1. Cape Town

In 1918, four years of war had swollen the Cape Peninsula's population to nearly 300,000, an increase of almost 30% since Union in 1910. Though several thousand of these were soldiers and sailors on wartime service and were therefore accommodated in expanded military camps and naval barracks, the majority were recent migrants to the city, some from Europe, but most from poor rural districts of the Cape, the Ciskei and the Transkei. Many of these people had been attracted by the prospect of securing work in wartime Cape Town, which they did, but often without finding adequate accommodation as well, for little new housing had been erected since the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Thus, working-class areas like District Six, Bo-Kaap, 'Little Sicily' near the harbour, Woodstock and Salt River and the African locations at the docks and at Ndabeni were jam-packed with people in houses, tenements, flats and huts which were congested and unhealthy. Even though the city council and the well-intentioned, middle-class Citizens' Housing Council began to debate the growing social problem of overcrowding during the war, very little was done in practice to ameliorate it. In 1917 a prescient local churchman warned that 'There were two ways ... by which the present state of affairs could be altered. One was an epidemic, and the other was to carry out a wise scheme of municipal housing.'[1] Almost exactly one year later the 'Spanish' flu epidemic arrived.

As several of the accounts which follow testify, the second wave of the 'Spanish' influenza infiltrated the overcrowded city in mid September 1918 unnoticed by all save those whom it struck, their families and their doctors. At first perceived to be more a nuisance than a threat, this image of the flu began to change rapidly in the first week of October as its ubiquity and lethality escalated. By Wiener Day (a public holiday on 7 October[2]), the city had been engulfed by the disease. On that day a city councillor warned an emergency meeting of the Council ominously, 'We are letting things slide. Dead bodies, from which life has been extinct for four or five hours, have been left lying on the pavement uncovered ... [in] all parts of the city from Sea Point on.'[3]

1 Canon Sidney Lavis in *Cape Times*, 10 September 1917.

2 Ludwig Wiener (1838–1921) was a prominent local politician in Cape Town who, in 1899, had had the first Monday in October declared a public holiday.

3 Councillor A.J. MacCallum in *Cape Times*, 8 October 1918.

7. NOTES FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH GADJA GAFIEL-CADER (born 1899)

[Interviewed on 12 October 1983 by Howard Phillips]

She was recently married and living at 70 New Church Street, Cape Town in 1918. Her husband was Amien Kader, a cutter for Hepworths.[39]

As she recalls, 'the epidemic' (her description) started on 7 October 1918 and was 'the highest' on 9th, 10th and 11th October. Several members of her family and her husband's family died. She did not contract it, but her husband had a mild dose for about three days.

The whole city was quiet – 'hardly a cat or dog to be seen.' There were 'sorrows in the air.' Shops and offices were closed – they didn't worry about paying.

A white man who had a shop or factory nearby (and who was married to a coloured woman) distributed lemons and milk from door to door, irrespective of who the inhabitants were. He also arranged to set up a soup distribution depot where soup made by the Muslim community was provided at 12 o'clock every day. This arrangement was made 'in the heart [height?] of the epidemic.' Strained soup and lemons (at 'fever time') became usual fare for the sick.

She used Wood's Peppermint Cure to very good effect during the epidemic – so much so that 'I believe in it since that time.' She still uses it for colds and 'flu today and strongly recommends it.

Doctors were unavailable – people had to be looked after by friends and family.

In the Muslim community as many as 60 corpses were being buried a day at one time. Many of these were buried at night by lamplight. Volunteers from the community acted as gravediggers.

Whites wanted to check that these measures were adequate and corpses weren't being left lying around too long before burial, so a four-man group (a Government doctor, a Simonstown Admiral, Dr Bennie Hewat[40] and a city councillor) came to inspect the situation. They were very impressed at the speed and efficiency with which Muslims buried their dead. Bodies were washed, wrapped in linen and buried – 'even when they died, they kept clean.' Deaths were reported at the police station where a burial order was issued.

She didn't remember any injections or fumigation of infected houses as during the 1901 plague. Also, people had no time for 'azeemats' (charms).

After the epidemic, Muslims (each congregation) presented a sheep for sacrifice

39 A leading clothing store in Cape Town.

40 Dr David Bennie Hewat, MB, ChM (Edinburgh, 1892).

'to take the troubles from the world.' She hoped that Allah 'will spare us and guide us from such a sickness again.'

As to the epidemic's origin, she thought that so many people had died in the war that the wind brought the sickness from that. 'The wind travelled from different countries – if you inhale that you get the fever.' Later, when asked if Allah had sent the epidemic as a punishment, she was unsure and, after pondering on it, suggested that *maybe* He sent it to make England and Germany stop fighting and killing – and they did soon afterwards!

23. VERBATIM INTERVIEW WITH LILIAN NONTOMBI MAWU (born 1874) [Interviewed on 15 July 1978 by Howard Phillips. Mawu was born in Somerset East and came to Cape Town to join her sister in 1916]

[I was] in there [Ndabeni in 1918[92]]. I have seen them [bodies of flu victims] with my two eyes. [They were] in the houses; there were 20 in one house, or 30 .... I can't say

92 Cape Town's first African location established 6 km north-east of the city in 1901 as result of the bubonic plague epidemic in that year.

[they were] not in the streets because some of them were picked up in the streets in the night. Somebody coming from somewhere fell dead in the street, but I know that in the houses there were 20 or 30 in one house. And in the morning when you come there early everybody's dead. And in Langa[93] [in later years] I was staying next door to Mutual [the offices of Old Mutual at Mutual Park, Pinelands][94]. That's where they put all the people [in 1918]. Well, in the morning they'll carry all the people in there; in the afternoon the waggons would come. They were just like, I don't know what I can say, like wood. One will stand here and one will stand there; one will carry about the legs and one will carry about [the body]. The two are standing on top of the waggon, throwing them up like this. When there were no more boxes [coffins], the person when he is dead is roll[ed] up in his own blanket ... Now the one is standing here, the one is standing [t]here and closing up [the blanket]. The two up there take it [the corpse] back, like packing bricks. Some of them, when they saw us, the blanket is off slight[ly], no they don't mind us, they pack. It's every day. The only thing I can't tell is how many dead or how many died, but it was a long time. It was more than a month. Every day now, I pass this place ....

[Another lady] lost two twins there at that time, small pieces, small babies. [She had to] try and make her peace. The boxes [coffins] were also [used for] packing that [the twins]. And these people were taking all the people [the corpses], what can I call them, people were from somewhere, black people [from other tribes], some funny people we don't know them [Askari troops stationed in Cape Town]; they are not Cape Town people.[95]

Now, in a time, I don't know what happened, when all the boxes were finished, now the people are wrapping their blankets. All that people, they all died, they [were] all buried. And some other people came [and] they said, 'These are Turkeys,[96] those kind of people. They are coming to do this work now.'

Some of them, they just put him [a man who was supposed to have died and was wrapped in a blanket] here in front of the house, then he said, 'Take me home, take me home!' When they opened the blanket, he sit up like this [and said], 'Take me home.' Then they carried him back to his house. That one was after[wards]. I've seen [a] few of them like that. One [wrapped corpse] was just [being carried] in the street, passing the house when he shaked himself like this and the people [carrying him] throw that thing down, stretcher, they throw the stretcher down [when he shouted], 'Take me home.' The one cut the blanket open with a knife. [The man in the blanket

93 Cape Town's second African location established in 1927.

94 Maitland Cemetery is very near to what is today Mutual Park.

95 See p.20, note 53.

96 Perhaps the Askaris were labelled as Turkish because they wore fezzes as part of their military uniform.

shouted,] 'Take me home!' They take him home from this place [and] bring him back [to] where they take him from.

In the end of all that, what I could understand I don't know. During the time I didn't know this, anything, but there were no dogs barking, there were no fowls crowing, no trains were running, everything was at a standstill. Everything was quiet.

And one day, early in the morning, about 5 o'clock, a dog started to bark. Everybody was anxious. Ooh, where does ...? We did not even understand where does the dog go. The dog started to bark. Then the fowls started to crow, 'Kuk-ke-re-koo', and all that. Hey! Later on, about 5 o'clock, the trains started to pass the location [Ndabeni]. Everybody raise up in the morning to see what's happening. Today it's the first time now we see this. Dr McKenzie[97] was there. The most popular doctor from Maitland. He used to come in in his car. In his car he had a little dog. The first day now the train come in. Dr McKenzie, I don't know if he didn't understand the train or didn't hear the train, just when he passed the gate, when he crossed the line, the train started, choo-choo, and knock the car. Dr McKenzie was dead and the dog was dead and the car was in pieces. The first morning. Ooh, that was very bad, that was very bad. Everybody was up already because we were all anxious [as to] where the dog [and its barking] come from, where the fowls come from ....

Teacher Jovane[98] was teaching in a public school ... and one coloured man. They used to go from door-to-door early in the morning in these houses where the peoples are. Now every one of us think they were doctors, but we know this teacher Jovane ... was going about every day, every day. When the sisters [nuns] went [with] all the other feeding staff – because the sisters were there with soup and food and everything to feed these people. The sisters went around the corner with their cars and always find these people out of the houses, out of the houses .... Now when that happened ... we understand ... what's the matter: that time that they were going about, they were not doctors, but they were taking money from the dead people. Oh, that was terrible, terrible. And [the] two big fat men [Jovane and the coloured man] ... they were both taken to prison. In the middle of the bushes the box was high there ... I don't know what happened that they must find the box full of money, full of clothing, full of everything ... they couldn't even close it, but just packing them [in] the bushes and things ....

I was not [sick], not even a headache, not even a headache. But I think I was sick because I didn't ... I was just going for my sister to help there every day. But I always think I was sick but I didn't know, I didn't understand. Because if I come there, come to my sister's house, I'll first take a bench or even a bed and lie down and have a rest.

97 No Dr McKenzie is listed as practising in Maitland or its environs at the time. Nor can the reference be to the Dr McKenzie mentioned in note 90 above as he had died before 'Black October'.

98 Presumably a teacher at the local primary school.

I'm coming to look for sick people, you know. I lie down and have a rest, then I get up and do all the work now: give them food, cook and everything and go home again. But I didn't eat that much food, that much food .... Reverend Mahabane[99] [helped people during the flu] a lot, a lot .... Reverend Mahabane was a good man ....

I can't say [where the flu came from]. Everybody was just surprised ... because everybody didn't know just when it came. It went on, went on, but now everybody was surprised. [They asked,] 'But what kind of sickness is this?' But we didn't know where it's coming [from].

24. VERBATIM INTERVIEW WITH ALFRED MAHLAHLA (born 1897) [Interview in Xhosa, 19 December 1978; interviewer Howard Phillips, interpreter Rev. M. Gqweta. Mr Mahlahla remained in Cape Town until 1921, before returning home to the Transkei and then going off to work in Johannesburg]

In 1918 during the time of the Spanish flu this happened when I was in Cape Town [working in central Cape Town, but living in Ndabeni]. Those people were dying like flies. Inasmuch [as] it was not even a big grave [where people were buried], it was just a big thing, a big hole. People were buried in the same grave. And I got it also.

And those people were leaders. They mentioned that you must use brandy also because [although?] they were not using it [normally], but they were spellbound [compelled?] to use it. I didn't go to that. Somebody made an advice and I got a pain killer. A pain killer. And I was [made] healthy by [that] pain killer.

This Spanish flu was mostly taking the young ones and the youth, mostly those people who accepted [sic] the young men. This was a difficult time.

And those that were far away from the church and were backsliders, they did go to church. That happened in 1918.

And even the hospitals were of no use during that time. And even the doctors couldn't help. The doctors were dying also. This started with the head, the headache couldn't [inaudible].

That is my knowledge as far as the Spanish flu in 1918 ....

White people were good ... [to us] in that time. They helped some of ... [the people], but others died ....Reverend Mahabane was of good help. He was one of the leaders, strong leaders [in Ndabeni].

99 See Document 25 below.

25. NOTES FROM INTERVIEW WITH REV. DR EZEKIEL E. MAHABANE (born 1900)

[Interviewed on 19 January 1978 by Howard Phillips. Born in the then Orange Free State, Mahabane came to Zonnebloem College in 1916 and matriculated there in 1918. He went on to have a distinguished career as a Methodist minister and became life president of the South African Council of Churches]

He woke up one morning in October 1918 and found there was no-one about in Ndabeni. All was quiet. Someone then told him that many people were down with Spanish flu. 'Many, many died', he recalled, 'even cats and dogs were dead'. Many were buried in mass graves. Only one doctor from the Somerset Hospital was available, but soon he was assisted by Bishop Smythe, a medical missionary from Uganda, and Nurse Middleton.[100] People from Cape Town also helped by sending clothes and blankets.

Some residents of Ndabeni believed that Spanish flu was a white man's disease which had been introduced to harm Africans and that he did not contract it because of his close association with whites [he was a student at Zonnebloem College then]. He felt that the flu was not so severe among whites; it was more serious where there was overcrowding.

His experience in the flu epidemic made him want to become a doctor and so he attended Loram's Medical College in Natal, but then switched to Fort Hare where he studied for the ministry.[101] He entered the Methodist ministry in 1924.

26. LETTER FROM ANONYMOUS FLU SURVIVOR (born 1906) TO HOWARD PHILLIPS, 16 OCTOBER 1978

My father was stationed at Simonstown[102] with the Imperial Troops, and I was at school at St. Cyprian's,[103] which was still in the Gardens. I returned home to Simonstown for the holidays, and had the doubtful honour of being about the first case of Flu in Simonstown; so much so that I was credited with having a 'hangover' from a midnight feast. By the time it was realised that 'The Kid' (I was twelve years old) had had the Flu I was well on the way to recovery and half of Simonstown was down with it, as well as the Naval and Army men.

100 See *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1919, p. 1.

101 Reverend Mahabane seems to have confused a proposal by Dr J.B. McCord of McCord's Hospital that such a college for Africans be set up in Durban with that of the Natal educationist, Dr Charles Loram, that Africans be admitted to the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School after completing the first year of medical training at Fort Hare. Neither proposal bore fruit. See K. A. Shapiro, 'Doctors or Medical Aids – the Debate over the Training of Black Medical Personnel for the Rural Black Population in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal Southern African Studies*, 13, 2 (January 1987), pp. 234–255.

102 The large naval base in the south Peninsula, about 45 km from Cape Town. During World War I it also housed a British imperial garrison.

103 An Anglican boarding school for girls, near to central Cape Town.

No one had the faintest idea of how ..
to be to feed the patient on Beef Tea, and keep them in bed. It ... the young adults in their 20s worst of all; but this may have been because they were the ones that had to keep going longest looking after others. We were in The Officers' Married Quarters, which consisted of two rows of iron bungalows, most of which were actually occupied by single Officers. I was given a thermometer, a bottle of disinfectant, a note-book and pencil, and sent off to get the temperatures of all those in the bungalows. This I did with the assistance of any of the batmen who were still on their feet. There were only three wives, my mother being one of them, and they were desperately busy, and were responsible for making vast quantities of beef tea, as well as checking on the patients, who were taken to the drill hall if their condition deteriorated.

A great anxiety was what was happening in the block houses away in the hills round the Harbour. There were always several Cruisers lying out in the Harbour, and one of these was a Japanese Cruiser.[104] Whenever their men had to come ashore for provisions they wore gas-masks, much to the astonishment of the Locals. It was rumoured that they didn't get a single case on board, but how true this was I don't know.

When the ten days holidays ended, the epidemic was at its height, and my Parents both went down with it, so they packed me off back to school. I arrived at a strangely silent Cape Town station. Only a few trains were running, and there were no taxis or trams. I made my way to the Wellington Fruit Shop opposite the station, which was one of the few shops open. [T]he only others were Chemist's [sic] shops, and they only sold essential medicines. How I got to the School I can't for the life of me remember, but I do remember the deathly silent streets which were really frightening. I was not enthusiastically received at St. Cyprians as it was closed! However there were three other girls in the same plight, and we were fed, and otherwise left to our own devices.

I did see the stacks of deal coffins outside the City Hall, and was told that at first people had to bring death certificates to get one, but this formality was dispensed with as there was no one to check. The Death Carts had to go through District Six, and we were told that finally they had to have house-to-house searches, as in some cases there was no on left to 'bring out your dead'. The suddenness with which it struck, and the speed with which it spread must have been quite devastating for the adults; I do remember hearing some time before that there was a very bad illness in Britain, where people were dropping dead in the streets. However, everyone at the Cape was convinced this could only come from the East, and was a form of Plague!

104 Probably the light cruiser, H.I.J.M.S. *Niitaka* built in 1902. Japan was an ally of Britain in World War I.

LETTER FROM DR ROBERT LANE FORSYTH (born 1904) TO HOWARD PHILLIPS, 2 NOVEMBER 1978

In 1918, the majority of General Practitioners in C.T. [Cape Town] conducted their practices from their houses. The result of this was that all members of the doctor's family capable of doing so, were pressed into such duties as taking messages

111 Dr George Watson Robertson, MRCS (England, 1893), LRCP (London, 1893), was head of the Government Laboratory in Cape Town. He was then a lieutenant-colonel in the Union Defence Force.

112 Dr Edwin Douglas Pullon, MB, ChB (Edinburgh, 1912), was an army doctor who had been seconded to the Government Laboratory.

by telephone, or answering the front door. In those days ... ...of maidservants was not sufficiently high for the purpose.

We were living at No 60, Kloof St [in Tamboers Kloof], ... I had just passed my 14th birthday, when it became evident that something extraordinary was taking place, because of the increasing number of telephone calls. After the elapse of 3 days the crescendo rose so that they became incessant. In fact, the phone never stopped ringing day & night.

At this stage my father [Dr Robert Forsyth[113]] asked me to come out with him in his car (a little 2-seater runabout called the Saxon). School (I was in Junior Certificate) had closed down.

He would start on his rounds at 7.30 in the morning, and would get into a street to see his first patient. As he emerged, he would be pulled into house after house, and I would follow after him driving the car. On one occasion, after he came out of a house in District Six, he told me that there were several people dead inside.

And so it would go on. Time meant nothing, we would get home for a bite and then be off again through the traffic-empty streets. Visits would not stop until after midnight. And even then he would be called for some emergency from his bed.

One night a man came to get my father to see his wife who was expecting an infant. The car was got out and we all went to a house in the Upper Mill Street area. I was given the job of boiling water and helping my father at my first maternity case. The baby was successfully born, but lost his father a few days later.

On another occasion, a young newly married man came from 'Erskine' a small boarding house opposite us. My father walked across to see the wife, who was dying. The husband died 2 or three days later. It was then I first saw my father cry. He was sobbing with sorrow and in frustration at his impotence.

There was little he could do. But our home was large and so, when he found people in boarding houses, hotels or hostels getting no attention, he arranged for them to be brought home where we had two large spare rooms. Here they were nursed. Their beds were structures knocked together out of raw pine wood, no springs, just wooden slats. No mattresses, but palliasses made of straw covered with hessian. I think they were made by the City Council. My mother, assisted by a Miss Molly Moller and a Miss Ruby Kinsley did the nursing ....

Nursing was well done, feeding seemed to consist in the early stages of beef tea & soups. Cough mixtures & some locally produced vaccine were given. But the bed rest & nursing was the thing. The record was good for no patients died. I met one of the patients in Cairo in 1944 [during wartime service].

113 Dr Robert Lane Forsyth (1867–1959) held the degrees of MB, ChB (Royal University of Ireland, 1888) and had been in practice in Cape Town since 1902. A keen socialist, he worked among the poor of the city in particular and was also active in local politics, being elected to the city council in 1906 and to Parliament as a Labour Party MP in 1920.

In the meantime there was also a domestic crisis. Apart from my mother & myself, the rest of the family i.e. my father & six children went down with the disease. For the most part, they were mild cases, except for one of my sisters who was really ill. I was told to stay at home one afternoon and given the task of boiling water in paraffin tins in the garden. They were used by Dr F.W. Weber[114] of Union Street who plunged my sister, who was blue about the face & lips and had a very high temperature, into a hot bath, whose temperature was rapidly cooled by the addition of cold water. She was wrapped in blankets & put to bed. In a day or two she improved & finally got better. But lost her hair and became completely, but temporarily bald.

My father, however, continued to work, looking ill & coughing. Eventually, my mother insisted on his going to bed & she took the phone from the hook so that he should get some rest. In the early hours of the morning, there was a knock on the front door and there was a little Jewish girl. When she was unable to contact the house by phone, seeing that there was no transport, she had walked all the way from Maitland [13 km away]. Her mother was in labour. So I got up with him & off we went. Some 20 years later he was an honoured guest at the wedding of the infant that was born that night.

During the height of the epidemic my father was struck by the inefficient use that was being made of doctors' services. Because of the ribbon development of Cape Town, city practices would stretch from Sea Point to Observatory & even to Maitland. There was a great degree of overlapping. I know he tried to get the M.O.H. [Medical Officer of Health] to arrange for "zoning" of doctors. He also tried to get the city to pay doctors a flat rate of 7 guineas a day to give their services free in the allocated zones. I am sure these efforts met with partial or no success. He was very anxious that the situation should not be exploited by the profession for its own material benefit ....

His access to the Council was fairly easy. He had himself been a Councillor and as such, was for a while Chairman of the Health Committee. I do know that he was met with opposition from many of his medical colleagues who detected the Red Hand of Socialism, for socialist he was, in the methods he proposed.

Be that as it may, his services were well recognised by the public, and on a wave of personal popularity he won the Gardens Constituency for the Labour Party from his friend W. Duncan Baxter ... in 1920 [in the general election]. He was also given a public Dinner in the City Hall by the Jewish Community in recognition of his services during the period of stress, when he carried out his duties as Medical Officer to the Sons of Israel & the Hebrew Order of David.

I have perused these notes which may well be interpreted as a eulogy of my father. I make no apology for my respect for him.

114 Dr Frederick William Weber, LRCP & S (Edinburgh, 1890), LFPS (Glasgow, 1890), MD (Erlangen, 1890).

42. VERBATIM INTERVIEW WITH JENNY STERN (born 1903) [Interviewed on 14 November 1978 by Howard Phillips]

I think the flu epidemic started immediately either before Rosh Hashana [Jewish New Year, 7 September 1918] or after. My father [Mr Shaer] was a [deputy] beadle in the Gardens Shul [Synagogue][151] .... Dad got ill. Dr Kark[152] was our doctor and he said, 'He's got a cold. Let him stop in bed.' .... Daddy got better and he went to shul. And then my late brother got sick ....He got better and my other brother got very very ill. And what momma did was, she used to give us, beat up an egg-nog and put it in brandy, and we had that every night. So, I didn't get it [the flu], not at all ....

I remember everything. I was very young ....

Dad came home [and said], 'I don't know what it is, everyone's sick. The shul is empty this evening, the Friday night'.[153] And then it started, but started. Every shop in Cape Town was closed. You could not get anything. Nothing! Across the road in Hatfield Street [they lived at 116 Hatfield Street] the fellow who worked for Singer's, the sewing machine [manufacturers], he was delirious. He ran out of his bed screaming out along Hatfield Street. I don't remember who caught him. There was also a tailor ... a military tailor in Plein Street [who died] .... We had the streets [cleaned] with an old-fashioned water-cart and they sprayed the city with water and something in it .... Things got from bad to worse. People were starving and dying in the houses.

151 The Gardens or Great Synagogue alongside the Company Gardens.

152 Dr Solomon Ezekiel Kark, MB, ChB (Edinburgh, 1905), L (LM) RCP & S (Ireland, 1906).

153 Usually the Friday night service welcoming the Sabbath was very well attended.

They opened the City Hall, they opened it up. There were blankets, there was food, there was all sorts of things .... There was a school in De Villiers Street [in District Six]. I think the principal was Kloot[154] or something .... Anyhow, they opened the school [as a food and medicine depot] in De Villiers Street. Also, coloureds were lying in the street, dead. In the street! ....

We couldn't get doctors. The doctors themselves were ill. Then it got to such a pitch that Dad was burying them not even knowing who, by lamp and until one o'clock in the morning. You know where *Die Burger* is [the office of this newspaper in Keerom Street]. There's a morgue there [alongside, in Venken Lane]. You know the back ... it was closed and they [corpses] were lying one on top the other. There was horse-drawn cart like you read [of] the plague in London – the same story.

Everything was there [at the City Hall depot]: food, blankets. I went to a place in Woodstock with Jack [her older brother] – the mother was dead, the baby was screaming, the husband was sick. I'll never forget it. And my brother went to my dad ... [and] they took the baby away .... I was helping with my late brother .... I would bring food; I would go and tell them at the City Hall or tell them at De Villiers Street [depot] where people were lying, where people were sick and what they could do .... I saw lots of things, it was very very [sad] .... There was nothing, nothing to buy. The doors [of the shops] were open. You could walk in and take everything, everything .... My late brother had come with me. My father didn't like the idea. But what was I going to do? I wanted to go, and I wanted to ... [help]. But I contracted nothing, nothing.

My sister [Martha] was very very very sick. I remember that like now, and we couldn't get a doctor. And momma says to me, 'Come with me to Caledon Street [in District Six], there's a chemist there. I will try and get something.' The chemist shop was closed. The chemist shop was in Caledon Street – the front entrance – but there was a side entrance and momma knocked at the door and the chemist's wife came out [and said], 'It's no good asking for medicine. I don't know whether my husband's alive or dying.' So we went away. I remember right now, momma put a mustard plaster on her [Martha] and gave her an enema ... and Martha got better .... We never got it, never. Momma gave us, mother ... beat up the egg and the brandy and we used to drink that hot. And momma also took garlic and crushed it to a paste with camphorate. But I do know that at the City Hall and in De Villiers Street they had little bottles of red medicine which they gave. Whether it helped or not, that I don't know .... I know everybody was crying out for lemons. Food there was plenty, being made in De Villiers Street and at the City Hall. Blankets were distributed. All these things [were available].

154 E.H. Kloot was principal of the predominantly Jewish De Villiers Street Public School in District Six.

But Daddy was non-stop [in burying people]. They didn't take notice whether they were Jews or Gentiles they threw them [into a grave] ....

There's an old man ... who knows a lot [about the flu]. When I approached him [to talk abut the flu] ... [he said] he's not interested. He says his parents lived in the suburbs and he came [home] and his brother was dead. He had to bury his brother himself. I said, 'Well, please, you know it's [important to record your memories]'. [He replied,] 'I'm sorry I want to forget about it. I'm not prepared ....'

[The De Villiers Street School] was opened up [as a depot], everything was taken out [to accommodate the depot's needs] .... All I know is that Jack and I grabbed and we took and we went .... Terrible. Terrible [crowds of people waiting outside] ....

I think that when the troops were coming back [from World War I] they brought it. They said it came from overseas. That I do know. That I do know ....

It was terrible, terrible [for people]. They opened the shul and cried and fasted. I remember. Daddy said, '*Gott in Himmel. Wos is dos? Wos hot mir geton?* [God in Heaven. What is this? What did we do?]' And my mother says, '*Daniel, wos kwetz du tu? Dos ist von Gott* ... [Why are you moaning? It comes from God ...].' All [shuls were] open. Every shul was open. People went. But people tried to keep away from one another ....

We lived in Hatfield Street and round the corner was [the] Wittenberg family .... Lionel [Wittenberg] got the flu. And I used to sit with Lionel Wittenberg, that I remember. And I was told not to tell Lionel that [his brother] Nathan's fiancée [a Miss Apple] died, that I remember, that I remember. And I do remember that one of the [family of the] Shagams died. I think they had a chemist's shop ....

Coloured[s], they went [died] like flies. .... But lots of Jews died. Plenty. No time even for coffins .... I know that the coloureds were put onto carts and taken away like that ... [and buried] in big holes. That I know, because Daddy told me. He told mama. So I said, 'What you running [away from me for]? Tell me also, Daddy.' .... I think he was a very brave man .... Momma did stop at home and momma cooked and she washed and she looked after us .... My father used to bring home a big bath with food and mother always had flour and baked .... I know we weren't short [of food], that I know, that I know .... I didn't go to school [during the epidemic], I helped.