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**Hamilton
Jewish**

News

JUNE 2024 | TISHREI 5784

The voice of Jewish Hamilton

FROM PURPOSE TO IMPACT:

Profiles in community leadership

At their core, these community leaders are guided by a moral compass that seeks to uplift the people they serve

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

IN ITS FINAL ISSUE of the current season, the Hamilton Jewish News is showcasing six community leaders who have made a notable impact on the Jewish community and beyond. These individuals vary in age, background, influence, and, in one case, religion. Some are in prominent, visible leadership roles, while others mentor or lead quietly behind the scenes. What they have in common is their empathy, communication skills, and a moral compass aimed at uplifting both their immediate surroundings and the broader community. In a world where political divisions and polarization often seem insurmountable, their selflessness and desire to serve can guide us toward a more connected and meaningful future.

PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP
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Community leaders who are making a difference

Clockwise from top left: Gustavo Rymberg, Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO, Jason Waxman, Jewish Federation president, Cindy Richter, Out of the Cold coordinator, Jack Rosenbaum, BBYO advisor, Marianne Klein, Shalom Vilage CEO and Victoria Mancinelli, LIUNA public relations director

COVER STORY P4

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When living is a fate worse than death

UNDERSTANDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING (MAID)



Marianne Talman

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR MEDICINE
McMASTER UNIVERSITY

HER NAME was Mary. She was vivacious, smart with a mischievous wit. She was 90 years old. She was dying and she was asking me to help her.

I remember distinctly when legislation was passed to allow patients the option of medical assistance in dying (MAiD) in June 2016. I felt conflicted, ambivalent, and vaguely interested but I felt I did not need to invest time in learning the nuances of this change in the medical landscape, because I did not anticipate it would be relevant to my practice. Then I met Mary. I was her attending physician during her hospitalization in the fall of 2016. She had advanced lung disease and cancer. She did not want any further investigations. She had a management plan to ensure she would remain comfortable in her home where she would live out her life. She had shortness of breath, a poor appetite and no energy, but these symptoms were being controlled. I was very surprised then, when she requested an appointment to see me in my clinic following her discharge from hospital. It was then that she told me that she appreciated what I had done for her in hospital but now she wanted me to help her navigate the system to undergo MAiD.

Suffering is manifest in many ways. There can be physical, emotional or anticipatory pain. There can be a host of somatic feelings that are horrendous. I had, however, not considered the construct of "existential suffering" until I met Mary. Yes, there is a fate worse than death. Nothing to live for. Nothing to look forward to. Anguish. There was nothing in the arsenal of therapies that exist in the medical profession to alleviate this sense. Despite having a very comfortable home, with all the amenities, and a solid palliative care plan, Mary described the hell that was her existence. Upon listening to her, there was nothing I could do say or do that would sway her from her decision. There was no health care provider that could deal with her suffering. I agreed to help her overcome the hurdles she would face before she could find the solace she was looking for.

MAiD involves several steps, with a long list of safeguards to ensure the patients fulfill strict criteria. I educated myself and helped Mary work through these steps and put her in contact with the health care team that could help her wish become reality. In the meantime, I stayed in close contact with Mary, and helped her stickhandle the challenges she was facing with a family that did not initially support her decision.

On the day she died, her friends and family each had a special moment with her. She was radiant. She was beaming. She was at peace. When it was my turn, I asked her if she wanted me to remain with her in her bedroom as the doctors provided medications that would put her into a deep sleep, that would ultimately result in her death. "Hell no. I want you to be with my family." Those were her last words to me. The living room was brimming with emotion. Tears. Laughter. Rejoice. Relief. Mary was gone. As she had wanted. The gratitude I received for the role I had played in Mary's journey was extraordinary. I will never forget the kind words and grace given to me by those who were left behind.

Over 30 years, I have witnessed many deaths that have been drawn out and involved suffering, unnecessary harm, and moral injury. Since that first MAiD death I experienced, I have been privileged to be part of death experiences that are truly patient-centred, humane, and conducted by highly skilled, non-paternalistic professionals who fully understand and respect the concept of patient autonomy. Death occurring on the individuals' terms. Each of these patients had a concurrent palliative care approach to the end of their life, but the suffering they experienced could not be met through palliation.

Mary changed my life. She taught me about suffering and gave me a new perspective on end of life care. She challenged some of the traditional view of the health care approach of life at all costs. She demonstrated that the reality of death is not something to fear, but to embrace. We are fortunate in Canada to have the opportunity to fulfill the end of our lives in a way that embodies our values and preferences and can occur on our own terms.

Dr. Marianne Talman is a general internist at the Hamilton General Hospital and an associate professor at McMaster University. She is a patient advocate, and outside her work she enjoys cycling and rock climbing.

The HJN welcomes letters to the editor. To submit a letter for publication, email wschneider@jewishhamilton.org.

A remembrance for Israel's fallen



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Hamilton's Israeli community hosted a poignant Yom Hazikaron commemoration on May 12 at the Adas Israel, a day of national remembrance to commemorate all the soldiers and people who have lost their lives defending the State of Israel. Pictured above is Kibbutz Zikim member Gabi Vaknin, recounting his family's experience on Oct. 7. Vaknin's daughter, whose image appears on the slide, survived the Nova music festival massacre.

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“The events of Oct. 7 strengthened my identity as a Jew and as a Zionist ...” **JASON WAXMAN**, PRESIDENT, HJF

Federation leaders Gustavo Rymberg and Jason Waxman have risen to the challenge of crisis leadership

Profiles in leadership

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

THERE IS nothing quite like a crisis to test one's leadership. Leading through times of uncertainty and volatility demands that leaders harness their intelligence and resourcefulness to guide others effectively, while also digging deep inside themselves to find the courage to keep going forward.

This August will mark the seventh anniversary of Gustavo Rymberg's tenure as CEO of the Hamilton Jewish Federation, a period bookended by the organization's move to JHamilton and the establishment at that location of the Margaret's Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre, achievements that speak to his effectiveness as a leader. But the crises of the last four years, beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Russia's launching a war against Ukraine in February 2022, and the seismic events of Oct. 7, 2023, have challenged him in ways he never could have imagined.

“It's been an incredibly challenging time ... it's also been in many ways a rewarding experience in that we've seen the community come together.”

JASON WAXMAN
President, Hamilton Jewish Federation



Federation president's perspective

When Jason Waxman took on the Hamilton Jewish Federation presidency in May 2023, he knew the volunteer position would make great demands on his time, but the myriad of issues that have arisen since Oct. 7 have required him to step up in ways he never anticipated.

“It's been an incredibly challenging time,” Waxman told the HJN, “but the silver lining in this is that it's also been in many ways a rewarding experience in that we've seen the community come together. The board has really stepped up and we all try to support each other. Obviously, the frequency and duration of our meetings has increased considerably, but nobody has complained. Everybody has stepped up where they need to.”

Asked about the personal impact of taking on a leadership position during such a challenging time, Waxman acknowledged that the demands have taken their toll. “I have a very busy job, I have four little kids who I love spending time with. It's been very difficult ... balancing family, work, and the Federation which has become an overwhelming part of my day and my time but I sort of wear it as a badge of honour.”

In the immediate aftermath of the Oct. 7 attacks, Waxman said he agreed to his wife's request that he wear a hat rather than a kippah during his 40-minute walk to synagogue on Shabbat mornings. “It really bothered me and after the first two weeks I stopped doing it,” he said adding that he now feels “an immense sense of pride walking down the street wearing a kippah.”

“It's strengthened my identity as a Jew and as a Zionist. Before this, I probably would have shied away from the word Zionist, but it's also a badge I wear proudly.”

Waxman had nothing but praise for Gustavo Rymberg, who, he says, has gone “above and beyond” in his role as CEO. “This is not my profession ... Gustavo's been fantastic. The hours that he works, it's just phenomenal.”

“Hamilton is a very special community. Many, many people would call me every day to ask how I was doing. That meant a lot to me and gave me the strength to carry on.”

GUSTAVO RYMBERG
Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO



Gustavo Rymberg: A changed Jewish world

“Nothing is going to be the same. Neither in Israel, neither in our community.” Gustavo Rymberg's words on a Shpiel on Hamilton podcast episode recorded two weeks after the events of Oct. 7 would prove prescient, although he couldn't have foreseen the exact nature of the challenges the community would face in the coming days.

In the immediate aftermath, Rymberg, haunted by memories of the dual terrorist attacks on the Israeli embassy and the Jewish Community Centre in his native Buenos Aires in the 1990s, spent hours on the phone with Hamilton Police Services (HPS) to arrange for security measures that would safeguard the city's Jewish institutions. But the HPS, he was shocked to discover, had neither the budget nor the personnel to provide these services free of charge, requiring Federation to divert funds from its budget at the cost of \$1,200 a day

(a number that would ultimately balloon to \$300,000), an unsustainable solution that challenged the financial well-being of the Jewish community.

Adding to the stress was the Playhouse Cinema's informing Federation in mid-March that it was reneging on its commitment to host the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival, which was just three weeks away. Against the backdrop of unrelenting demonization campaigns against Israel on social media and the streets of Canadian cities, and a terrifying surge in anti-Jewish hatred on a scale not seen since the Second World War, the announcement came as a huge blow, leaving festival organizers shocked, disappointed, and wondering if the city was no longer a hospitable place for a Jewish cultural event.

Rymberg remembers that moment as a particularly low point. “I was thinking so many times I can't do this anymore, but every time I was thinking along those lines, something good happened.”

Rymberg said that since Oct. 7, he would receive daily phone calls “from many people” checking in to see how he was doing. These simple gestures went a long way. “That was very important in order to continue. Hamilton I will say, is a very special community, a very warm and welcoming one.”

Then there was the outpouring of support that followed in the wake of international media's covering news of the festival cancellation, and Hamilton Mayor Andrea Horwath's pulling out all the stops to find an alternate location, which resulted in the festival's move to the Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre, breaking all previous attendance records. Most remarkable of all, said Rymberg, was the unprecedented community response to the needs of the day.

A banner fundraising year

The response of Hamilton's Jewish community to the Hamas attacks in Israel helped Federation achieve a milestone in its fundraising history. Its Annual Campaign surpassed its goal of \$2.4 million, its Israel Emergency Campaign raised nearly \$1.2 million, and donors contributed just over half a million dollars toward a new security fund, which will be matched by the Jewish Federations of North America. That's a whopping \$4.2 million in a community that, for decades, struggled to surpass the one-million-dollar mark. While some of those funds came from foundations, international organizations, and government grants, the majority of the funds was community money.

Those fundraising totals do not tell the whole story, however. With the increase in designated gifts and grant funding specific to a particular area, funding available for Federation's beneficiary agencies this year remained more or less the same.

“The truth is we never have enough money to give for everything our beneficiary agencies ask for,” Rymberg said. “It would be great if we could raise this amount of money without the extra crisis to make sure the community stays economically healthy.”

Some more positives

Despite the war and ongoing political tensions in Israel, and what Canadian author Noah Richler is calling the end of North America's Jewish moment, Rymberg said there have been a number of positive developments due to the current situation. These include stronger relationships with the Mayor's Office, Hamilton Police Services, and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. “We're having conversations now that we were never able to have before. I'm not saying that they are solving everything, but it's important to have these relationships,” he said.

Rymberg is also encouraged by the renewed sense of Jewish identity he's observed among younger Jews.

“I see parents of kids in public schools getting more active in expressing their feelings. They are not silent about how bad the situation is for their kids. If we continue like this, we really have the potential to be more united and stronger.”

“Real thought has been put into ensuring programs are exciting and relevant ...” **ARI LEVIN**, PARENT

PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

BBYO advisor Jack Rosenbaum is intent on letting teens take on meaningful leadership challenges

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

ENGAGING TEENS in Jewish life has long been considered among the most significant challenges facing the Jewish community. The rapid decline in teen engagement in North American Jewish life post-b'nai mitzvah is well-documented, and here in Hamilton, there were years in which Jewish teens were all but invisible at community events.

That's why hopes were high when Hamilton Jewish Federation brought the non-denominational Jewish youth group BBYO to Hamilton.

That those hopes have been fulfilled beyond anyone's expectation is mostly thanks to one individual whose leadership has nurtured the creation of BBYO “Mispacha,” a thriving tightly knit community of 31 Jewish teens. Jack Rosenbaum was just beginning his second year at McMaster, when he heard that BBYO Ontario was looking to hire a youth advisor to start a Hamilton chapter back in the fall of 2022.

By any measure, Rosenbaum was a dream candidate. BBYO played an important role in the Thornhill native's formative experiences, which also included years of volunteering at his local karate club, and working as a counsellor at a Jewish summer camp. His bona fides also included a family deeply immersed in Jewish values.

His grandfather, the late Hank Rosenbaum, was a Holocaust survivor and the one-time chair of the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem. His mother is an educator, and in their family home, Rosenbaum played the role of mentor to his two younger brothers. In fact, mentoring kids,

Rosenbaum told the HJN “was just something I did. It came naturally to me.”

Rosenbaum readily admits that his earliest attempts at outreach were discouraging, with only a handful of teens coming out. But his persistence — which included hosting special events to which Toronto BBYO members were bused in to beef up the numbers — would eventually pay off by December of that year, when the chapter reached eight members, enough to elect a board.

One of the hallmarks of BBYO is its commitment to staff-supported but teen-led programming, and Rosenbaum makes a point of letting newcomers to the group know “that this is their space, where they get to choose what they want to do ... I mentor and I guide, but as much as I can, I try not to be the one who's doing everything.”

Rosenbaum acknowledges that it's not always easy to let the teens run with an idea that he suspects might not work out as planned, but he also knows that failure can be the best teacher.

“I want them to figure out at some point to adapt and overcome obstacles because a big part of what we do is developing young leaders,” said Rosenbaum, “and it's so important right now to produce young Jewish people who have confidence and critical thinking skills and the ability to communicate.”

Rosenbaum says this approach has led to impressive transformations in a number of teens. Parents would appear to feel the same. Luba Dubinsky has seen that transformation in her daughters Belle and Melissa.

“Through their involvement, both Belle and Melissa have developed



Hamilton's BBYO chapter members with Jack Rosenbaum, (kneeling far left), at the 2023 Hamilton Jewish Federation AGM when then president Howard Eisenberg, (standing far right), presented them with the President's award.

strong leadership skills and experienced a multitude of beneficial impacts. They have taken ownership of their participation, demonstrating a deep sense of responsibility in planning events, volunteering, and fostering new friendships. The overall experience has been overwhelmingly positive for them, providing numerous enriching opportunities,” she said.

Ari Levin and Laura Waltman say that BBYO has helped their son Max feel more a part of the Jewish

community. “The programs have been excellent. You can tell that real thought has been put into ensuring that they will be relevant and exciting for the kids including with appropriate Jewish content,” says Levin. “We're thankful that the Federation and BBYO have provided these opportunities to connect. Laura and I have also been particularly impressed with the local BBYO leadership, who have gone out of their way to ensure that Max regularly feels welcomed and comfortable.”

“A big part of what we do is developing young leaders. It's so important right now to produce young Jewish people who have confidence and critical thinking skills.”

JACK ROSENBAUM

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“Cindy Richter has made me and so many others better volunteers ...” CAROLYN MOLOT, FRIEND

PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

CeCe Schreiber Award winner Cindy Richter has been described as a humble, selfless, and dedicated leader

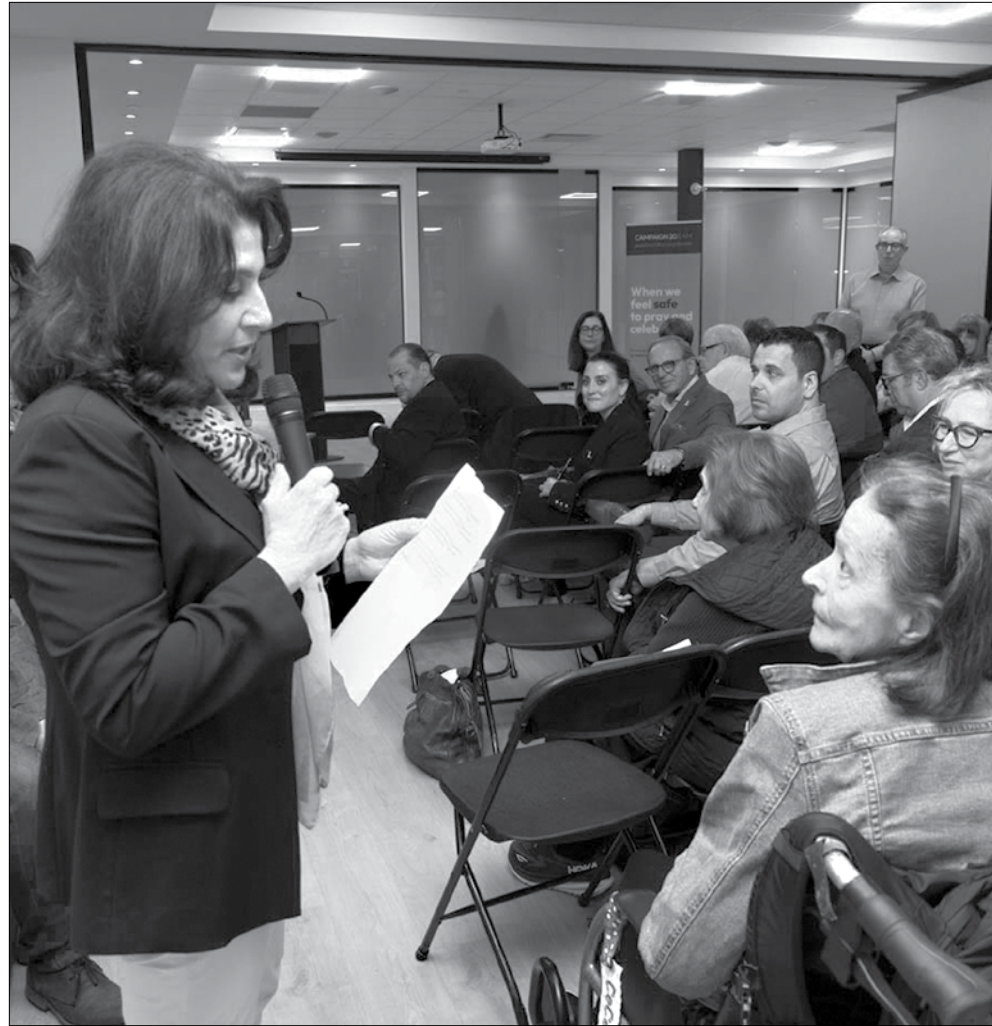


PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Cindy Richter addresses her acceptance speech to CeCe Schreiber at Federation’s AGM, honouring the woman for whom her award is named.

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

A PASSIONATE ADVOCATE for social justice, a caring and compassionate community leader rarely seen without a smile on her face, Cindy Richter is this year’s recipient of Federation’s CeCe Schreiber Volunteer Leadership Award, named for one of Hamilton’s most respected and accomplished volunteers. Richter is best known in the community for her five-year stint as president of Beth Jacob Synagogue and her role as coordinator of the Jewish community’s Out of the Cold program, a position she’s held for 17 years.

Richter’s heart and mind is almost always on the needs of those she serves. “None of us will truly know the extent of Cindy’s volunteering as her anonymous mitzvahs are too many to count,” wrote her friend, Carolyn Molot, who nominated Richter for the community’s most

prestigious volunteer awards. “She visits unwell community members and Out Of The Cold clients who are in hospital. And not just once, but weekly, all while ensuring their privacy, dignity and friendship.”

Richter’s connection to Judaism runs deep. An avid participant in a weekly Torah study group, Richter lives her Jewish values through daily acts of kindness, hospitality and tireless efforts towards bettering the lives of others.

Molot credits her friend for making her and other volunteers, “more caring members of our Jewish community and an inspiration to do and be more ... None of us will truly know the extent of Cindy’s volunteering as her anonymous mitzvahs are too many to count. I feel truly grateful to spend time with Cindy every week. She faces her leadership challenges with optimism and grace, always inviting others to join in her pursuits but never judging their decisions.”

President’s Award recipient Victoria Mancinelli praised for her courage and moral clarity

WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

IT ONLY TOOK HOURS after the news of the massacre of Israeli civilians on Oct. 7 for CUPE Local 3906, a union that represents academic workers at McMaster, to tweet “Palestine is rising, long live the resistance.” And it took mere hours after that for Victoria Mancinelli to respond. “Any form of praise or celebration when women, children and families are being killed by terrorists,” she put out in a tweet on Oct. 8, “is unfathomable.”

The senior executive at LiUNA (Laborers’ International Union of North America) continued to put out tweets in support of

Israel and the Jewish community over the next several weeks, but it was her March 21 op-ed in the Toronto Sun that really had Jewish Canadians take notice of this fearless, outspoken, and self-appointed ally of the Jewish community.

“The cancellation of the Jewish Film Festival in Hamilton ... is a cancellation of the Jewish people,” wrote Mancinelli in a blistering piece that condemned elected officials for “giving in to the intimidation and hate from anti-democratic voices ... that emboldens those who want to destroy our society and guarantee future attacks on the Jewish community.”

When asked about the reasons for her unwavering support for Israel and the

Shalom Village’s Marianne Klein is a great listener who is able to connect with both staff and residents



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHALOM VILLAGE

Shalom Village CEO Marianne Klein, (second from right), shares a fun moment with staff. Klein believes the teamwork of the Shalom Village support staff is the residents’ most valued asset.

BY HELEN METZ
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

SINCE TAKING on the position of Shalom Village CEO last year, Marianne Klein has had a major impact on both staff and residents.

I am a relatively new resident at Shalom Village and have found that Shalom Village is a happy place for so many people, much of it due to the leadership of Marianne Klein. Residents tell me that Klein is a wonderful listener, that she makes them feel recognized, acknowledged, appreciated and valued, and that she puts so much effort into knowing the identity of every resident and staff member. They appreciate her engaging with residents at supper, at events, and in the front lobby and value that Klein brings members of her family to Shalom Village events.

When I asked Klein to sum up her leadership philosophy, she said, “it takes a village to support the Village.” She stresses the value of teamwork, of supporting staff in order to facilitate their supporting all the residents of Shalom Village and loves the involvement of families, the board and

the foundation and the community at large. “We are driven by knowing that we make a difference,” she said.

Klein believes in the need to be compassionate and kind and caring to all. She gets inspiration by seeing the staff providing care to all the residents. Klein also holds dear the values of Shalom Village, that this is a place where everyone is welcome and has a sense of belonging. She emphasizes the importance of listening and of developing trusting relationships.

Klein cherishes Shalom Village’s Jewishness which permeates the home in times of celebrations, mourning, or the observance of traditions. She also loves how Shalom Village is accepting of everyone’s differences. She holds spirituality in high esteem and believes that there is always room to grow, no matter what our age or circumstance. Klein says it’s an honour to work with the people at Shalom Village and that personal recognition is not important to her.

“All the recognition I need is when I walk through the halls of Shalom Village and see the impact of the amazing care we provide,” she says.



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Victoria Mancinelli with Jason Waxman, Hamilton Jewish Federation president.

GRAND OPENING

Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre



PHOTOS: DONNA WAXMAN PHOTOGRAPHY AND WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS



Tom Weisz, along with his wife, Sasha and daughter, Danna Horwood, affix a mezuzah to the entrance of the Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre located in JHamilton.

CELEBRATION

Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israel Independence Day



Adam Norris and his children Ally, Perry and Teddy were among hundreds of community members attending the Yom Ha’atzmaut concert at Theatre Aquarius on May 14.

COMMEMORATION

Geraldine Katz and Hamilton Police Chief Frank Bergen view an exhibit panel at the grand opening of the Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre.

Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day



BBYO members Benjamin Farkash, Mike Pochae and Noah Jaye light a candle in memory of their grandparents who perished during the Holocaust. The event took place at JHamilton on May 7.




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2024 SHEM TOV AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARDS

We came together to recognize and honour individuals who embody the essence of a shem tov—a good name. Shem tov represents a person's character, their values, and their unwavering commitment to making a positive impact in our Hamilton Jewish community.

We congratulate the recipients of this year's community leadership awards. Their dedication and tireless efforts have left a positive mark on our community, and we are immensely grateful for their contributions.

Congratulations to the incredible individuals who make up our Jewish Hamilton community.

Lifetime Achievement Award
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Hamilton Hebrew Academy
Donald (DJ) Corning

Hamilton Jewish Family Services
Greg Matusovsky

Excellence in Jewish Education
Rebecca Sampson

Jewish National Fund
Luba Apel

Beth Jacob Synagogue
Maureen and Philip Price

Shalom Village
Vanessa Greenblatt

McMaster Hillel
Rachel Belmont

Adas Israel Congregation
John DeMarco



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

McMaster Hillel
Andrew (Andy) Roth

Cece Schreiber Volunteer Leadership Award
Cindy Richter

Kehila Heschel School
Frehiwot Pochaev

Na'amat Hamilton
Bonnie Kirsh

Hamilton Jewish Federation
Georgina Katz and Danna Horwood

President's Award
Victoria Mancinelli

Temple Anshe Sholom
Ginny Levine

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Ben Shragge

THE GARDEN of Eden story, at its most basic level, is a story of childhood. As we mature and digest the knowledge of good and evil, we are all a little Adam and Eve, repeating humanity's first chapter in miniature. The loss of innocence that the story describes is universal; but so is the opportunity to nurture, protect, and guide that innocence when it reappears in our children. As the parent of a two-year-old girl, I watch scenes from the garden play out in modern form each day.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam, the first man, "gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts." In the nursery, my first-born daughter names the cows, owls, and zebras in her books. Of course, she's not inventing their names like Adam, but her excitement at repeating them is a throwback to the dawn of language. With every pronouncement of a familiar word, she brings order and meaning to her universe. And when she points out the planets on a map of the solar system and says "ball," or looks at patterned butterfly wings and says "flowers," I share in the wonder and accidental poetry of learning to name.

During their time in paradise, Adam and Eve "were both naked, yet they felt no shame." When my daughter is looking up at me as I change her diaper, the lack of shame is all too evident in her casual expression. Emotionally, too, she is unconcealed and uninhibited, whether in love or in anger. When, apropos of nothing, she hugs my legs and exclaims "Papa!" then I know it's from the heart. And when she throws a tantrum in a restaurant, screaming uncontrollably and thrashing in her high chair, it doesn't matter what on-lookers think or decorum dictates. She will express her emotion until a new one takes its place. Nothing stands between her feelings and the world.

Of course, innocence has a built-in expiration date, commonly called maturity. As the climax of the Biblical story reminds us, we can't live in Eden forever. After giving in to temptation and

eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve "realized they were naked; so they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loin cloths." They become self-conscious and, newly aware that they've done wrong, attempt to hide from their divine parent. God says that they have "become like one of us, knowing good and evil" and banishes them from the garden to a world of enmity and hard labor: our own. As much as my daughter's own private world is Edenic, the wider world to which we are all inevitably exiled surrounds it on each side.

Sometimes, despite the efforts and intentions of parents, that wider world creeps into childhood early. While my daughter is too young to know good and evil, let alone to cover herself in shame, there have been signs that an end to innocence is coming. Recently at a children's museum, she walked over to a group of older children interacting with an exhibit. I let her approach, naively expecting that they would welcome her, only to watch them shove her aside. Within her wounded look was perhaps an early premonition that all is not good; that there is evil in this world, that there are those who love you and those who don't, and that you must learn to distinguish between the two. It is a hard and necessary lesson, but one I hope can wait until she's older for her to fully learn.

Her hurt expression was also a painful reminder to me as a parent. My responsibility is both to protect her little Eden and to start preparing her for that big, exciting, but dangerous world outside the garden. As a glance at today's headlines (no matter what day it is) reminds us, we're not living in paradise. And even among children, there is thoughtless cruelty: shoving, snatching, shaming, bullying. I need to teach my daughter to call serpents as well as farm animals by their names; to stay open to others, but also, at times, to put her guard up; to live wisely and choose righteously in a world of both good and evil. And, by so choosing, to make the world a little more like the Eden an innocent child imagines it to be.

Ben Shragge was born and raised in Hamilton. He now lives in the Boston area with his wife and two children.

Paper trails, paper roots

Researching an individual's Holocaust story can be rewarding



Kaye Prince-Hollenberg

IN MAY, the Margaret's Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre opened its doors. I have had the distinct privilege of acting as the centre's first curator, a labour of love that involved researching and writing for the permanent exhibit and selecting artifacts for display. Along with researcher Cory Osmond and Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg, we worked for many months to bring the experience together. Marrying aspects of a traditional museum with a Holocaust education facility, the centre embodies a living memorial to victims of the Holocaust while simultaneously celebrating our survivors and creating a welcoming space for anyone to learn.

While I've previously worked on many Holocaust projects, from genealogy research for private clients to survivor memoir, curating the centre allowed me to research so many different aspects while also focusing on local survivor stories. Like the small exhibit I curated for Hamilton Public Library last year, but on a larger scale, I was able to talk to survivors' family members and conduct in-depth research into each survivor's Holocaust story. Their stories took me across Europe through written records, and oral testimony, and photographs. While we couldn't tell every person's story in the permanent exhibit, I have hope that in the future rotating exhibits can be utilized to focus on more individual survivors.

Researching an individual Holocaust story can be heartbreaking and overwhelming. There are so many websites and resources available, but even that only scratches the surface of possible documentation available. Much work has been done to digitize this material, most notably by Yad Vashem, the Arolsen Archives, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum but the work will continue for many years to come. One of the talks I sometimes deliver to historical societies and genealogy groups provides a

basic overview of online Holocaust resources and even then, my handout is lengthy. This is not to discourage anyone from researching an individual experience, but rather to encourage you to keep researching, and keep digging!

Only recently I cracked a case that I have been working on for a decade; I had been trying to identify a man who had submitted almost 600 testimony pages to Yad Vashem for his murdered neighbours and friends from the village of Korolowka, including our family. His surname wasn't one I recognized but I knew he settled in Israel and every few months I would dig through records trying to find him, even reaching out to contacts in Israel to check old phonebooks for me. With just that surname and a first initial, I recently found a notation for his name change that included his original name and from there I was able to delve deeper and create a tree linking him back to Korolowka. It was extremely important to me that I be able to identify this man who had taken the time to memorialize hundreds of people, many of whom were murdered in the village in mass shootings and aren't documented in any other way. Now I can keep him in my remembrances as well.

If you're just starting your journey to research an individual Holocaust story, check the three main resources I mentioned above, as well as JewishGen. The Yad Vashem Shoah Names Database includes testimony pages submitted by survivors, researchers, family members, and town societies, as well as survivor registrations and indexed records from Yad Vashem's own collections. It's a great place to start.

An aside: In August I will be travelling to Philadelphia to give two talks at the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies annual conference. My sessions will include Landscape of Dreams: Jewish Genealogy in Canada, and Holocaust Compensation and the United Restitution Organization. There's still time to register for the conference, so check out the IAJS2024 website if you're interested, and don't forget to introduce yourself while you're there!

To submit a question or if you have some Hamilton Jewish history to share, please email wschneider@jewishhamilton.org

A delicious Jewish tradition

Who knew baking challah could be a spiritual experience?



Helaine Ortman

I'VE NEVER been the kind of person to join a club; save for one misguided effort as a teenager. I'm referring to the time I pledged for a high school sorority because my older cousin Barb had. The same reason I studied clarinet.

(That did not go well. Two memories yet linger. First, my parents' good-natured suggestion that I need not bring the instrument home every weekend to practise; and second, my music teacher asking me in open class if I really were Syd Levy's — the bandleader's — daughter.)

Back to the sorority. Among the orientation antics we endured was the requirement to make and saturate tissue flowers with perfume and then wear them, pinned all over our clothes, for the day. So overwhelming was the fragrance for classmates and teachers (this long before there were scent-free policies), the office sent us "pledges" home to shower and change. Mortifying; and all the motivation I needed to resign from the sorority before I was even accepted.

Why then would I say yes to my cousin Reesa's invitation to join her at the Aish Thornhill Community Shul for their monthly Challah Club?

Was it the in-person demonstration of the art of dough-making that I craved; having learned to make challah via FaceTime during the pandemic? Or, could it be, almost six decades later, that I was mature and secure enough to revisit the idea and experience of belonging?

My cousin pulled out all the stops for my visit. After a busy work day (hers), she prepared a delicious air-fried salmon supper, and, following a dessert of fruit and homemade chocolate truffles, she presented me with a "loot bag" of riches from the dollar store: a large white flat-bottom shissel (mixing bowl), mixing spoons, and set of measuring cups and spoons.

We arrived at the shul where Alissa, one of the organizers, greeted me warmly. I quickly took in the scene: a standard hall with round tables covered by white

plastic cloths, equipped to fit 35 to 50 people. In the centre of each were the ingredients that would, in the next hour or so, produce about four good-sized challahs per maker: a 10-lb bag of flour, a 5-litre container of canola oil, yeast, sugar, eggs, and salt.

In anticipation, we donned our aprons (colourful, some challah-themed) and gloves (optional), and "schmoozed" with our table mates. On my right, Silvana, an Argentinian, was speaking to her friend in Spanish. That animated a conversation about family backgrounds, having grown up in a mixed Sephardic-Ashkenazi house where my father, aunts and uncles, and grandmother Vinucha spoke Ladino, especially when they didn't want the "children" to know what they were talking about.

Moving from group to group where we voiced the names of loved ones who were sick and in need of healing, Alissa led the group in the refuah shlema; a compassionate and heartfelt prayer. After a collective amen, it was time to get down to business; the laminated Aish challah recipe clear and present on each table to guide us in our evening's mitzvah.

We dissolved the yeast and sugar in four cups of warm water (what you would use for a baby's bath) and set it aside to foam and bubble; measured 12 cups of flour into the shissel; made a well; and added in the rest of the ingredients. We kneaded, adding more flour as we went to make a soft and elastic dough—not too sticky, not too dry—for 10 to 15 minutes. With not a stand mixer in sight, the room of women was, to use sport parlance, "locked in;" at one with their dough. Focused as I was, I heard my cousin coaching me on, saying "it's going to be fluffy; look at those air bubbles."

After taking a photo of the seven women at our table and posing for a collective group shot, we wished each other well and left the shul with our precious cargo, bedded down under layers of saran wrap, to rest overnight in the refrigerator, double in size, and ultimately emerge as variously braided and seeded baked loaves to be enjoyed with our families.

As a retired person living in Hamilton, Helaine seeks out opportunities in everyday life to nourish mind, body and spirit.

Unwanted family heirlooms

What do we do when our kids don't treasure what we treasure?



Phyllis Shragge

"MY KIDS don't want any of my things," my friend says, her voice quavering. She's obviously not referring to the clothes buried in the back of her closet, relegated to that spot because they are now too tight. And she's not talking about her extensive book collection, mostly novels, nor anything else she's accumulated in recent years.

She's lamenting the things she treasures, the family heirlooms and wedding gifts from so long ago, special things that hold a place in her heart. These items mean so much more than their monetary value.

She describes the bone china dishes she inherited from her mother. "They're pure white and trimmed with gold, simple and elegant," she says. "They're fragile and need loving care."

She recalls her childhood, when it was taken for granted that the fine bone china would adorn the dining room table for weekly Shabbat dinners and for every holiday meal. The dishes signified the meal as a celebration. Of course, the food was delicious, she recalls, especially her mother's crispy and tender roast chicken, but the presentation was equally, if not more important than the food. Once the dining room table was set in all its splendour, the family knew to respect the tradition of these special dining experiences.

Respect also meant dressing nicely for the occasion. My friend laughs when she remembers her brother turning up at one Shabbat dinner with bare feet. "All it took was a glare from my dad. He didn't do that again."

My friend is in her late 70s. She's healthy and active. Yet, she is realistic about the time she has left. She's been thinking a lot about what will become of her things, after ... after, you know what.

"I asked my daughters if either one would want my bone china when I'm gone. Both said they weren't interested in dishes that needed to be washed by hand. And when I asked about my sterling

flatware, they said they didn't want to polish all that silver. These things are special to me. They don't seem to care."

Why does this make her so sad? Is she unique in her feelings?

I check with other friends. It's like opening the floodgates. These women babble on and on about how their children don't appreciate the possessions they hold dear. These women want their things to be valued, to be passed down through the generations.

One friend is fortunate to have antiques and fine jewelry. Her children have no interest in her antiques, especially the furniture. Her jewelry now sits in a safe deposit box at a bank, retrieved for the occasional wedding or party. Her daughters wonder why she bothers with all that rigmarole. They are practical. Down the road they likely will question the need to hang onto these pieces. They've grown up in a throw-away society. They're so used to buying things that aren't designed to last. Quick to buy, quick to discard.

One woman, who points out her treasures are only precious in a sentimental sense, is equally distraught. She worries that her special things will be tossed out or sold once she's gone. What about the family photos, she wonders. They're now preserved in albums. Will they be thrown away after they are digitized? How can they be keepsakes if they can no longer be held?

The concern is consistent. The objects of concern vary. A unique painting may have been purchased in a faraway country and tucked into a carry-on bag with tender loving care. A collection of Inuit art may be especially treasured because it was handed down by a parent. An assortment of pottery mugs may have tickled a woman's fancy as she scoured galleries to add to her collection. A collection of small dolls from various countries may have been inexpensive to buy, but they are a treasure to its owner.

Each of these things has value that goes beyond the concrete. Is it unrealistic to expect our kids to appreciate what we hold dear? Perhaps it is. We want them to treasure what we treasure, when perhaps the most important thing is that when we're gone, they treasure our memory.

Wishing the community
a wonderful summer



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ORA (AURELIA) MARKSTEIN, 100

Holocaust survivor, prolific
artist and beloved friend

BY BARRY ROSEN AND WENDY SCHNEIDER

BARRY FIRST met Ora Markstein in 1999 during Temple Anshe Sholom's Mitzvah Week, a program in which congregants volunteered to perform acts of kindness in the community. After signing up for home visits, he was given Ora Markstein's name. He knew she was a talented sculptor, but not much else.

During his first visit to her Kent

Street home, Ora told Barry about her idyllic childhood in a small city near Budapest, where she and her sister lived in the warm embrace of a close-knit family. Ora's carefree adolescence was shattered at the age of 15 with the Hungarian government's alliance with Nazi Germany and her family being deported to Auschwitz.

Against all odds, every member of her immediate family survived the war, as did the young man who captured her heart just four months before he was sent into forced labour. Francis Markstein was near death when Ora's mother nursed him back to health after the war. Ora and Francis were married, and their son, Igor was born in a UN sponsored refugee camp in Germany.

The Marksteins moved to Israel in 1949, where they stayed for 26 years, until their son's move to Illinois prompted them to try and make a go of it in Canada.

Ora's chance encounter with well-known Polish Canadian sculptor Ethel Rosenfield in Montreal marked a turning point in her life.

Ora met Rosenfield at a dinner party, and after showing her photographs of plaster casts she had made in Israel, Rosenfield exclaimed, "But you are thinking in stone! You feel in stone!" When Ora replied that she had never even put her hands on stone, nor could she ever afford to work in that medium, Rosenfield reassured her, "I'm going to help you." True to her word, she arranged for Ora to receive a scholarship from the Saidye Bronfman Centre.

When Francis was offered a job at Beth Jacob Hebrew School, the Marksteins moved to Hamilton. Larry and Sharon Enkin welcomed them like long-lost family. Sharon Enkin soon arranged for a show of Ora's sculptures at the Delaware Avenue JCC, which would set her career in motion. Years later, when Ora was 83 years old, the Art Gallery



Ora Markstein in her Shalom Village apartment surrounded by her beautiful stone carvings.

of Hamilton organized a one-woman exhibit of her stone carvings.

Barry's initial visit with Ora sparked a 25-year friendship that included his wife, Leslie Viner. In addition to visiting with Ora in her home, they invited her to theirs and often accompanied her to community events and synagogue services. Leslie's parents, Pearl and David Viner, eventually became her neighbours at Shalom Village.

Ora loved connecting with people of varying ages and backgrounds, and she dearly missed her Kent Street neighbours after moving to Shalom Village. She was an avid reader, enjoyed quality films and kept up with current events via her favourite newspaper, The Globe and Mail. Ora was intelligent and articulate, and not shy about expressing her opinion. She was very honest and you always knew where you stood.

For years, Ora would speak about the Holocaust at Hamilton high schools, despite the emotional toll that came from reliving her experiences. It is a testament to her enormous artistic vision and talent that she was able to create such beautiful works of art despite having lived through such horrors.

Ora had many physical challenges, which eventually resulted in her move to Shalom Village. Staff there were loving and helpful towards her throughout her time there. Ora's quality of life deteriorated quite significantly over the past year. During some visits, we weren't sure to what extent she was aware of our presence.

Shalom Village threw a wonderful birthday party for Ora in April for her 100th birthday. Ora was glowing and particularly alert that day and really seemed to enjoy connecting with all those in attendance, including extended family who travelled from the United States to be with her on that special day. She died a week later, with her dedicated long-standing caregiver Nancy Coward by her side.

Ora leaves behind her much-loved son Igor, his wife Joan, extended family members in Canada, the US and Israel, and many close friends. Ora will never be forgotten by those of us who were fortunate enough to know her. May her memory be an abiding blessing.

NEGEV DINNER

JNF Dinner honours beloved couple



PHOTO: JOHN CEKO PHOTOGRAPHY

JNF Negev Dinner keynote speaker Noa Tishby (centre) is flanked by Victoria Mancinelli and her husband Anthony Primerano and Negev Dinner honorees Donna and Gary Waxman.

WENDY SCHNEIDER

The Jewish National Fund held its annual Negev Dinner on May 9, a sold-out event honouring Donna and Gary Waxman for their volunteerism in the Jewish and greater Hamilton community. The dinner was co-chaired by friends of the couple, past Negev Dinner honoree Jeff Paikin and Dr. Allison Sekuler, who praised the much beloved couple for their understated generosity and deep commitment to many community causes.

Donna Waxman is a gifted photographer who is usually seen behind the camera at community events capturing the joy of the moment and the essence of her subjects in her beautiful photographs. Her husband Gary was praised at the dinner for his steadfast moral and

philanthropic support for causes that are dear to his heart.

Funds raised by the dinner will go towards the construction of a family therapy centre in Ofakim, Israel, a small city 30 km from the Gaza border that lost 48 people during the Oct. 7 attacks. The new centre will provide essential counselling services to those grappling with loss, trauma and uncertainty.

The evening's entertainment was provided by the Moe Koffman Tribute Band, whose members are family members of Donna Waxman. The highlight of the event was an interview conducted by Victoria Mancinelli, of LIUNA, a stalwart ally of the Jewish community whose father and grandfather were past honorees with best-selling author, and Israel activist and advocate Noa Tishby.

SAR-EL

'I felt good about volunteering'

LAURA WOLFSON

Last March, I travelled to Israel to volunteer with Sar-El, an organization whose name means "service to Israel". Sar-El has brought thousands of international volunteers to Israel. I had an extremely positive experience.

The idea of Sar-El is that volunteers can do logistical tasks that free the soldiers up to do what they need to do. Volunteers might be folding laundry, assembling meal kits, sorting or sterilizing medical supplies, making simple repairs to military equipment, counting supplies, or moving boxes. I was stationed at a large army base just outside of Tel Aviv that dealt mostly with medical supplies. On the first day, after giving the volunteers army uniforms to wear (so that we would not be mistaken for intruders on the base) we were divided into our jobs. A supervisor described the tasks that needed doing, and each of the volunteers chose a task that they felt they could do. We worked in pairs or small groups in warehouses on the base. Our work started at 8 a.m. and continued until about 3:30 p.m. each day. We worked at our own pace and could take breaks whenever we needed.

Sar-El takes volunteers of all ages! I volunteered with people in their 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. I met other volunteers from all over Europe, from Australia, South Africa, South America, the U.S. and Canada. Most remarkably, they were not all Jewish. At least 20 per cent of the volunteers who were there when I was there were non-Jews. When asked why they were there, they said, simply, "We want to help." A group of non-Jewish South Africans arrived on the day that South Africa enacted a law saying that any citizen who helps Israel will be arrested as an enemy of the state upon their return. They decided to go to the beach in Tel Aviv, take



PHOTO: COURTESY LAURA WOLFSON

Laura Wolfson on an army base outside of Tel Aviv in her olive-drab IDF uniform.

pictures of themselves swimming or sunbathing with drinks in their hands, so that upon their return home they would have photographic "proof" that they were simply on vacation. Then they came to the army base to volunteer.

In the evenings, our madrichot (the soldiers who were our supervisors) provided activities for us. On the weekends, all Sar-El volunteers are required to leave the army base (they drove us to Tel Aviv, and most of the volunteers had booked hotels in Tel Aviv, but others, including myself, went to visit family).

I felt good about volunteering in Israel, even though it was in a very small way. Sar-El made it very easy: they provide transportation, meals, and lodging. For more information visit sarelcana.org/ or call (416) 781-6089. I know I will participate again and I hope it will be soon.

Wishing you a
safe, wonderful summer

Barry Yellin has joined Scarfone Hawkins LLP and will be continuing his established commercial and civil litigation practice with our firm.

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The dogged pursuit of a distant Zionist dream

'Elusive Dreams: Letters to Zion' a new book, highlights the troubled experience of Georgian Jews in British Mandate Palestine

BY BEV MILLER
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

THERE ARE MANY MYTHS about the idealistic Jewish pioneers who settled in British Mandate Palestine during the 1920s and '30s British Mandate Palestine, their courage and unwavering determination to work together to overcome overwhelming odds and create a new life in an ancient homeland.

In his book, 'Elusive Dreams: Letters to Zion', Ronnie Miller dispels some of these myths in telling the story of Nathan Eliashvili of Georgia, one of the most significant Zionist leaders of his time, who led a group of 17 Georgian Jewish families to Palestine in the 1920s during what is known as the Fourth Aliyah.

One of the most satisfying, but also unsettling, aspects of conducting research is that you can start down one path reasonably confident as to what you will discover, and then find yourself traveling down unimagined trails. As Miller continued with his research, made extremely complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and long periods of travel bans, he came across numerous elements of the story of Eliashvili and his Georgian compatriots which challenged the stories on which he was raised as a child in Israel and continued to believe as an adult researcher and historian.

Nathan Eliashvili was born in 1893, in Tskhinvali, in Northern Georgia. Following the Soviet takeover of his country in 1921, Eliashvili's belief in a Jewish homeland in Eretz Yisrael spurred him to persuade his fellow



PHOTOS: COURTESY RONNIE MILLER

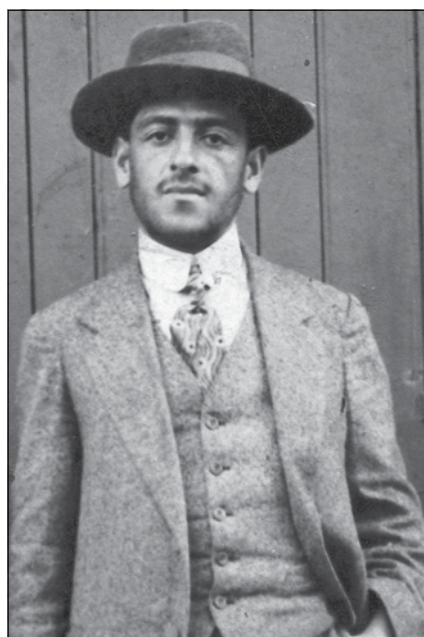
Jews to follow him to Palestine. But there was no consensus, even within the Zionist community of Georgia, as to which path was the safest and surest path to deliverance for the endangered Jewish population, and Miller's research revealed evidence of feuds and outright betrayals within the community was a constant source of surprise.

The approximate 60 Georgian Jews who did make it to Palestine faced years of unrelenting adversity that often led to bitter internal disputes and distrust, sometimes culminating

in acrimonious estrangements. They experienced hunger, disease, depression and outright despair. The Zionist organizations which they expected would support them through their first years of acclimation were often ill-equipped, under-resourced, distracted, or disinterested in their challenges. There was also an undercurrent of racism as Georgian Jews, did not neatly fit into the usual categories of Ashkenazi or Sephardi, and fell into a crack that led to underfunding and the ignoring of their near-insurmountable difficulties.

Above, Members of the group of 60 Georgian Jews who followed Nathan Eliashvili to Palestine in the mid-1920s.

Right, Georgian Zionist leader, Nathan Eliashvili, whose great grandson is the author of the book, 'Elusive Dreams: Letters to Zion'.



As these calamities were occurring, Eliashvili continued to receive letters from friends and family in Georgia imploring him to help them make aliyah, entreaties that went unanswered. Miller's research eventually revealed the poignant reasons behind Eliashvili's silence and failure to return to lead others to safety. Many of those left behind in Georgia did not survive the Second World War, and many more were lost to Judaism through the long years of Soviet rule.

Among the Georgian Jews who did manage to succeed were the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of Nathan Eliashvili, of whom Ronnie Miller is one.

Miller is now embarking on new avenues of exploration of the experiences of the Georgian Olim to mandate Palestine. For further details, visit elusivedreamsbook.com.

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