



- ▷ Jewish Film Festival a huge success • 6
- ▷ JNF honours Victoria Mancinelli • 7
- ▷ Uncovering tango's Jewish roots • 22



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Hamilton
Jewish

News

The voice of Jewish Hamilton

Federation CEO TO BE HONOURED WITH King Charles III Coronation Medal

Gustavo Rymberg is being recognized for his leadership, community building and advocacy against antisemitism

BY **JAZMIN RYMBERG**
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg is being awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal in recognition of his visionary leadership, his advocacy against hate and antisemitism, and his commitment to community building. Flamborough-Glanbrook Member of Parliament Dan Muys will present the medal to Rymberg this spring, in recognition of what he has described as Rymberg's "strong advocacy and wisdom and calm, particularly in these challenging times when hate is too prevalent on our streets." Rymberg is among 30,000 Canadians nationwide to receive the award, which recognizes significant contributions in public that have advanced Canadian society or brought international recognition to the country.

PRESTIGIOUS AWARD CONTINUES P4



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg is one of 31 Hamiltonians set to receive the King Charles III Coronation Medal. The medal will be awarded to 30,000 outstanding Canadians in recognition of significant achievements. SEE COVER STORY **PAGE 4**

Momentum builds for a Jewish high school

Concern in the community for the well-being of Hamilton's Jewish students behind the push for a regional secondary school.

SEE COVER STORY **P5**

“He is a natural leader who leads by example, inspiring his staff to consistently go above and beyond.”

WENDY SCHNEIDER
EDITOR, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS.

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FEDERATION EDITORIAL

We face a test we can't afford to fail



Gustavo Rymberg

CEO
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

AS THE CEO of the Hamilton Jewish Federation — and as a proud Jew — these past months have weighed heavily on my heart. Like many of you, I have been consumed by anguish, helplessness, and anger. The horrific scenes from Israel, the unbearable wait for news about the hostages, and the grotesque mockery from Palestinians — celebrating terror, laughing at our pain — have left me shaken to the core. Watching the funeral of the Bibas family — little Kfir, just a baby, his brother Ariel, and their mother, all murdered — was one of the hardest moments I've ever lived through. The sense of hopelessness, of not being able to do anything, of crying out into silence, is something I know many of us have felt. It's a hunger for justice that seems impossible to satisfy.

And while we mourn and ache for Israel, we face a different kind of pain here in Canada. A pain that comes from betrayal. A country we once believed in — one that stood for tolerance, decency, and freedom — is no longer standing strong for its Jewish citizens. The surge in antisemitism, the normalization of anti-Zionist rhetoric, the silence of our leaders — it is not just disappointing, it is frightening. And yet, we are not without hope. We are fortunate to live in a democracy. Elections are coming, and maybe — just maybe — things will change. The wheels of justice turn slowly, but they do turn.

At the very least, we can find some relief knowing that one of the most radical, fanatical, and openly antisemitic and anti-Israel voices in Canadian politics — Sarah Jama — is finally out of the picture. I may be too optimistic, but I believe we won't hear from her again for a long time. Her removal is a small victory in a landscape that feels increasingly hostile.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Budapest and Vienna — two cities with their own complicated Jewish histories. What I experienced there was eye-opening. No Palestinian flags. No keffiyehs. No hate-filled graffiti. No protests calling for the destruction of Israel. Instead, I saw memorials in public squares for the Israeli hostages; trees with yellow ribbons in solidarity; Israeli flags hanging from balconies and public buildings with pride; mayors and ministers who are unafraid to call out hatred, who speak plainly and courageously against terrorism and fanaticism. It was a striking contrast to what we see in Toronto or Montreal, where fear and appeasement often silence truth.

In Europe — where you might expect to feel tension — I felt support. In Canada — our home — I often feel isolated. We are being tested, and it's a test we cannot afford to fail.

Around the world, things feel uncertain. In the United States — our strongest ally — the political landscape shifts daily. Tariffs, no tariffs. Ceasefire, no ceasefire. Words that bring hope one day, despair the next. The uncertainty is paralyzing at times. But we cannot allow fear to immobilize us. We owe it to ourselves, to each other, to our children and grandchildren — to keep going, to keep building, to keep fighting for the community we love.

Now, more than ever, we must bring the Jewish voice into every room where decisions are made. Onto school boards. Into committees. Into other nonprofit organizations. Into our children's schools. Into every space where we can stand up, speak out, and represent. And, critically, we must bring that voice to the ballot box when we vote.

We cannot afford to be divided. Not now. Not over egos or petty disagreements. Not over things that are not truly essential. This is a time for unity, for clarity of purpose, for courage. We must protect and strengthen what we've built together in Hamilton. We must support the people of Israel, in word and in deed. And we must dare to dream — of new initiatives, new programs, new ways of bringing Jewish life to the next level here at home.

By doing so, we create something greater than ourselves. We create security. We create pride. We create unity. And we do it together — not just as Jews, but as Canadians who believe in a future here. A future where we don't have to hide, where we don't have to apologize for who we are or for our love of Israel.

We are proud. And we are here — for good.

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

Sunday morning at JCC's Chess Club



PHOTO BY WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Hamilton JCC's Chess Club offers learn-to-play, recreational and competitive chess programs for kids aged 9-13. Program participants can learn new strategies, solve puzzles, and compete in real matches. Above, volunteer Chess Club instructor Yuval Bavly and budding chess enthusiast Liam Drober match wits in a game of chess.

COVER STORY

Momentum builds for Jewish high school

4

FEDERATION NEWS

Gustavo Rymberg honoured

9

IN FOCUS

Today's Jewish immigrant experience

17

LOOKING BACK

Remembering Dr. Harry Paikin

22

FEATURE STORY

Tango's Jewish roots

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Editorial
- 4 Cover Stories
- 6 Local News
- 7 Special Mentschen
- 9 In Focus
- 10 Local voices
- 16 Inspiration and Insight
- 17 Looking Back
- 18 Community News
- 22 Feature Story
- 12-13 Federation News

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Your Federation at work

From Holocaust education to cultural experiences, Hamilton Jewish Federation is at the forefront of community engagement



PHOTO BY WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS



MP Melissa Lantsman addresses a packed house during a Federation event featuring local members of the Conservative Party of Canada speaking about their party's strategies to combat antisemitism in Canada.



HJN editor Wendy Schneider interviews filmmaker Derek Goldman following the screening of his film "Remember This" during a community commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre on Jan. 27.

Above, Margaret's Legacy Holocaust and Jewish Advocacy Centre guide Cory Osmond leads a group of Hamilton Wentworth District School Board teachers through the exhibits.



John Levy and newcomer Oli Moreno found much to discuss at a speed networking event organized by Federation's JWelcome Home committee.

King Charles III Coronation Award

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg awarded

Since stepping into the role of Federation CEO in 2017, Rymberg has gained the respect and admiration of community leaders, donors, and Federation staff. For Jacki Levin, who was Federation president when Rymberg was hired, his leadership qualities were evident during the interview process. "What impressed me most was how much research Gustavo did on Hamilton. He came in with a vision, and he has executed it flawlessly," she said.

Rymberg's visionary leadership has driven several transformative initiatives, including JHamilton—his most ambitious project—uniting four Jewish organizations under one roof, orchestrating a coordinated community response to the COVID-19 crisis, and positioning Hamilton as the host of an international conference on antisemitism. Federation treasurer Lorne Rochweg highlighted the significance of the 2022 #nomoreantisemitism conference, noting that it placed Hamilton on the global stage and laid the foundation for Federation's partnership with Yad Vashem and the creation of the Margaret's Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre.

Rymberg has also reinvigorated the annual Community Campaign, which had remained stagnant for years. The campaign has flourished under his leadership, with annual contributions nearly tripling.

Under Rymberg's leadership, both the Federation and the Jewish community have gained a renewed public presence. His influence was evident when the Mayor's office stepped in to secure a new venue for the 2024 Hamilton Jewish Film Festival after a local theatre withdrew its support—highlighting the strength of the strategic alliances he has built over the years.

Rymberg's deep commitment to the Jewish community traces back to 1997 when he, his wife Marisa, and their two daughters became the first Argentinian family to immigrate to Canada through the Jewish community's Grow Winnipeg initiative. He began his Canadian career as a graphic designer at the Winnipeg Rady JCC, a role that soon led to new opportunities. A scholarship from the JCC Association of North America

allowed him to earn a master's degree in marketing from Toronto Metropolitan University (then Ryerson), and in 2003, he was recognized as Professional of the Year by the JCC Association. After holding leadership roles in Jewish communities in Ottawa and Toronto, Rymberg moved to Hamilton in 2017 to assume the role of CEO at the Hamilton Jewish Federation.

Rymberg's commitment to professional development led him to join the inaugural cohort of the Spertus Institute's Leadership Certificate in Combating Antisemitism in February 2023—an experience that prepared him to navigate the challenges Jewish communities faced in the aftermath of Hamas's deadly attacks on Oct. 7, 2023. The relationships and frameworks he established beforehand became the foundation for his effective leadership over the past 18 months, leaving a lasting impression on MP Dan Muys.

"Gustavo brought leadership and professionalism," said Muys. "People feel a sense of connection through his passion. He has been a builder of this community."

Having personally benefited from the support of the Jewish community in his own career, Rymberg made it a priority to bring younger voices to Federation staff and its board of directors.

Rymberg's dedication and work ethic have had a tremendous impact on the morale of Federation staff, who, according to long-time Hamilton Jewish News editor Wendy Schneider, are thriving under his leadership.

"Gustavo is a natural leader and role model—thoughtful, considerate, and always appreciative," she said. "No task is too small for him. His example motivates staff to go above and beyond."

MP Dan Muys will present Rymberg and 30 other recipients with their Coronation Medals in May.

For Rymberg, this honour goes beyond a personal achievement—it symbolizes the strength and resilience of the Jewish community he has worked tirelessly to build. Through his vision, dedication, and steadfast commitment, he has played a vital role in ensuring that Jewish life in Hamilton is not just surviving but thriving.

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Together we raised over \$40,000!

Your generosity fuels the work we do every day, and we can't wait to do it all again next year.

Special mention to Hamilton Kosher, Chocolate Tales, Bothwell Cheese, Metro Dundas, Meir & Hanna Ben Ishai, and Marty's Pickles for their delicious contributions. And thank you to everyone who made this night so special!



Momentum builds for Jewish high school in Hamilton

Concern for safety and well-being of Jewish students drives community initiative to establish regional school

BY **JASON WAXMAN**
PRESIDENT, HAMILTON JEWISH
FEDERATION

SINCE OCTOBER 7, much of what we believed about Jewish life in North America has been challenged. In the face of growing concerns about the safety and well-being of Jewish students in public secondary schools, a group of concerned community members, parents and teachers, with the support of the Hamilton Jewish Federation, are pleased announce the launch of Ontario Jewish Collegiate (OJC), a groundbreaking and transformative initiative that marks a significant milestone in the history of our community.

Through a dynamic and forward-thinking academic environment, students will gain the knowledge, skills, and resilience needed to succeed in a rapidly evolving world. Furthermore, the school will provide a safe and nurturing space where Jewish students can grow in confidence and deepen their Jewish identity. Serving students from Hamilton, Burlington, Oakville, Mississauga, the Niagara region, Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, and Brantford, it is committed to fostering academic excellence.

The school will offer a safe and supportive environment where Jewish students can build confidence, strengthen their Jewish identity, and foster a deep connection to Israel. The establishment of Ontario Jewish Collegiate is fueled by a commitment to developing confident, engaged, and proud Jewish leaders, who will

make a lasting impact both within the Jewish community and beyond. With a focus on academic excellence, Jewish values, and real-world experiences, the school aims to set new standards for Jewish high school education across Southern Ontario.

OJC presents an opportunity to attract new families to the region. It also aims to retain Jewish families in Hamilton, encouraging them to invest in a future here.

The school is fostering strategic partnerships with institutions and professionals who can provide students with mentorship opportunities, career guidance, and real-world applications of classroom learning. These collaborations will ensure students graduate with the skills and confidence to excel in their chosen fields.

An anonymous donor has pledged a significant donation to enhance the school's coding, robotics, and STEM education programs. The donation will enable the future purchase of cutting-edge materials to enrich the curriculum with practical learning experiences in technological innovation.

At the heart of OJC's strategic development is its advisory board, which will play a crucial role in shaping the school's curriculum, refining its pedagogy and ensuring that OJC remains at the forefront of academic excellence. Members of the board include:

- Hadassa Halpern, executive director of the Ronald S. Lauder Impact Initiative. Halpern has been instrumental in leading impactful changes

in 20 European Jewish day schools. With experience transforming Jewish education and a Harvard executive MBA, she brings innovative, strategic leadership to OJC.

- Daniel Held, chief program officer at UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and executive director of the Julia and Henry Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Education. Held has dedicated his career to Jewish education, academic excellence and Jewish identity integration.

- Romy Friedman, chair of Hamilton Jewish Federation's education committee and recipient of the 2024 Sharon Enkin Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education. An expert in science education, Friedman consulted for the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and contributed to Oxford University Press.

- Jaime Kirzner-Roberts, a senior director of policy and advocacy at Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC), who is a dedicated advocate against antisemitism. She works closely with Canadian government officials, law enforcement, and academia to strengthen Holocaust education.

- Josh Schwarcz, secretary general of The Jewish Agency for Israel. Schwarcz serves on the boards of Birthright Israel, Masa Israel Journey, and the Israel Museum. His extensive expertise in Jewish community development will be invaluable in advancing OJC's mission.

This diverse team of advisors will help OJC students connect with industry leaders, explore career pathways, and gain learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom.

The school will also introduce a weekly program called IMPACT:



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Empowering Leaders, Inspiring Change, which will equip students with the tools to combat antisemitism and misinformation, and serve as effective voices for the Jewish community.

Community service will also play a central role through meaningful, impact-driven projects. IMPACT reflects OJC's dedication to developing the next generation of Jewish leaders.

As we build a school of excellence, we invite students, families, and community members to join us on this transformative journey. With the support of our advisory board, leading educators, and industry mentors, Ontario Jewish Collegiate will equip students with the tools to succeed, inspire change, and lead with integrity.

Please join us at our open house on Monday, April 7 at 8 p.m. at JHamilton, 1605 Main St. W. in Hamilton.

We request that interested parents with school-aged children complete our parent survey that can be found by visiting ontariojewish.ca.

Jewish student forum members met with Hamilton Wentworth District School Board officials last fall at JHamilton.



*Wishing our community
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Hamilton Jewish Film Festival

2025 celebration of the best Jewish cinema worldwide drew a record audience

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

FOR THE second consecutive year, members of Hamilton's Jewish community came together at the Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre for a powerful cinematic celebration of Jewish history, culture, and identity.

This year's festival offered a rich selection of films, documentaries, and engaging Q&A sessions that resonated deeply with attendees. The closing night screening of *We Will Dance Again* was followed by a heartfelt musical performance that moved many to tears.

"There's something truly special, healing, and uplifting about a community coming together for a Jewish Film Festival," said festival organizer Wendy Schneider in her closing remarks. "Especially in the times we're living through, this shared experience feels more meaningful than ever."



PHOTO: JASON CHURCH PHOTOGRAPHY

Left: Jewish Film Festival attendees enjoy a reception catered by Hamilton K kosher and sponsored by Lawrence Yanover and Frances Cohen.



PHOTO: JASON CHURCH PHOTOGRAPHY

Right: Audience members were deeply engaged in the films and post-screening presentations.



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Left: Rivka Campbell, executive director of Toronto's Beth Tikvah synagogue takes audience questions following film *Rabbi on the Block*.

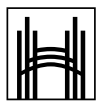


PHOTO: JASON CHURCH PHOTOGRAPHY

Right: The closing night performance featured pianist, Nadav Greenhut, and local singers Catherine Silverglen and (not pictured) Yuval Bavly.

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JNF honours Victoria Mancinelli at 2025 Negev Dinner

Mancinelli's unwavering commitment to Israel and the Jewish community defines her leadership

BY **SUZY POLGAR**
JEWISH NATIONAL FUND

ON MAY 27, 2025, the Hamilton community will gather at LiUNA Station for an unforgettable evening celebrating leadership, advocacy, and impact. This year, JNF Hamilton along with the Israel Magen Adom Fund of Canada proudly honours Victoria Mancinelli at the Negev Dinner, continuing a distinguished family legacy — her father and grandfather were recognized as Negev honourees for their contributions 25 years ago.

Mancinelli's remarkable career and dedication to community building have made her a powerful force for change. As director of public relations, marketing, and strategic partnerships for the Labourers International Union of North America (LiUNA), she has dedicated herself to championing marginalized communities, advocating for women and girls, and fostering economic development. Her efforts have earned her numerous accolades, including the YWCA Woman of Distinction Award, the CIBPA Woman of the Year Award, and the King Charles III Coronation Medal.

Among her many initiatives, Mancinelli has been a relentless advocate against gender-based violence. She played a pivotal role in establishing the Victoria and Friends Emergency Shelter in partnership with Interval House of Hamilton, offering refuge



JOHN CEKO PHOTOGRAPHY

to women and children fleeing abuse and human trafficking. She continues to make a profound impact through her work with the Ontario Task Force for Women and the Economy, the LiUNA Women in Trades Department, and the United Way Women's Committee.

Mancinelli's unwavering commitment to Israel and the Jewish community is another defining aspect of her leadership. She has courageously spoken out against antisemitism and hate, earning the Hamilton Jewish Federation President's Award and the Spirit of Hope Award from the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre. A passionate advocate, she has raised her voice at significant events, including the JNF Hamilton 2024 Negev Dinner, UJA Believe All Women Event, and the Lion of Judah Conference in Atlanta. Since October 7, 2023, Mancinelli's advocacy has been

more overt than ever. She has personally connected with friends and relatives of hostages and victims, offering support and amplifying their voices. A proud Zionist, she has marched alongside the Jewish community in solidarity and has continued to speak out against hate and terrorism with unwavering strength and conviction.

In keeping with her commitment to uplifting communities, Mancinelli has chosen to direct proceeds from this year's Negev Dinner to an urgent and vital cause — the dedication of a new innovative rehabilitation centre in Ashdod.

This facility will provide a full spectrum of essential rehabilitation services, including physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, psychological support, and specialized education programs. By establishing this comprehensive centre, we will help

Victoria Mancinelli gives an impassioned address at the 2024 JNF Negev Dinner, during which she interviewed keynote speaker Noa Tishby.

bridge a critical gap in care for those in need.

Southern Israel has long struggled with a shortage of rehabilitation services, a crisis that was tragically worsened by the war that began on October 7, 2023. The healthcare system is overwhelmed, leaving hundreds of thousands of wounded and traumatized individuals without adequate care. For many in Southern Israel, access to rehabilitation services is severely limited, putting them at risk of long-term disability and diminished quality of life.

This new rehabilitation centre will be a beacon of hope for trauma victims, injured civilians, and children facing severe medical conditions. The facility will offer essential treatments to help patients regain independence, improve mobility, and adapt to life's challenges. For many, this centre will mean the difference between hardship and recovery — providing life-changing care close to home, without the burden of traveling long distances.

By supporting the 2025 Hamilton Negev Dinner, you will play a vital role in dedicating this life-changing facility and honouring Victoria Mancinelli's steadfast commitment to advocacy and humanitarian efforts.

Join us as we celebrate an extraordinary leader and help build a stronger future for those in need. Your support will make a lasting impact — both in Israel and within our community. We look forward to seeing you on May 27 at LiUNA Station for this special evening of unity, purpose, and generosity. For more information please contact our office at hamilton@jnf.ca, or 905-527-5516.

Happy Passover from ISRAEL BONDS

In celebration of our holiday of freedom and renewal, we wish you, your families, and the People of Israel a very meaningful and safe Passover.

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Seeking to understand the Jewish immigrant experience

Newcomers to Hamilton face significant challenges to settling in the community

BY **ABIGAIL CUKIER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

OREN, WHO moved to Hamilton from Israel in June 2024, says local community members have been warm and welcoming. But settling in a new country has not been easy.

He, his wife and three children originally rented an Airbnb in Vaughan. When they wanted a more affordable alternative, they found Hamilton.

"We connected with the Kehila Heschel School," he says. "We came here for two weeks and we fell in love with the school and the Dundas area.

"The community here is so warm and welcoming. Also the nature is amazing."

The family came to Canada through the federal government's special measures, which allow Israeli passport holders with temporary resident status to apply for a work permit for up to three years.

While Oren has been working remotely for an Israeli tech company, it took nine months for him and his wife to get their work permits. So it is only now that his wife can start looking for work.

"It was a difficult situation, with three young kids without the ability to work and without any medical coverage," he says.

"It is very expensive to restart your life in a new country, with a car and house and to buy all the furniture, and then to pay for private health insurance.

"The hardest part is that your family is far away. We used to do Shabbat dinner every week with all the family and birthdays and holidays. Suddenly you're alone."

Oren says though he loves Israel, having kids changed his perspective. "Suddenly you have the responsibility for those children and it's hard to feel on a daily basis that fear of your children not being safe. So we decided to make the move and try something different."

Lena, another newcomer from Israel had the same feelings. "The most important reason for moving was the safety of our children," she says. "Right now, Israel is not safe for children, especially my daughter who is getting to the age of going to the army. I don't think it is safe for her, even being in the unit, going on the bus or on the street. You want them to be safe. So that's the main reason, after Oct. 7 that we brought them here."

Lena arrived in Hamilton in November 2024 with her three children. Her husband, Michael, joined a month later with their dog and cat. They are renting a home in Dundas. They have not received their work visa yet. "We are living off of our savings, so it is very difficult," she says.

Michael works in IT and Lena is a nurse. She is studying for the licensing exams so she can work in Canada. Their two younger children are going to the Hamilton Hebrew Academy, which is allowing them to attend without tuition until Michael and Lena are able to work. When they tried to enrol their 15-year-old daughter, in high school at the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, they found out they would have to pay a fee.

The school board did not respond for comment before the HJN deadline, however its website states that children who are temporary residents in the visitor class without a study permit or guardian with a work permit are considered international students. In this case, fees are \$7,425 for one semester.

The family chose to enrol their daughter in the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, which has a slightly lower fee and agreed to refund the payment if they receive their permit in the next few months. "We don't want her to lose the school year. So we paid the money. We didn't have a choice," Lena says.

Despite these hardships, Lena says the family has felt the support of the community.

"We met a lot of Israelis ... It's good to find friends, as we don't have any family here. And we have gone

through similar things."

Cara Bensimon is executive director of Hamilton Jewish Family Services (HJFS). She points out that even after newcomers receive their permits, it can take many months to get a job.

"Of the Israeli newcomer clients we have served, the vast majority are young families with parents who are highly educated professionals with significant work experience," she says, adding that while waiting for their work permit, they face many barriers such as difficulty securing housing or ineligibility for OHIP. "These factors push them into financial vulnerability and hinder their ability to succeed."

To provide as much support as possible, HJFS and JWelcome Home Hamilton, a part of Hamilton Jewish Federation dedicated to supporting newcomers, are in constant contact over what support newcomers need and how each agency can help.

"We're such a small community, so our system is not sophisticated, but it's as simple as picking up the phone and sharing a spreadsheet," says Maggie Norris, who heads up JWelcome Home. "We just all need to be in the know so that people don't fall through the cracks."

One challenge is that helping these newcomers is not a one-size-fits-all journey. "We have so many newcomers with so many different challenges," Norris says.

Bensimon agrees. "Just because they all get the labelled 'newcomers from Israel,' why they came or what they're facing when they come is not the same."

For example, a person who moves to Hamilton because they were displaced from living on a kibbutz near the Israeli border and doesn't have a work permit has different needs than a person who moves here with a position lined up at McMaster University with housing.

Another challenge for the agencies is that many Israeli newcomers don't know about their services. "The concept of an umbrella organization you reach out to for help is new to them," says Norris.

"It was a difficult situation, with three young kids without the ability to work and without any medical coverage."

OREN
Israeli newcomer

"We are living off of our savings, so it is very difficult."

LENA
Israeli newcomer

"Just because they all get labelled 'newcomers from Israel,' why they came or what they're facing when they come is not the same."

CARA BENSIMON
Hamilton Jewish Family Services

"We have so many newcomers with so many different challenges."

MAGGIE NORRIS
JWelcome Home

Others may say they don't need help, Bensimon says. "But the landlord is making them pay a full year of rent up front, which is what some are doing. So they might be OK today but need help in the future. It's not easy to get a start here. There are so many roadblocks along the way."

When newcomers do contact JWelcome Home, they help them with anything from applying for a visa or completing other paperwork, finding housing or school or putting them in touch with a local doctor or dentist. They recently held a speed networking event to connect locals and newcomers.

They also connect newcomers with others who have settled here a few years earlier.

HJFS provides services like financial assistance, referral for employment services and a food bank. It has also recently opened its Giving Room, where Israeli newcomers can find new and gently used household items like furniture or small kitchen equipment.

While HJFS already provides financial assistance to clients through funding from Federation, some generous donors have set up an emergency fund specifically for Israeli newcomers.

"We do cherish our newcomers," Norris says. "We want them to feel included in the community. We want to help them and really care about their well-being. We will support them any way we can to get their feet on the ground."

She says the best way community members can help is by making connections. "Reach out and be an ear. Sometimes all it takes is an invitation for Shabbat dinner. Invite them to community events. The community is vital."

Oren says he feels that connection. "The community is amazing. The local community and also Israelis," he says.

"I had shared some information on the community in an Israeli chat group. Every person who moves to Hamilton, we sit for a coffee. I say 'Let's talk. You're not alone.' So this move created a lot of connections."



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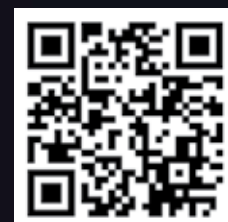


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Your hurt feelings aren't fatal

We have tried to expiate our collective guilt by endorsing real and imagined trauma

BY **ROBERT ISSENMAN**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

FOR THE PAST few years North American culture has been obsessed with feeling bad. Decades of cultivating a feeling culture came to a head with the collective trauma of watching the police choke George Floyd to death. Since then, we have tried to expiate our collective guilt while endorsing both real and imagined trauma experienced by anyone over the last 400 years.

The cultural opinionators dictate that anyone who has been reasonably successful in their life should feel bad because they clearly have gotten where they have by stepping on someone else. (As an aside, this is probably true — in a productive society individuals achieve success by “beating out the competition.”)

Ruminating on the origin of the term “feelings,” it gradually dawned on me that “feelings” play an essential role in the universe of life. Take the lowly paramecium, a lovely one-celled organism that glides through its (gender neutral) universe by “feeling” its way about with tiny hairs called “cilia.” When it encounters something too warm or too acidic, it gets its feelings hurt, it retreats and moves in the opposite direction. Now I don’t know if a paramecium learns from these encounters but almost every organism higher on the evolutionary scale (sorry) learns from painful experiences. In the rat, this is termed aversive conditioning, one of the few truly reliable behavioural experiments.



Dr. Robert Isсенman is an academic pediatric specialist, author and health columnist for the Hamilton Spectator.

Not only do mammals learn from experience, but they also get unpleasant sensations if they are reminded about the negative occurrence. We have come to call this post traumatic stress as if learning the lessons that bad times have to teach us is a negative.

Last year, I experienced my own traumatic episode when I was reprimanded by the associate chief (The cause of the reprimand was my lack of sensitivity during our team Halloween celebration.) Attempting to “get with the times” in a tribute to Ryan Gosling’s role as Ken in the Ken and Barbie movie I had the affront to wear a headband that someone (anonymous of course) “felt” looked like a turban. This issue of “cultural appropriation” (from Ryan Gosling?) was sufficient to warrant a phone call and several email messages.

This came mere weeks after the murder, rape and kidnapping of Israeli civilians which had not been sufficiently concerning to elicit a comment from the leadership during the meetings that followed the event.

In trying to better understand the origins of my lack of sensitivity, I have cast my mind back to my family history. Like most everyone in Canada, my grandparents emigrated to this continent because someone had made them feel bad about where they lived before.

The family emigrated because a great-grandmother had “a bad feeling” about what was coming for the Jewish population of eastern Europe. Grandfather Ruben swam a river to escape being drafted (for 40 years with no prospect of promotion) into the Russian army. Grandmother Clara, as a child, watched a



PHOTO: DREAMSTIME

“The worst atrocities in history have been committed by groups who believe they have an exclusive claim to ‘the right way to think’.”

woman in her refugee group bled to death after having been shot for hurting the feelings of a border officer insulted by a challenge to his authority. My paternal grandfather, John, who worked in steel construction, chased a co-worker with a blow torch. At the end of a steel beam overlooking the job site, his co-worker apologized for hurting my grandfather’s feelings. His aged father, who with his beard and long black robe looked like an easy mark, banged the two young toughs’ heads together to express his feelings about the way they were taunting him.

My father was forced to go to an out-of-town university because of prejudicial religious bias represented in the Jewish student quota typical of university admissions committees at the time. I never heard Bernie express that this act of prejudice had hurt his feelings. His response to this prejudice was “I guess I had to work harder.”

The consequence of this philosophy was that my parents bought into

the admittedly post-colonial Anglo philosophy of exposing kids to challenging experiences. At 10, I was sent to a summer camp to “toughen me up.” My counsellor greeted me with the news that he was studying “Jew engineering” (accounting) no doubt in an attempt to make me feel more welcome. Later that summer, I was chased through the night woods after a campfire by a gang of cabin mates yelling “Get the Jew.”

All of this did more to strengthen my cultural identity than attending a Jewish parochial school for six years. What did I learn from this experience? Life’s not always fair. It’s a fact of life that some people will hate you before they meet you but you can survive that too. As has been said; “It’s a question of “mind over matter — if you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.”

All of this is to say that I too have experienced post-traumatic stress. I am very sensitive when I observe group think, especially when combined with a dose of righteous conviction. From my perspective, largely based on collective memory, the worst atrocities in human history have been committed by individuals and groups who believe they have an exclusive claim to ownership of the “right way to think.” Their beginnings can usually be recognized by the establishment of a “my truth and your consequence” apparatus epitomized by the US Senate’s “Unamerican Activities Committee.”

This approach, adopted by universities everywhere under the rubric of “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion” is now being re-evaluated. It’s worth remembering that the appealing slogan “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” was quickly followed by the invention of the guillotine, a clever device designed to efficiently separate individuals from thoughts judged to be out of tune with prevailing sensibilities.





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YOM HASHOAH

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A candle lighting ceremony with Hamilton's Holocaust survivors and their descendants will be followed by a tribute video presentation

John-Henry Crawford will give a presentation and cello performance accompanied by Nadav Greenhut on piano

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John-Henry Crawford is a winner of top international competitions. He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2023 and has released multiple Billboard-charting albums. Crawford plays a rare Homolka cello smuggled out of Austria by his grandfather, a Holocaust survivor.



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Activities for the entire mishpocha

Live entertainment by Party Crew

LOCATION TBA 12 HOURS IN ADVANCE

PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED

bit.ly/israel77



Taking the oath

It saddens me to see the US-Canadian alliance threatened



Ben Shragge

I RECEIVED notice of my American citizenship interview around the time Donald Trump first threatened to annex Canada. As a Canadian residing in the US, I felt mixed emotions about my situation.

The first emotion was buyer's remorse. I had filed paperwork, paid fees, and sat for interviews so I could live and work in the US. Now it seemed I could have avoided the hassle and become American just by staying in Canada. Why did I bother moving to the US when the US was going to move to me anyway?

Seriously, I had no grand plan to become an American when I arrived in the summer of 2015. I came and stayed for professional and romantic opportunities, not for lack of true patriot love. I was almost 30, single, underpaid, and eager to move forward with my life, even if that meant starting fresh in another country. Had an interview or a date gone differently, I would have happily remained in Canada. But they did not, and I was willing to try my luck elsewhere. Now I have an American family (though my two children are also Canadian through me), so it only made sense to apply for citizenship.

I wouldn't be in the US without NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement that also included a little-known work visa program. The logic behind the TN (Treaty National) visa was that if goods could now easily cross North America's borders, skilled workers should be able to, as well. My occupation loosely fit under one of the professions deemed important back when the treaty was signed in 1992. And so I could apply for many more jobs than the three or so openings in Toronto that I had previously been resigned to chasing. An economy 13 times the size of Canada's opened up to me.

On July 1, 2020, the Trump-brokered United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) came into effect, replacing NAFTA while keeping the TN visa program. That was exactly one month after I married my American wife and

became a permanent resident, in fact and intention, of this country. I'm not about to defend every aspect of free trade and work visas, both of which have their flaws and abuses. Nonetheless, I'm grateful that, over the past decade, I've been able to advance my career, find love, start a family, and build a home because of the opportunity to cross the border between two allied countries. It saddens me that this alliance, so deeply rooted in shared history and values, is now threatened for no good reason.

Trump's 25 per cent tariffs on Canada and Mexico, which would have spelled the end of USMCA and North America as a common market, were scheduled to be implemented on Feb. 4. My citizenship interview was scheduled for Feb. 6. At the last minute, the tariffs were postponed. Despite a possible snowstorm, my interview was not. I passed the civics and — quelle surprise — English exam and was approved for naturalization. I then accepted an impromptu offer to take the Oath of Allegiance that same day.

I was the only Canadian at the ceremony. The officer, a first-generation immigrant herself, said she knew how hard it was to learn a new language, adjust to a different culture, and develop a taste for foreign food. Admittedly, I experienced none of those challenges when moving to the US. (Though there were some cultural challenges, like having to learn the meaning of "copay.") But I do remember times when I felt very much alone, far from friends and family and anyone who cared for me. I no longer feel that way. I have a family of my own in the US. I have a life and a future here.

Though, as of this writing, the US has not annexed Canada, the news cast a pall on my journey to citizenship. Still, though, I was and remain a proud Canadian, I'm now a proud American as well. I pledged to "support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." To me, Canada will never be foreign. And to any right-thinking American, it will never be an enemy, either.

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

Victimhood or agency

Beware the dangers of a victim mentality



Nicki Franek

AUSCHWITZ, 1944. The war was nearing the end, but the Nazis had not yet been defeated. My grandfather, in relatively decent health, was shipped from Auschwitz to the forced labour camp in Schwarzheide.

When Schwarzheide was liberated in 1945 and became a displaced persons camp, my grandfather, a young and bright 23-year-old, made a plan for his future. He applied to Charles University, moved to Prague in 1946, and met my grandmother. Three months later they were married, and by 1947, my father was born. My grandfather, not even two years since staring death in the face, had reclaimed what the Nazis had tried to steal; his family, his life, and his dignity.

My grandfather wasn't alone in his rush to move on and build a new life following the Shoah. Between 1946 and 1948, birth rates in displaced persons camps were among the highest in the world.

One could argue that centuries of persecution have helped the Jewish people hone their ability to overcome adversity through self-agency. But that would ignore the countless Jewish scriptures that preach it. In Exodus, the seminal Jewish story, freedom was a fate chosen by only 20 per cent of the enslaved Jews, who would then go on to receive and accept the Torah.

The birth of Israel in 1948 is a story of personal agency over victimhood, a country created by persecuted Jews who willed it to be, who didn't beg and wait for saviours, but instead, organized, acted, and earned their sovereignty.

History is rife with examples of prosperity following the empowerment at the root of self-agency — even in societies that start as nihilistic aggressors (i.e. post-war Germany and Japan). There are also many historical examples of civilizational decline and destruction, brought on by the social and political embrace of victimhood narratives and "virtuous" but unrealistic aspirations.

At the heart of Marxism — the

philosophy born of Germanic romanticism that spawned socialism, communism and pan-Arabism — is the story of a victim (the proletariat) who can only be redeemed with the complete eradication of the villain (the bourgeoisie), whose demise will shepherd in utopia. When you boil down the ideology to this core theme, the path to destruction is evident. This is a philosophy built on resentment, revenge and fantasy. With its zero-sum framing and detachment from nuanced reality, it is no wonder that Marxism is at the heart of some of the worlds' worst atrocities and failed societies.

Today's progressive ideology increasingly draws from Marxist framing, whose utopian vision makes victimhood a currency.

Under popular social theories like "intersectionality," the more victimized identities you can claim (except Jewish of course), the more sanctified and valued your feelings, opinions and actions are — and the more protected from scrutiny and responsibility. Lacking self-agency, victimhood becomes a justification for expanding state power to correct the perceived injustices of a fundamentally flawed society — one that must be purified and rebalanced. This is a dangerous path to head down, especially in a country with real and complex economic issues that ideology cannot solve, and, especially in our messy, human existence, that will never be wholly free from inequality.

History has proven that the more we foster victimhood, the more victimhood we create.

The Jews who emerged from the Holocaust embraced a lesson their ancestors had demonstrated centuries earlier when they chose to wander the desert for 40 years after crossing the Red Sea: "I can't control the cards I'm dealt, but I can decide how to play them."

In the current world on the cusp of seismic cultural shifts that impact not only Jews, it is more important than ever to realize that whining about a villain will never be as effective as seizing opportunities within our control to shape our own future.

Nicki Franek lives in Toronto with her husband and two children

*Wishing the community
Happy Passover*



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For the love of books

Books and reading have always been important to me



Helaine Ortmann

I LOVE WALKING in my Victorian-era neighbourhood. On most days, before I return home to my street, I circle the full-block site where a beautifully renovated 66-suite condo now stands: once Stinson Street School, the historic landmark built in 1894-1895 that our two sons attended from junior kindergarten through to Grade 5 almost 100 years later.

What never fails to catch my eye (and trigger long ago memories) is the street sign on the east side of the Lofts that reserves a place of honour — a dedicated spot on Mondays from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. — for one of the City's roving Bookmobiles; itself a venerable institution that has served the Hamilton community for decades.

Books and reading have always been important to me: a link to learning, a portal to other worlds, and a connection to fascinating people.

Back in the day when library branches closed for summer vacation, I was happy, at the end of June, to browse the Westdale Library in search of my 20-book quota, the allowable limit to borrow for two whole months; and again contented in late August, when Westdale Secondary School mailed home notices advising us to pick up our textbooks for the coming year: academic materials, yes; but also critical ballast for students like me who were too short to reach the overhead handle grips at the front of the bus on those precarious commutes to and from school. This was a time, for a serious high school student in the 1960s, when print reference books reigned supreme.

Commissioned salespeople visited door-to-door selling encyclopedias (and vacuum cleaners), and, after earnest banter with friendly agents, my parents invested enthusiastically in both: a lightweight canister-style Electrolux, and more importantly, a 20-volume set of World Book (joined by its relatives the World Book Dictionary and annual Year Book); referred to ever after by my father as the "books of knowledge." Over

the years, I treasured these hardcover books, elegantly trimmed with gold and green highlights, now displayed in an antique mahogany bookcase in our living room: a family keepsake, and, a symbol of the value our parents placed on learning, even though it presented them with a financial hardship at that time.

The same feelings stirred, every September, when I queued up at the McMaster bookstore to purchase my semester's worth of scholarship; the heavy pile still straining my back and shoulders as I continued to fight to balance myself on the bus (no appreciable change having happened to my four-foot-something height in the transition from high school to university); this in the days before knapsacks became de rigeur and online learning, the way of our brave new world.

Years later, in the 1980s, my husband and I became parents and then it was our turn to introduce books to our children. We had so much fun playing with those primary coloured rub-a-dub floating bath books, board books and those that were "touch and feel," perfect for baby fingers to manipulate, and safe to gum.

How we kvelled, as the months went on, to wake up to the sounds of the babies responding to the books we tucked into their cribs. How we enjoyed the hours reading to our little boys, establishing what we hoped would become a lifetime habit. And, up until the time they were teenagers, how excited we were on holidays like Chanukah and Passover, and even Valentine's Day, to give them books. To this day, I am drawn to old friends Robert Munsch, Sandra Boynton, Dr. Seuss and the Berenstains when I shop for "new baby" gifts.

As a student and later a working professional, I frequently visited book stores to add to my collection. But circumstances have changed. I no longer have the disposable income I once had; and, during the pandemic, I befriended Libby, the Hamilton Public Library's reading app, to borrow E-books. While I sometimes need to wait weeks to receive my reservation for an especially popular title or new release, nu, what's the big deal? I'm retired.

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

Oh, to sleep!

Things that feel unimportant by day haunt my thoughts at night



Phyllis Shragge

I'VE BEEN in bed for more than two hours. It's now 1:21 a.m. If I fall asleep in the next nine minutes, I'll have six hours of sleep tonight. Not a lot, but I can survive on that.

I try to imagine relaxing on the beach, mesmerized by the sound of the ocean's waves hitting the shore with a staccato yet reassuringly melodic tempo. I picture the sun beating down, caressing me with its rays, enveloping me with the warmth of a cozy blanket. Surely, this image will help me relax and drop off to sleep.

The sun's rays do not warm me like a cozy blanket. Instead, my real blanket is suffocating me. I'm way too hot. I toss the blanket off in a fury and once again check the time. Soon it will be 1:30, the deadline for my anticipated six hours of sleep.

As the relaxing-on-the-beach image bites the dust, I fall into a worrying trap.

I worry about how early today, I couldn't remember the name of a movie I had just seen, nor the name of the very famous actor who starred in it. I tell myself that as a senior, it's normal to forget things. Occasional forgetfulness doesn't mean I'm getting dementia, does it?

I think about a recent woe-is-me conversation with one of my daughters. Hopefully, she is correct in her analysis of my disintegrating brain.

"You've always had a bad memory when it comes to the names of things," my daughter said. "Remember when we used to play trivia games? You sucked, and that was 20, 25 years ago. Nothing has changed."

I guess my memory loss is not new. Maybe I'm functioning normally, at least normally for me.

With this worry more or less resolved, at least for now, I should be able to fall asleep. I wonder what time it is. I glance at my phone.

It's now 2:21 a.m. If I fall asleep in nine minutes, I'll have five hours of sleep

tonight. Oy vey.

I try to imagine relaxing on a swing in a beautiful park. I'm swinging back and forth, admiring a lovely garden with luxurious flowers of all different colours and textures. I find myself immersed in the calmness of my environment. I will be off to dreamland before I know it.

I can't focus on the beautiful garden. I'm bombarded with worries that would seem irrelevant during the daytime but in the middle of the night seem pressing, almost life-altering. I feel overwhelmed by things I should have done, things I shouldn't have done, things I meant to say, things I shouldn't have said, things I planned for that fell through, and things that I didn't plan for, but happened anyway. As I dwell on this, it becomes obvious: it all comes down to one word, regret. I know regret is a useless emotion. Normally I buy that adage, but not in the middle of the night when I'm bombarded with insomnia.

I check the time again.

It's now 3:21 a.m. If I fall asleep in the next nine minutes, I'll have four hours of sleep tonight. Double oy vey.

I try to imagine walking through a forest, lush with huge trees. A babbling brook flows alongside my path. Birds chirp in the distance. The atmosphere is blissful and ever so peaceful. If I focus on this image for long enough, surely, I will relax and fall asleep.

I start thinking about what I'm going to pack for my upcoming trip. I'm a goner now. I will never sleep. Being a hopelessly indecisive packer, I'm always rethinking my choices. Now, even though I'm in bed and not actively putting clothes in a suitcase, I'm in packing hell. Should I pack another sweater? The weather is so unpredictable. Do I need a rain jacket?

I will be up all night. I can't remember the last time I've had such terrible insomnia. I will be a basket case tomorrow. Guaranteed. My alarm rings. It's now 7:30 a.m. I must have fallen asleep.

I tell myself I will go to bed early tonight and fall asleep immediately. I will not wake up in the middle of the night.

Sure.

"You've always had a bad memory when it comes to names and things," my daughter said. "Remember when we used to play trivia games? You sucked ..."



Happy Passover!

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A granddaughter's tribute to her family's journey

This community that has always stood by one another continues to lift each other up in times of need

BY **MICHELLE DALEO**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

FIFTY YEARS AGO, the Hamilton Jewish community opened its arms to the Neizvestny family as they began their new life in Canada. Today, we strive to do the same for families arriving from Israel, displaced in the wake of October 7. The circumstances may be different, but the need — and our response — remains the same. This is what we do. This is who we are. A community that has always stood by one another, lifting each other up in times of need. As you read Michelle's heartfelt account of her grandparents' journey, let it serve as a reminder that the work is never done and what we did then, we continue to do now.

Cara Bensimon, executive director,
Hamilton Jewish Family Services

THIS YEAR marks the 50th anniversary of a pivotal moment in the lives of my grandparents, Jacob and Lena Neizvestny, Holocaust survivors who made the life-changing decision to emigrate to Canada with their daughter, my mother, Ola. On May 25, 1975, they arrived in Canada with a vision of building a better future for themselves and their family. Just two days later, they arrived at the bus station in Hamilton, Ontario, ready to embark on their new life.

Born and raised in the USSR,

my grandparents had already endured the unimaginable during their early years. Having survived the horrors of the Holocaust, they rebuilt their lives in their homeland, but the Soviet regime left them with limited opportunities for personal and religious growth. Their journey to Canada was fueled by the hope that their lives — and the lives of their children — could be better in a new country where freedom and opportunity awaited.

At the time of their arrival, my mother and grandparents were the first immigrants from the former Soviet Union to settle in Hamilton in more than 50 years. They left behind my uncle and aunt, who had just welcomed their first son, and a life that they had worked hard to build. It was not an easy decision, but their commitment to a brighter future for their family propelled them forward.

Upon their arrival, they were supported by the kindness and generosity of the Hamilton Jewish community, which played a pivotal role in helping them settle into their new home. Hamilton Jewish Family Services, under the guidance of Sam Soifer, Carol Krames, Rabbi Morton Green, Rabbi Bernard Baskin, Rabbi Israel Silverman, and the Shapiro, Goldblatt, and Minden families, provided invaluable assistance, offering support as they adjusted to life in a new country.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHELLE DALEO



Above, Lena and Jacob Neizvestny with their daughter Ola at the Black Sea prior to their immigration to Canada.

Left, Nick, Michelle, Nora and Lena Daleo with Michelle's mother, Ola Norton on the one-year anniversary of the Hamas attacks on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. Photo taken in Hamilton on Oct. 7, 2024.

Over the years, my mother and grandparents not only built their lives in Hamilton, but also gave back to the community that embraced them. Their home became a beacon of warmth and kindness, as they sponsored many friends and family members to come to Canada, helping others find the same opportunities they had been fortunate to receive. Their deep commitment to their Jewish identity remained a guiding force throughout their lives, inspiring those around them.

Over the last 50 years, our family has grown, and the legacy of their hard work, resilience, and love has been passed down through generations. Their great-granddaughters now attend The Hamilton Hebrew Academy and Camp Ramah in Canada, continuing the traditions and pride in their Jewish heritage that my grandparents held so dear. It is a testament to their lasting influence that these values continue to shape the future of our family.

This 50th anniversary is both a reason to celebrate my family's arrival in Hamilton and their remarkable story — one marked by struggle, determination, and, above all, an unwavering love for family and community. Their story is a powerful reminder of the transformative power of hope, hard work, and the kindness of a community that can change lives.

As we reflect on their journey, we honour the memory and the enduring impact of their legacy on both our family, and the Jewish community in Hamilton.

- Moische, Eli & Gabe Chaimovitz & families -

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Jewish trustee was a guiding moral force in Hamilton

Principled and passionate, Dr. Harry Paikin served several terms as public board of education chair in the 1970s and 80s

BY CHRIS ERL
REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

HARRY PAIKIN, though not born in Hamilton, was inextricably linked to this city's story. His parents were Jewish refugees from Lithuania living in Stockholm when he was born in 1905. Sweden was just one stop on their long and arduous journey, which brought them to Hamilton in 1909. Not long after arriving in the city, Paikin's father, Abraham, opened a grocery store in their modest home on Bay Street North.

Paikin went to Hess Street School before heading to the Hamilton Central Collegiate Institute at the corner of Stinson and West and to University of Toronto for medical school. During undergrad, he worked at local factories to help pay for his tuition. His time in local shops, as well as his parents' own struggles, gave him a deep appreciation for the challenges facing working people. After graduating in 1930, he returned home and opened a practice on Barton Street East, and married his wife Goldie the following year.

As the Second World War ramped up and the threat of fascism increased, Paikin became increasingly involved with the Hamilton Council of Jewish Organizations (CJO). After Nazi Germany initiated Operation Barbarossa in June of 1941 and the Soviet Union joined the war on the side of the Allies, the CJO spearheaded the city's Aid-to-Russia campaign. Paikin, who was selected to lead the campaign, organized rallies at local theatres and talks from prominent international relations experts who advised Canadians to set aside their distrust of the Soviets to ensure victory over the Nazis.

In 1943, Paikin was elected as public school trustee in Ward 5, carrying 53.5 per cent of the vote. Shortly after being elected, he threw himself into advocacy on all fronts. He headlined a conference recommending schools provide free vitamins to students, and wrote poems in favour of buying war bonds. At the same time, Paikin became one of the city's most prominent communists. In June 1945, he was unanimously selected as the Labor-Progressive Party (LPP — the name for the Communist Party from 1943 to 1959) candidate for MP in Hamilton West. On election night, he earned 7.7 per cent of the vote, drawing enough votes away from incumbent CCF member Robert Thornberry to



PHOTO: THE CUNNINGHAM STUDIO, COURTESY SUSAN ABRAVANEL

Dr. Harry Paikin, during his second tenure as chairman of the Hamilton Board of Education

ensure his defeat. He went on to introduce motions opposing the city's centennial celebrations because of the commercial exploitation of city streets, requesting the Ministry of Education add labour history courses to the curriculum, and seeking approval to purchase a mobile x-ray machine to test students for tuberculosis more efficiently. In 1948, Paikin unsuccessfully sought a \$100 annual pay increase for teachers. That year would bring the 43-year-old doctor a rollercoaster of ups-and-downs. On July 27, his father passed away at his home on Grosvenor Ave. N. Three months later, Paikin and his wife welcomed the birth of their daughter.

Though he remained a progressive firebrand without many friends on the board, a number of acclamations and years of dedication led to Paikin being named chair of the board for 1952 — by all accounts, becoming the highest ranking Jewish Hamiltonian in public office ever.

Every election, Paikin was returned enthusiastically by his constituents, many times by acclamation. When ward boundaries were realigned in 1960, Paikin opted to run in the new Ward 2 where he still lived and practiced medicine. Even when faced with a strong challenge from former board chair George Ross and young Tory-affiliated lawyer Doug Scott, Paikin earned 2,932 votes, topping the polls in his new ward. He repeated this feat over and over again.

The late 1960s brought more bold proposals from Paikin. During the urban renewal craze that leveled much of the downtown core, Paikin initially supported plans by the board to demolish Central Public School and build the new education centre on the site. But, as plans changed, the board moved to the corner of Bay and Main, and the downtown began to experience the effects of renewal, his tone changed. By 1966, he was urging the board be more mindful in its effort to secure land for the new Sir John A. MacDonald Secondary School. "It's not necessary for the school board to get a school at the expense of the poor little fellow who's lived all his life in that area," he told a meeting of the board during an expropriation debate.

Paikin carried on with his advocacy for accessible, universal healthcare. He pushed the board to support water fluoridation and advocate for universal dental care. Maybe it was this dedication for the NDP's favourite cause or maybe it was just a smart bet, but, in 1968, the Hamilton and District Labour Council endorsed the former LPP candidate for the first time in his political career.

As the 1970s approached, Paikin remained alone on the left of the school board. Increasingly marginalized and left to defend his positions alone, Paikin began searching for allies on the board. An opportunity arose in 1970 when the NDP announced they would formally run candidates for municipal office under the party's banner. In late October, Paikin was added to the party's slate alongside a host of other

"Not to the sword, but to the pen
Not to the bomb, but to the microscope
Not to the treasures of Earth and Sea
But to the treasures of Mind and Spirit
Do we dedicate this building?"

DR. HARRY PAIKIN

From his dedicatory poem that was inscribed on the walls of the former Board of Education building on the corner of Bay and Main. A duplicate of Paikin's poem can be found in a showcase in the David Braley Health Sciences Centre.

official NDP trustee candidates.

The entry of the party could not have come at a worse time. The party suffered a massive dent in its credibility after Tommy Douglas opposed the implementation of the War Measures Act during the October Crisis that year. And, locally, all the political energy in the city was directed toward the triumphant re-election effort of Vic Copps, the popular mayor who vehemently opposed partisanship at city hall. Only three NDP-backed trustees were elected, including Paikin, who mused to the Spec that "running on the NDP ticket...cost him 500 votes."

As the longest-serving trustee on the board, Paikin was elevated to the role of chair after the 1970 election. But his status did little to endure him to other board members and, by May of 1971, trustees were getting into shouting matches over basic procedures.

In 1972, Paikin's seatmate, McDonald, resigned with just months to go before the municipal election. The board set up a hiring committee to select his replacement, narrowing a list of candidates down to 13 applicants and making a recommendation to the board. The board promptly rejected the recommendation and, instead, voted on a shortlist of three people: retired nurse Donna Husband, Marjorie Baskin, the wife of the city's well-known Rabbi Baskin, and former candidate Ray Mulholland. In the end, the board settled on Mulholland, which drew opposition from all corners.

In the election three months later, the voters of Ward 2 elected Paikin by a wide margin and handing the second seat to the spurned applicant, Donna Husband, sending Mulholland packing after only a few meetings.

Using the office of school trustee as a platform, Paikin pursued a cornucopia of policies, from opposing the widening of York Boulevard (he said urban renewal advocates: "embrace the philosophy of the bulldozer. All they want to do is bulldoze everything and

I resent it terribly."), teacher layoffs, and the termination of night school programs.

By the 1980s, it seemed like the tide was turning for Paikin. Two easy election victories in 1980 and 1982 for Paikin were paired with a shifting dynamic on the board and a local trend toward liberalization that countered the international shift toward the right. Suddenly, trustees became the last defenders of local schools and public education.

Two successes followed soon after: the board united to oppose extending funding to Catholic schools past Grade 10 (Paikin said schools "should not have any particular ideology incorporated") and finally voted to ban the use of the strap in schools. The board was finally coming around to Paikin's way of viewing education.

On the morning of Friday, Oct. 18, 1985, Paikin suffered a massive heart attack and died in his office, just two weeks short of his 80th birthday.

After his passing, his fellow trustees noted that he was a trailblazer who advanced ideas well before their time. His Ward 2 seatmate, Lillian Vine, said that "When we first introduced junior kindergarten a few years ago, it turned out Harry had talked about the importance of it very early on." The Hamilton Spectator's editorial board summed up his impact on the city with ease: "Hamilton without Harry Paikin is like Hamilton without the Mountain or the Bay." Spec columnist Tami Paikin Nolan wrote:

"Harry Paikin has been called Hamilton's last angry young man...He was a socialist without the dogma, an avowed defender of the rights and dignity of the working man...He was a crusader whose fervour never waned. He believed in the discipline of thought. But his capacity for feeling knew no bounds."

Paikin was a man of principle and passion. Over 41 years, he advanced causes few would have dared to even consider for fear of ruining their political careers. He took up the cause of women when there were few women in politics, the cause of working people when so many advocates for labour and workers were systematically excluded from local politics, the cause of children with differing needs, from differing backgrounds, and with differing life experiences.

He had opposition in the community and on the board, but he persisted through it all, dedicating his life to making this city a little better, one day at a time. Not bad for an angry young downtown socialist.

Chris Erl is a current Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) postdoctoral fellow in the department of politics and public administration at Toronto Metropolitan University.

HAMILTON JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES

Uncork the fun fundraiser



PHOTO: ADRIAN VECCHIO

Hamilton Jewish Family Services' annual wine fundraiser event was a vibrant evening filled with laughter, connection, and community spirit. Guests enjoyed delicious food, Kosher wines, and a carnival-themed atmosphere in support of the essential work we do to uplift and support those in need. Thank you to everyone who made this night so special

BBYO

A safe space for Jewish teens



PHOTO: COURTESY BBYO

Shani Rabizanovich (second from the right) at BBYO's international convention with other Canadian teens from across Ontario.

SHANI RABIZANOVICH

THE POPULATION of the Jewish people is exceptionally small, especially in the community in which I live. Whenever I get the chance to embrace my Jewish identity and meet other Jewish teens, I feel so fortunate to be given that opportunity.

BBYO is an organization for Jewish teens that expands all across the world. Currently, I am a member of Hamilton's BBYO chapter, serving my second term as the vice president of membership. As a very active, enthusiastic member of BBYO, I take it upon myself to participate in any and all events I can to engage with other Jewish teens.

In February 4,000 Jewish teens from around the world celebrated Shabbat and our Jewish identity at the International BBYO Convention happening in Denver, Colorado, where we heard from inspiring speakers, including influencers, activists, and professionals.

The weekend opened my eyes to how tight-knit and supportive the Jewish community is, and how meaningful and inspirational a weekend full of Jewish pride can be. It allowed me the chance to meet and connect with Jews I would have

never met otherwise, some of which I formed a close bond with and continue to communicate with even after returning to Canada.

Living as a Jewish teen in the diaspora is a daily challenge many experience — one which I have felt significantly in recent years. Since Oct. 7, antisemitism in schools has become increasingly common, and has become a frequent occurrence in my life. These daily struggles of living as a Jewish teen have intensified my need for Jewish interaction and connection, which is what BBYO has provided me. Through BBYO, I am able to not only connect with Jewish teens in my community and around the world, but I am exposed to a safe space where I can openly practice Judaism, openly talk about antisemitism with people who share my experiences, and openly find joy in celebrating my identity.

My experience at BBYO's international convention changed my life and my views on what BBYO and Jewish connection truly is. It taught me lessons I cherish profoundly, allowed me to make friendships I value deeply, and will continue to be a highlight of my Jewish teenage experience.

HILLEL McMASTER

Finding the ethos of empowerment



PHOTO: COURTESY McMASTER HILLEL

Minister Stephen Lecce and John Demik visit Hillel McMaster to share their story of allyship.

RABBI BEN SHEFTER

THE SEDER is a ritual that dates back to the Exodus and was fundamental in shaping the Jewish people. Dr. Erica Brown, in *The Torah of Leadership*, writes that the Exodus experience can be seen as a struggle between two models of leadership: the diminisher and the multiplier.

Pharaoh exemplifies the diminisher — He forces people into uniformity, making them feel powerless without a leader to champion their cause. In contrast, God presents a model of a multiplier, seeking to empower individuals to step up and grow into the people they are meant to be. By fostering these intimate gatherings, the Seder becomes a space where each participant is empowered to take an active role, strengthening their identity and connection to the Jewish people.

At Hillel McMaster, this ethos of empowerment has fueled remarkable growth. Participation has surged from

310 students last year to more than 550 this year. This expansion is driven by the flourishing of many sub-communities, that provide students with spaces to lead, express their multifaceted identities, and build lasting connections. Whether through Jewski (Jews from the former USSR), Rainbow Jews (LGBTQ2S+ students), Grad and Young Professionals, Sephardi/Mizrahi, Greek life, advocacy initiatives, or other micro-communities, students are growing into the Jewish leaders of tomorrow.

As you gather around the Seder table this year, take a moment to reflect: When have you acted as a multiplier, empowering others to speak up, lead, or find their voice? When have you been the beneficiary of someone who encouraged you to stand for what you believe in? May we embody the message of Passover — moving from oppression to freedom, war to peace. And may all the hostages return home soon.

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM

Celebrating 175 years with music

CANTOR PAULA BARUCH

AS OF 2025, our congregation is celebrating its 175th anniversary, marking a significant milestone in its long-standing history. Throughout its history, Temple Anshe Sholom has been a welcoming and inclusive community, offering engaging and inclusive Jewish learning programs, worship services, and various community events. The congregation continues to serve as a cornerstone of Jewish life in Hamilton, fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual growth among its members.

As a cantor, I have the profound privilege of bringing music into our congregation's spiritual life. Music has the power to uplift, to inspire, and to unite us in times of joy and in times of challenge. It is with this spirit that I invite you to join us for our 175th Celebration Concert, a special fundraiser dedicated to supporting our community and its most vital needs.

On Thursday, May 8 our temple will transform into a haven of harmony as we gather for an evening of soul-stirring melodies. This concert will feature a diverse selection of music, from traditional Jewish liturgical pieces to contemporary



PHOTO: COURTESY TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM

Rabbi Bernard Baskin (second from left) at the 1952 ground breaking ceremony of Temple Anshe Sholom.

and inspirational works, all performed by talented musicians from our community.

Our belief that tradition and creative innovation can coexist and thrive together like the houses of Shammai and Hillel is something we have learned through years of experience. Music can inspire us to create new pathways to ensure that Jewish life flourishes in our community for generations to come.

As the 175th anniversary celebrations continue this year, Temple Anshe Sholom remains committed to honouring its rich heritage while looking forward to a vibrant future.

Good news for HHA students



PHOTO: ODED LEVY

Grade eight students gathered around the displays at HHA's 2025 STEM night.

RABBI YAACOV MOREL

THE HHA is pleased to announce that an anonymous donor has provided a significant grant to elevate the school's coding, robotics, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education.

This transformative donation will make it possible for students to compete in national STEM leagues such as First Lego League (FLL), and explore real-world applications of AI, automation, and problem-solving. This investment further strengthens HHA's commitment to mathematical excellence and ensures students are well-prepared for the technology-driven world of tomorrow.

Over the past year, HHA's math working group adopted "My Math Path," a program based on Singapore Math, a globally recognized system that emphasizes deep conceptual understanding and critical thinking. Singapore Math uses hands-on materials to build foundational knowledge, transitioning to visual models to illustrate abstract concepts, and applying

learned skills through number operations and algebraic reasoning. This structured, progressive approach has propelled Singapore to the top of international math rankings and equips HHA students with the problem-solving mindset necessary for success in higher education and beyond. The enhanced curriculum aligns with the Ontario Ministry of Education's vision for future-ready learning, which emphasizes critical thinking, data analysis, and mathematical reasoning.

This generous donation marks a pivotal moment for HHA, enabling the school to strengthen its math, STEM, and robotics programs in a way that will benefit students for years to come. With Singapore Math, expanded STEM initiatives, and a focus on robotics and coding, HHA continues to pave the way for academic excellence, innovation, and leadership. As the school embraces this exciting new chapter, it remains committed to empowering students with the skills, confidence, and knowledge to excel in a rapidly evolving world.

Torah learning at its best

RABBI DANIEL GREEN

TORAH LEARNING isn't just about studying texts, it's about engaging in a conversation that challenges us, reveals deep truths, and helps us navigate our own lives. Few classes capture this approach better than The Genesis of Relationships, led by Rabbi Jonathan Riaboy. Held on Thursday evenings, the class examines the weekly Torah portion through personalities and relationships, uncovering the emotional and psychological depth of biblical figures. The class fosters an interactive approach, encouraging participants to explore patterns that reveal new dimensions of the text.

Riaboy's background in social work shapes how he brings biblical figures to life, in that he presents them as complex individuals who face challenges, make decisions, and navigate relationships. His understanding of human behavior and relationships provides a fresh lens for engaging with Torah, making its narratives feel relevant and personally meaningful.

Riaboy and his wife, Rachel, are the

co-directors of the Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus (JLIC) at McMaster University, a program of the Orthodox Union in partnership with Hillel. Through JLIC, they create an environment where university students explore Torah and Judaism in a way that is intellectually rigorous and personally relevant, while also providing mentorship and community.

Beyond his local impact, Riaboy founded The Parsha Lab, a WhatsApp-based discussion group where participants worldwide engage in discussion, critical thinking, and fresh perspectives on the weekly Torah portion. The group fosters an open, collaborative approach to exploring the text, encouraging members to share insights that challenge and enrich one another's understanding.

The Genesis of Relationships is part of Adas Israel's commitment to dynamic and meaningful adult education.

We invite the entire community to join this inspiring conversation. For more information on this course and other learning opportunities at Adas Israel, visit adasisrael.ca.

Normal Aging vs Dementia

Are you concerned about memory or behavioral changes in yourself or a loved one? Recognizing the difference between normal aging and dementia is crucial for early intervention and managing symptoms. Early diagnosis can open doors to treatments and strategies to improve quality of life.

Presentation by Dr. Atal Sunny Luthra
May 7, 2025 at 7 p.m. | Ancaster Memorial Arts Center, Voortman Studio Theatre

Dr. Luthra is the medical director of the program for older adults at Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, and a research scientist with the research institute for aging, Schlegel, University of Waterloo. His clinical and research focus is on developing safe pharmacological and affordable non-pharmacological treatment interventions for behaviours in moderate to advanced dementia.

This talk honors the memory of Michael Levine, who endured a relentless journey of young-onset Alzheimer's and Vascular Dementia. Space is limited. First come, first serve. Register for free at: bit.ly/aging-vs-dementia



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KEHILA HESCHEL

Everyday moments at Kehila

LISHAI PEEL AND KEHILA STUDENTS

AT KEHILA, we learn not just from books but from each other. We practise kindness every day. One way we do this is by taking care of the kindergarten students during recess. Every day at our school brings a new surprise. We love exploring nature, whether it's hiking in eco class, or learning about pigments in leaves, or planting and harvesting vegetables from our garden, which we donate to the Jewish food bank. We each have something special we love: Miss Ellie enjoys discovering colors in nature; Miss Sophia loves gardening; and Miss Sadie loves to experience nature through drawings and learning tree names.

One of our favorite parts of the week is Kabbalat Shabbat, when we take turns being the chazanit, drinking grape juice, and enjoying special Friday treats like Challah and Oreos. We also love celebrating holidays together. Purim and Tu B'Shvat are our favorites! This year, Sadie dressed up as Queen Esther, and Ellie loved the Purim carnival, especially the fun stations like face painting, guessing how many chocolates are in a jar, and bracelet making. We're also excited to welcome Yonatan, a new classmate from Israel, who is nine years old. Kehila is a place where we learn and have fun together!

Young journalists

We invited our students to write our article, and they were excited to be young journalists. Providing young people with the opportunity to express themselves is at the heart of how we teach at Kehila.

Prizmah, the Centre for Jewish Day Schools, recently released a report that showed 81 per cent of day school alumni say their Jewish identity is very



PHOTO: COURTESY KEHILA HESCHEL

Kehila students Sadie, Ellie and Sophia are learning the wonder of the natural world.

important to them, compared to just 35 per cent of those who did not attend. This finding underscores the vital role Jewish education plays in shaping a strong sense of identity and connection to heritage.

But the impact of Jewish day schools extends beyond individual students — these schools enrich family culture, deepen Jewish literacy, and help cultivate the future leadership of our community. Investing in Jewish education fosters lifelong engagement and strengthens the broader Jewish world.

Kehila is growing and evolving to meet the needs of our students and families. Our aftercare program is expanding to include STEM, music, and sports. Our integrative curriculum offers students the opportunity to learn in three different languages starting at JK in — French as well as Hebrew — while exploring a new middah (Jewish value) each month.

Every holiday we observe, and every lesson we teach, is rooted in a fundamental question: What kind of individuals do we want to raise, and what kind of world do we want to help create? You can see the answer in the everyday moments at Kehila, the way our students explore, learn, and celebrate together.

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

Programs for all age groups



PHOTO: DORA-ANN COHEN ELLISON

Skaters gather at the snack table during the Shabbat family skate in Churchill Park.

DORA-ANN COHEN ELLISON

MORE THAN a school, Temple Anshe Sholom Religious School is a gathering place for families to make lasting connections! Our Jewish Learning Program reinforces connections to one another and to our community.

This winter, our kindergarten to Grade 10 students explored the values of responsibility and tzedakah as we learned about Hamilton Jewish Family Services (HJFS), Hamilton Jewish Federation and JNF. Our teens participated in a successful Tu B'Shevat telethon, raising more than \$1000 for JNF projects in Israel. Students explored the value of gratitude, in connection to Purim. When we reflect on all we are grateful for, we also take time to notice how we can help others with the blessings we are given. Students created matanot l'evyonim bags of snacks, water, socks and toiletries, to keep in their cars, ready to give out when they see an individual in need. This spring, students will continue to explore positive impacts on our community, as younger students prepare a vegetable garden and our older

students budget and grocery shop, all in support of Carol's Cupboard at HJFS. We are also teaming up with BBYO for JServe, a day of volunteering in our community. Additionally, we have made it a priority to connect families more frequently, in a time where connection to and support within Jewish spaces is so needed and appreciated. This winter, we gathered for two Shabbat family skates on the Churchill rink, and shared a Purim meal together before our lively "Wicked" Purim Shpiel. On April 4, our K-3 students led our Kabbalat Shabbat prayers, followed by a family pot-luck dinner. On May 3, don't miss "Trivia Night For All!" with competitive trivia for the adults, JR Trivia for youth ages eight to 12 and babysitting for ages four to seven. We wrap up our year with family bowling in June.

If you have a child entering JK through Grade 12, we invite you to join our Jewish Learning Program in September 2025. New student registration is being accepted now at anshesholom.ca. To join our family programs or for more information please email Dora-Ann Cohen Ellison, at dacellison@anshesholom.ca.

It starts at the Seder table. But it doesn't end there.



Canadian.
Jewish.
Advocacy.

This year as we retell the Passover story of our Exodus from slavery in Egypt to freedom in Eretz Yisrael, we are reminded that we remember the past to protect our people's present — and our future. The younger guests at our Seder table — our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews — will be the leaders of tomorrow. They will carry on our traditions and will lead the fight against antisemitism, proud of their Jewish heritage. It's our responsibility to educate them about how to do it. Thankfully, there is something we can all do to engage leaders in all walks of life to ensure the safety and vibrancy of our community.

Sign up at cija.ca to get involved



BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE

If you are reading this, you are completely free



RABBI BENI WAJNBERG

THERE IS a four-letter word that we, the Jewish community, seem to have forgotten at times, or better, especially

in these times. This four-letter word is, however, never truly forgotten. And, at all times, it is precisely what we need. It is also, lo and behold, free and can be abundant.

Before we get to this word, I want to acknowledge all of the feelings that we have been holding on to for over a year and a half.

We feel scared, we feel hurt. We feel belittled, diminished, and insignificant. We feel threatened and we feel persecuted. We open the newspaper, we connect to social media, and all that we see validates those very emotions.

I want to invite you to stop for a moment. Literally, stop for a second, I will wait. I mean it! Stop and take a deep breath of air. You see the air that comes into your lungs and fuels your body? You still have it. But what you have is even more important than breath. For breath is common to all living things, but we human beings have something more important.

Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who went through hell during the Shoah, observed what our people went through — what he was going through — and made a remarkable observation. We are always free — not in our bodies perhaps, but our minds are always free to search for meaning, for purpose.

No one can ever steal that from us — those were his observations in such horrendous circumstances, in the direst of all straits. He saw people comforting one another, letting go of their comfort for another prisoner. We are, Frankl noted, free to find meaning and purpose. The freedom to have a meaning, a purpose.

Friends, if you are reading this, if you are breathing and if you are a human being (the likelihood of all of these being true is high!), you are completely free. Free to search for meaning, free to will the life that you wish to live.

We have been traumatized, individually and collectively.

And we are re-traumatizing ourselves every time that we invite those same feelings back into our minds. To be clear — we have good reason to feel all of those hard emotions. They are real. But just as real is our capacity to find purpose and meaning, not only in opposition, in defense, in response to news cycles. We cannot control our neighbours and their actions, but we have absolute control over our reaction.

We are in the season in which we remember leaving Egypt.

Mitzrayim in Hebrew, meaning a place of narrowness. And we are to see ourselves as if we had been slaves. We are, to some degree. Egypt is now. Here. Not in a place, but in our hearts. And the goal is to leave Egypt.

It is time, my holy friends, to let the Pharaoh of fear and trauma lose their strength. Indeed, that would be a great way to honour what our people has gone through: proving that we are resilient.

Ah, I almost forgot. The powerful four-letter word. The word is hope. Do you know when a little bit of grass dares to grow in the midst of cement? That's hope. That's you and I.

That is a future that we can believe in. Chag Sameach!

SHALOM VILLAGE

Shalom Village selected to participate in provincial pilot project

MARIANNE KLEIN

AS WE GATHER to celebrate Passover, a time of reflection and renewal, I am reminded of the enduring strength and unity of our community. At Shalom Village, we are deeply committed to honoring these values by continually enhancing the care and support we provide to our residents and clients.

In alignment with our dedication to innovation and excellence, I am thrilled to announce that Shalom Village has been selected to participate in Ontario's Long-Term Care Homes Cultural Pilot Project. This initiative, launched by the Ministry of Long-Term Care, aims to address the unique needs of residents by improving access to culturally, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically appropriate care.

The pilot project seeks to evaluate how modifications to long-term care waitlist prioritization can better serve communities like ours. By allowing placement coordinators to prioritize applicants whose cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds align with those of the designated homes, the program ensures that residents receive care that resonates with their personal identities and traditions. This approach not only enhances the quality of life for our residents but also preserves the rich cultural fabric that defines Shalom Village.

Our inclusion in this pilot project is a testament to Shalom Village's longstanding commitment to providing culturally sensitive care. We recognize the profound impact that familiar customs, languages, and traditions have on the well-being of our residents. Participation in this initiative allows us to further this mission,



PHOTO: COURTESY SHALOM VILLAGE

Shalom Village staff are committed to making moments that matter.

ensuring that our community remains a place where everyone feels at home.

In addition to this exciting development, I am pleased to share that the Shalom Village Foundation will be launching a new Summer Fundraising Event. This family-friendly outdoor gathering is scheduled for June 22, coinciding with Senior's Month. It promises to be a day filled with joy, connection, and celebration of our vibrant community. Please keep an eye on your inbox for more details and your personal invitation.

As we embrace the spirit of Passover, let us also look forward to these new opportunities for growth and togetherness. Your unwavering support and involvement are what make Shalom Village a true embodiment of community and care.

Wishing you and your loved ones a joyous and meaningful Passover.



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IT TAKES TWO

Uncovering the Jewish roots of tango

Argentine tango has long captivated the Jewish imagination with its deep cultural and historical ties

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

ONCE AGAIN, I find myself in wallflower mode at a tango milonga — a social dance gathering where partners move in close embrace to the rhythms of Argentine tango. As I wait for a leader to meet my gaze with a *cabaceo* — the subtle invitation exchanged through eye contact and a nod — I scan the room, watching the predominantly Russian-speaking dancers pair up, part, and find new partners. Seeking a sense of connection, I find myself wondering how many of them might be Jewish?

Tango is one of the most demanding dance forms to master. It's humbling and hard on the ego, but it's also profoundly fulfilling, and the closest I've ever come to pure bliss. Perhaps that's why, for the past nine years, I've been drawn to fellow Jewish tango enthusiasts, eager to understand why this dance speaks so deeply to my Jewish soul.

That was the impetus of my reaching out to Meredith Klein during the COVID-19 pandemic. The executive director of the Philadelphia Argentine Tango School had given a presentation in an online webinar I had stumbled upon about her encounters with Jewish Argentinian tango dancers in Buenos Aires. Intrigued, I reached out to her for an interview. We spoke over Zoom in August 2020, where Klein graciously shared her tango journey with me.

Her introduction to Argentine tango came in 1997 while studying music theory at Amherst College, igniting a passion that led her to spend several years honing her skills in studios and festivals across the United States. In 2005, she finally set off on her long-awaited journey to Buenos Aires — just weeks after a devastating nightclub fire claimed 200 lives. With tango venues temporarily closed pending city inspections, Klein feared her dream of dancing in Buenos Aires might slip away during her brief three-week stay. However, the shutdown launched an array of underground and outdoor tango events that brought people together outside their comfort zones and opened the doors to rapid and profound relationship-building.

"A lot of the dancers I met that night were Jewish," she told me, "When my ancestors fled Lithuania, they could have just as easily ended up in Buenos Aires instead of the United States."

Klein's ancestors were part of a massive wave of Eastern European Jewish migration between 1881 and 1914, fleeing persecution and economic hardship in Russian-controlled territories. During this period, two million Jews sought refuge in the United States, while approximately

300,000 made new lives in Canada, South Africa, South America and Palestine. Those who disembarked along the Río de la Plata — the river separating Argentina and Uruguay — settled in the working-class slums of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, alongside other European immigrants, formerly enslaved Africans, and Argentina's labouring poor.

In the brothels and nightclubs of these working-class neighbourhoods, the tango was born — a fusion of African, European and New World influences, carried by the melancholic strains of the violin and the *bandoneón*, a German-imported, accordion-like instrument. At times, it was danced by pairs of men; at others, by prostitutes and their companions. Among those who found themselves entangled in this world were immigrant Jewish women, many of whom had been coerced into working in legalized brothels. At the same time, a significant number of the musicians shaping the sound of early tango were Jewish, weaving their own musical influences into its evolution.

Scholars have long observed the striking similarities between klezmer and tango, highlighting their shared use of expressive ornamentation, intricate rhythms, and vocal cadences — some reminiscent of cantorial melodies — all of which captured the struggles, sorrows and fleeting joys of everyday life.

The connections Meredith Klein forged on that first, unforgettable night in Buenos Aires two decades ago remain just as strong today — none more so than her partnership with Andres Amarilla, her former dance partner, collaborator and fellow teacher.

Beyond her own journey, Klein is deeply committed to fostering a thriving, inclusive tango community. "We have students who start tango in their late 70s or even 80s without a movement background and are having some success," she said. "It's just such a remarkable dance form that if you can manage to keep walking, you know then (that) you can keep dancing this dance forever."

There's no doubt that Toronto tango devotee Ilona Milonguera (a pseudonym) is dedicated to dancing tango for life. The Russian-born Jewish dancer has made a notable contribution to the community as the founder of Toronto Tango Junkies, a Facebook group that has become an indispensable resource for tango dancers throughout Southern Ontario. A dynamic, pixie-like force of nature, Ilona is a well-known presence at Toronto milongas, always taking the time to warmly welcome both seasoned dancers and newcomers alike.

Ilona discovered tango in September 2001. At her very first milonga, she was struck by the sight of a community coming together to celebrate a man's 93rd birthday. "I remember thinking, wow, you can dance tango and be part of a community like this even at 93."

The next day was Sept. 11. As the



PHOTO: COURTESY MONTELEONE TANGO



PHOTO: COURTESY ILONA MILONGUERA

Above, Meredith Klein, executive director of Philadelphia Argentine Tango School and her partner, Ignacia Ondartz.

Left, Toronto-based tango dancer Ilona Milonguera enjoys a blissful moment at a milonga.

musician, while her father was a gifted writer and accomplished musician. Her parents met while playing in an orchestra in Siberia, where Ilona was born. At this point in her story, she reaches for a photograph — her father holding an accordion, her uncle with his violin.

"My father got his first accordion when he was 16," she says. Inside the case, was a small picture of a dancing couple. Above them, a single word: Tango.

No discussion of the Jewish influences on tango would be complete without mentioning Polish tango — a genre of sentimental songs composed between 1918 and 1939 by classically trained Polish musicians, many of them Jewish. The rebirth of the Polish state in 1918, after 123 years of partitions and conflict, created a fertile ground for the emergence of tango. Infused with klezmer influences that set it apart from the traditional rhythms of Argentine tango. Polish tango developed a distinct style.

History took a devastating turn when Hitler's troops invaded Poland in 1939, and we know how the story ends.

Polish Jewish violinist Artur Gold, was forced to perform Polish tangos for his captors, dressed as a clown, before his own murder. Renowned tango composer Henryk Gold and a few others saw the danger early and escaped, continuing their musical careers in Israel, New York and Hollywood. But for most, the story of interwar Polish tango ended in unimaginable horror.

They say you don't find tango — tango finds you. While fate may have introduced me to it, its Jewish influences are what keep drawing me in, again and again. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

"When my ancestors fled Lithuania, they could have just as easily ended up in Buenos Aires instead of the United States."

MEREDITH KLEIN
Executive director,
Philadelphia
Argentine Tango
School

world reeled, one thought kept running through her mind: If everything is falling apart, maybe I just need to dance more.

And dance she did. Determined to master the art, Ilona sought out every tango instructor she could find in Toronto, immersing herself in lessons. In 2004, she made her first trip to Argentina, and since then, she has studied with 150 tango teachers across the globe, and taught the dance in six countries.

Ilona's paternal grandparents were Hungarian Jews who moved to Belarus in the early 1930s for economic reasons. In 1938, her grandfather was arrested as an enemy of the state and sent to Siberia, never to be heard from again. Her grandmother, father and uncle were the only Jewish family in their town to survive the war, protected by their ability to pass as Hungarians.

Like many Russian Jews of her generation, Ilona didn't learn about her Jewish heritage until she moved to Canada at the age of 11. "It wasn't something that we talked about in Russia because it was dangerous for children to know such things," she says.

Ilona likes to say that her tango journey preceded her birth. Her mother was both a dancer and a



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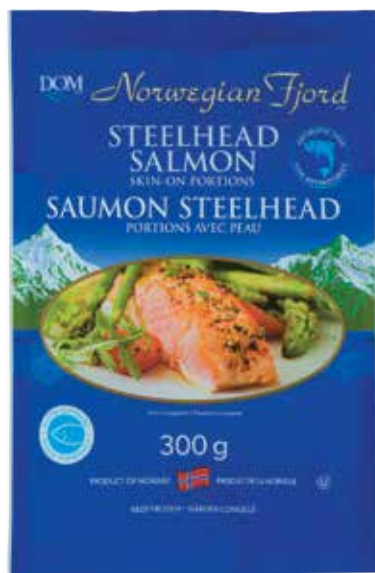
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