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Hamilton
Jewish

News

SEPTEMBER 2026 | TISHREI 5787

The voice of Jewish Hamilton

DOCUMENTING THE REMNANTS OF JEWISH LIFE

HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION A new chapter under CEO Marion Zeller

Veteran communications leader brings experience, vision and a commitment to the Hamilton Jewish community

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

MARION ZELLER has built a career helping organizations connect with people, but her newest role is deeply personal. The South African-born marketing and communications executive, who immigrated to Canada with her family in 2022, officially became CEO of the Hamilton Jewish Federation in August after serving as executive director of Windsor's Jewish Federation and Community Centre. Zeller's rise to leading two Jewish federations in just a few years is an unusual journey: while she came to Canada from the corporate world rather than Jewish communal leadership, her Jewish roots run deep. Raised in a traditionally Orthodox home in South Africa, she joined Windsor's federation as a volunteer board member before being encouraged to take on the executive director role — a path that has now brought her to Hamilton, where she hopes to help the community navigate an increasingly complex moment for Jewish life.

A NEW CHAPTER CONTINUES P4

“I really want to focus on Jewish pride, identity and resilience. We should be proud of who we are.”

MARION ZELLER, FEDERATION CEO



PHOTO: DAVID KAUFMAN

The restored interior of Poland's 18th-century Łancut Synagogue with its four-pillar bimah and richly decorated walls.

Jewish life and loss

Canadian photographer David Kaufman's exploration of vanished worlds.

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Where community begins
**Building community
through connection
and shared purpose**



Marion
Zeller
CEO
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

RECENTLY I have been asking myself how we make our Jewish community strong, how we build our resilience and sense of community in a time when there is a lot of noise to cut through. This led me to reflect on how my upbringing framed my view of community.

A strong Jewish community is built when people come together with a shared commitment to support and uplift one another. Community is not simply something we belong to—it is something we actively create.

Growing up in South Africa I was part of the Victory Park Hebrew Congregation. Some of my earliest memories are being part of children’s service at shul, saying morning prayers together and playing alongside all the other children. As the years progressed, I went from attending children’s service to running it—a rite of passage for all the children. I then moved onto helping prepare the kiddushim we had on Shabbat and Yom Tov, assisting with the annual fundraisers and events, and for about six years took on the responsibility of designing our High Holidays annual magazine.

My family and I were at every Friday night, Saturday, Yom Tov and every community celebration that the shul hosted. The shul was not only like a second home to me, but the people became my community. We had a meal roster for when people were ill, had babies, and passed away; we carpooled with one another to events, shared in each other simchas. Being part of the community was never questioned; it was just the way of life for us. Looking back, I know all of this framed my desire to one day become a Jewish professional.

This is what matters to me — community. I believe that being part of our community creates the foundation off which we can build relationships and a strong foundation for our lives. The strength of our community has always come from its people. By being active participants, we create lasting friendships, support one another through life’s milestones and challenges, and help ensure that our traditions and values remain vibrant. By volunteering our time, sharing our talents, and contributing our ideas, we strengthen the bonds that connect us and build a foundation for the future.

One of the things I appreciate about Jewish communal life is that no two people experience it in exactly the same way. Each individual brings their own background, traditions, perspectives, and life experiences, and it is this diversity that enriches our collective story. When we create spaces where people feel welcome to share their journeys, ask questions, and engage authentically, we foster a deeper understanding of one another and strengthen the sense of belonging that is essential to a thriving community.

As I begin this journey in Hamilton, I am excited to meet members of our community, listen to your stories, and learn about the experiences and perspectives that make our community unique. And in turn, I look forward to sharing my stories and perspectives. I look forward to working together to strengthen the connections between us, support one another, and create opportunities for meaningful engagement. By sharing our ideas, talents, and commitment to one another, we can continue to grow a community that is strong, resilient, and energized for the future. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of this journey and look forward to meeting you, working alongside you, and helping strengthen our community.

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

JCC Maccabi Games 2026 Opening Ceremony



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Team Argentina makes a dramatic entrance at the Toronto 2026 JCC Maccabi Games opening ceremony, that took place at Hamilton’s TD Coliseum on Aug. 3, 2026. More than 2,000 Jewish teen athletes from 75 communities across North America, South America, Europe, and Israel competed in the Games. The Olympic-style event is the world’s largest gathering of Jewish teens, fostering athletic excellence, Jewish pride, and lifelong connections.

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Antizionism is Antisemitism



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Rob Roberts & Dave Gordon
Media Bias and Antisemitism



December 6th, 2-4pm
Kile B. Jones
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“We’ve had a really rough three years since October 7. We’ve taken so much grief and so much pain, but what I really want to focus on now is building Jewish pride, identity and resilience”

MARION ZELLER, FEDERATION CEO

A new chapter at Federation

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

FOR ZELLER, the move is both professional and personal. She and her husband, Stuart, have recently relocated to Hamilton with their two children, ages 11 and 13, and say they are excited to become active members of a larger Jewish community with opportunities for families at every stage of life. While grateful for the warmth and support they found in Windsor after arriving in Canada, the Zellers see Hamilton as a place where they can put down roots, build lasting relationships and fully immerse themselves in Jewish communal life.

Before setting new priorities, Zeller says her first task will be listening. Having arrived in Hamilton only recently, she plans to spend her first months meeting with community members, organizational leaders, donors and volunteers to better understand both the community’s strengths and the challenges it faces. She believes meaningful leadership begins with understanding what matters most to the people she serves.

“I really believe in relationship building,” she said. “I don’t want transactional relationships. I want people to get to know me, and I want to get to know them.”

At a time when Jewish communities across North America continue to grapple with rising antisemitism and the aftermath of Oct. 7, 2023, Zeller believes federations have an important role to play in supporting and strengthening Jewish life. While she sees combating antisemitism as an important priority, she is equally passionate about fostering Jewish pride, identity and resilience.

Hamilton Jewish Federation’s new CEO Marion Zeller



PHOTO: JAMES WILLIS PHOTOGRAPHY

“Social media is so draining. It can really kill your spirit.”

MARION ZELLER

“We’ve had a really rough three years since Oct. 7. We’ve taken so much grief and so much pain,” she said. “I really want to focus on Jewish pride, identity and resilience. We should be proud of who we are.”

Building that sense of connection means helping community members navigate the emotional toll of the current climate while deepening their understanding of Jewish history, culture and shared identity, said Zeller. She worries that social media, with its constant stream of conflict, outrage and misinformation, can leave people feeling anxious, overwhelmed and disconnected from one another.

“Social media is so draining,” she said. “It can really kill your spirit.”

Resilience, she says, is not only about responding to external challenges, but also about helping people develop the confidence and emotional strength to move through them. She hopes to create opportunities for conversations, educational initiatives and community programming that

help people reconnect with a sense of pride, purpose and optimism.

Education, Zeller believes, is at the heart of building a confident and resilient Jewish community. She says that having a strong understanding of Jewish history, identity and contemporary issues allows people to participate in difficult conversations rather than avoid them.

Too often, she says, communities retreat from challenging discussions because they feel they do not have the knowledge or tools to engage. By strengthening education and encouraging informed dialogue, Zeller believes people can approach differences with greater confidence, respect and openness—even when they disagree.

Asked about the wide range of views that exist within the Jewish community on Israel and Zionism, Zeller emphasized the importance of education and respectful conversation. In an era of heightened polarization, she says informed dialogue allows people to engage with differing perspectives while remaining grounded in their own values and connection to Jewish life.

Zeller is also troubled by what she sees as a double standard in the way Israel and Jews are often treated in public discourse. While she acknowledges that criticism of any government is legitimate, she argues that Jews are too often held personally responsible for the actions of a foreign state in a way that members of other communities are not.

For Zeller, conversations about Israel are also deeply personal. Several members of her extended family

live there, and like many Jews with loved ones in the country, she follows events with a mixture of concern and anxiety. While she believes people have every right to criticize Israeli policies and governments, she says discussions about Israel should also recognize the human dimension—that for many Jews, the issue is connected to family, identity and deeply personal relationships.

She notes that Canadians with ties to countries around the world are generally not expected to answer for every decision made by those governments, and believes the same standard should apply to Jews.

Outside of her professional goals, Zeller is looking forward to building a life for her family in Hamilton and becoming involved in the community. She and her husband have two children and a mini Bernedoodle named Jozi—a name inspired by Johannesburg, where Zeller was born.

At home, the family enjoys creative pursuits. Stuart paints, while Zeller enjoys baking, especially her signature baked cheesecake.

As she begins this next chapter, Zeller says she is looking forward not only to leading the Hamilton Jewish Federation, but to becoming part of the community itself. For her, the role is about more than organizational leadership—it is about relationships, shared responsibility and creating a Jewish community where people feel connected, supported and proud of who they are. She hopes that, over time, the community will come to know her not simply as its CEO, but as a neighbour, volunteer and fellow member invested in its future.

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HJFS

HAMILTON JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES



How the Federation is strengthening Hamilton’s Jewish community security

Campaign launch keynote will discuss evolving security challenges

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS



Campaign opening keynote speaker will be Michael Masters, CEO of Secure Community Network.

As Jewish communities across North America confront an increasingly complex security landscape, Hamilton has emerged as an unlikely leader. Through its pioneering partnership with the Secure Community Network (SCN)—the official safety and security organization for North American Jewry—the city has become Canada’s only community connected to a continent-wide network of intelligence, training, and emergency preparedness.

Michael Masters, SCN’s National Director and CEO, will discuss the evolving security challenges facing Jewish communities and Hamilton’s pioneering partnership with the Secure Community Network when he delivers the keynote address at the Hamilton Jewish Federation’s campaign opening on Wednesday, Sept. 2.

The partnership, led locally by veteran law enforcement professional Glenn Mannella, gives Hamilton access to SCN’s continent-wide network of security experts, intelligence resources, training programs, and emergency preparedness initiatives. The model has strengthened security across synagogues, schools, camps, and other community institutions while integrating Hamilton into a broader North American security infrastructure.

According to Masters, Jewish communities are navigating one of the most complex threat environments in recent memory. Security concerns now range from lone actors and

extremist groups to foreign regime-linked organizations, with threats often crossing national borders.

At the same time, the digital landscape has become an increasingly important front in community security. SCN analysts monitor publicly available online platforms for signs of harassment, suspicious activity, and potential threats targeting Jewish institutions and individuals. The goal, Masters said, is to identify risks early enough to support prevention and preparedness before online rhetoric escalates into real-world harm.

Hamilton’s connection to SCN also means local incidents and reports contribute to a continent-wide intelligence picture. Information gathered in Hamilton is analyzed alongside reports from across North America, allowing communities to receive real-time alerts about emerging threats.

While security concerns have grown, Masters emphasizes that preparedness should not be rooted in fear. He describes security training as comparable to learning CPR or first aid—practical skills that build confidence and help people respond effectively during emergencies.

As Hamilton’s partnership with SCN approaches its second anniversary, the community’s experience is increasingly being viewed as a model for other Canadian Jewish communities seeking to strengthen security while maintaining vibrant and welcoming communal life.

To register, visit hamilton-jewishfederation.ticketspice.com/2027-campaign-opening or call 905-648-0605.

Fall programs strengthen Jewish learning and community

Holocaust education, family programming and new initiatives mark the Federation’s fall lineup

BY **MAGGIE NORRIS**
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

HAMILTON Jewish Federation is excited to offer a season of programs that educate, connect, and strengthen our community.

Holocaust Education Week in November remains a cornerstone of our educational work, engaging students, educators and community leaders in learning about the Holocaust, the state of contemporary antisemitism and the role and importance of standing up to hate.

This fall also marks the launch of Windows to Witness at Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre. Developed through the work of Judy Schwartz and the USC Shoah Foundation, the

initiative allows visitors to access recorded Holocaust survivor testimonies, bringing local history to life for future generations.

Families can also look forward to new opportunities to connect. A new B-Mitzvah Jewish Values Program for students in Grades 6 and 7 and their families will explore the meaning and traditions of this important milestone while building community.

Registration is available at: hamiltonjewishfederation.ticketspice.com/j-hamilton-b-mitzvah-program.

PJ Library continues to offer popular programs for young families, including the annual Shlepoever, story times and hands-on Jewish experiences throughout the year. Watch Federation’s social media posts for more updates.

STAFF UPDATE Farewell to Elaine Levine



PHOTO: DONNA WAXMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Elaine Levine, retiring after 24 years with the Hamilton Jewish Federation.

After 24 years with the Hamilton Jewish Federation, Elaine Levine will retire Sept. 30. She began her Federation career in program development before becoming campaign director nine years ago. Looking back, Levine is proud of what has been accomplished and grateful to the donors, volunteers and colleagues who made her work so rewarding. She looks forward to more time with family while staying connected to the community she has served. A full profile of Levine and her contributions will appear in our upcoming Chanukah issue.



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Shana Tova U'Metuka

From all of us at Shalom Village and the Shalom Village Foundation, we wish you and your loved ones a sweet New Year filled with health, peace, kindness, and connection. May the year ahead bring moments of meaning and care to our whole community.

SAVE THE DATE

45th Annual Shalom Village Ladies Auxiliary Tea *A Sapphire Anniversary Celebration*

For 45 years, the Ladies Auxiliary Tea has reflected the love, loyalty, and care at the heart of our community. Join us for a beautiful afternoon of tradition, friendship, and giving. Your support of the Tea will help make a meaningful difference in the lives of Shalom Village residents, community participants, and the families who care for and love them.

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

Afternoon — details to follow

Watch your mailbox and inbox for your invitation.

Temple presents Pride in Our Heritage conference

Community invited to a day of lectures and discussion exploring Jewish history, identity, Israel and resilience, capped by a keynote on the congregation’s Holocaust Torah

BY **PAULA BARUCH AND RONNIE MILLER**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

TEMPLE Anshe Sholom is pleased to invite members of the Hamilton Jewish community to Pride in Our Heritage: A Day of Learning, a special educational conference to be held at Temple Anshe Sholom, 215 Cline Avenue North, Hamilton, on Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. The Day of Learning reflects Temple Anshe Sholom's commitment to fostering Jewish learning, thoughtful dialogue, and community engagement through accessible educational programming.

Bringing together leading scholars from Canada and abroad, the conference will explore Jewish history, Israel, antisemitism, and the remarkable resilience of the Jewish people. Whether you attend the entire day or choose only those presentations that are of particular interest to you, you are sure to leave with new knowledge, fresh perspectives, and a deeper appreciation of our shared heritage.

The program will feature four outstanding presentations:

Georgian Jews in the Age of Modernity: Preserving Identity Across the Ages

Dr. Ketevan Kakitelashvili
Discover the remarkable history of one of the world's oldest and most remote Jewish communities, whose members preserved their Jewish identity and enduring attachment to Zion

for over two millennia, and whose centuries-old dream was fulfilled with the establishment of the State of Israel.

Dr. Ketevan Kakitelashvili is an associate professor of history at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, whose research focuses on the history of Georgian Jewry and Zionism.

UNRWA: From Temporary Humanitarian Agency to Permanent UN Anti-Israel Institution

Dr. Ronnie Miller
A historical examination of how UNRWA evolved from a temporary refugee relief agency into one of the most controversial institutions within the United Nations and how that transformation has influenced the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dr. Ronnie Miller is an historian, educator, and author of several books in English and Hebrew, whose research focuses on Jewish identity, Zionism, and the history of Georgian Jewry.

A Hostile Campus Climate: Antisemitism in Canadian Universities after October 7

Dr. Cary Kogan
This presentation examines the rise of antisemitism in Canadian universities after Oct. 7, through the experiences of Jewish students and faculty. It will examine how hostile campus climates influence mental health, and explores practical ways post-secondary institutions can effectively



address antisemitism and foster safer, more inclusive environments. Dr. Cary Kogan is professor of clinical psychology at the University of Ottawa, whose research focuses on mental health, racism, and antisemitism in higher education. He is co-president of the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics (NECA), an organization dedicated to combating antisemitism on Canadian campuses.

Keynote Address: Temple Anshe Sholom’s Holocaust Torah: A Story of Survival and Renewal

Dr. Celia Rothenberg
The story of Temple Anshe Sholom's Holocaust Torah is a journey from destruction to renewal. Learn how this rescued Czech Torah became a living symbol of remembrance, resilience, and the enduring continuity



of the Jewish people. Dr. Celia Rothenberg is a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University. Her current research project is focused on Torah scrolls in Canada from the Memorial Scrolls Trust.

Every presentation will include time for audience questions and discussion, allowing participants to engage directly with the presenters.

Participants may attend the entire conference or any individual presentation. A catered luncheon and keynote address are available for \$36 per person. Admission to all other presentations is free. Pre-registration is required by calling the Temple Anshe Sholom office at (905) 528-0121.

Join us for a day of learning as we celebrate the richness of Jewish history, culture, and identity.

Conference speakers
(clockwise, from l to r), Dr. Celia Rothenberg, Dr. Ketevan Kakitelashvili, Dr. Cary Kogan and Dr. Ronnie Miller.



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Barry Yellin

Next generation of Jewish leaders begins a new journey

Hamilton’s inaugural Wexner cohort begins a journey of Jewish learning, leadership and community-building

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

HAMILTON HAS reached a significant milestone in Jewish leadership development, joining the prestigious Wexner Heritage Program for the first time. The two-year initiative brings volunteer leaders together from across North America for intensive Jewish learning, dialogue and community building. For more than three decades, the Wexner Heritage Program has invested in volunteer Jewish leaders, helping cultivate individuals who go on to strengthen their communities through learning, service and thoughtful stewardship.

Hamilton’s participation is made possible through a partnership between the Wexner Foundation and philanthropic organizations committed to strengthening Jewish leadership beyond Canada’s largest centres. The inaugural Canadian cohort also includes Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg.

Hamilton native Rabbi David Russo, who has directed the Wexner Heritage Program for the past four years, describes it as “an intensive, two-year, cohort-based leadership experience” that combines deep Jewish learning with leadership development. The goal, he said, is to bring community builders together “so they can create lasting change in their communities.”

Hamilton’s inclusion carries special significance for Russo.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATALY MINSTER

Hamilton’s Wexner participants, (from l to r) Daryn Epstein, Nataly Minster, Soraya Chusyd and Nicholas Daleo.

“Hamilton has always had a strong Jewish community,” he said. “This program is about building on those strengths while creating space for new ideas, new relationships and new voices to emerge.”

After attending the Wexner Heritage Program’s opening welcome seminar in Winnipeg last May, Hamilton’s

inaugural cohort returned home energized by new ideas, lasting friendships and a shared commitment to the two-year journey ahead. Each participant brings a unique story, but together they represent the diversity of experience, dedication and leadership that strengthen Hamilton’s Jewish community.

Nataly Minster
The Wexner program arrived at a pivotal moment for Nataly Minster. After moving from Israel to Canada in 2024, she began exploring her Jewish identity in a new way. In Israel, Jewish life was woven into everyday living; in Canada, maintaining that connection became a more conscious choice, shaped by community, learning and reflection.

At the program’s opening session in Winnipeg, Minster encountered a style of Jewish learning that went beyond the texts themselves, embracing thoughtful discussion, diverse perspectives and the shared exploration of ideas.

“The program felt like another step toward understanding myself as a Jewish person,” she said. “It was completely new for me, overwhelming, but in the best possible way.”

The experience challenged Minster to think differently about leadership, belonging and her place within the Jewish community. It also strengthened her desire to play a more active role in Hamilton’s Jewish community.

Nicholas Daleo
For Nicholas Daleo, the Wexner program is a natural extension of a life-long love of learning. A researcher by profession, he was drawn to Judaism when he converted in 2013, finding a tradition that encourages thoughtful discussion and the exploration of ideas rather than simple answers.

His perspective is also shaped by his Mohawk heritage from Six Nations, where storytelling and the passing of knowledge between

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generations is deeply valued. Daleo says that both traditions share a belief that understanding is built by listening to others and considering different perspectives.

What resonated for Daleo most at the opening session was hearing how people with different backgrounds could interpret the same Jewish text in remarkably different ways.

“The more that I dive into the learning, and the lessons, the more curious I become,” he said.

The experience affirmed for him that authentic leadership begins with humility, the willingness to keep learning, asking deeper questions, and remaining open to new perspectives.

Soraya Quintela Chusyd

For Soraya Quintela Chusyd, the Wexner program offers an opportunity to deepen her understanding of Jewish community engagement while connecting with peers from Jewish communities across Canada and North America. Originally from Brazil and now living in Hamilton with her family, she brings a unique perspective shaped by her work in education and her graduate studies in educational leadership and equity.

Guided by the Jewish value of tikkun olam — repairing the world — Chusyd is particularly drawn to the program’s

exploration of Jewish texts alongside contemporary communal challenges. What stood out most for her at the opening session was the openness of the discussions and the participants’ willingness to learn from one another.

“The conversations were so open and welcoming,” she said. “You really feel that everyone has something to contribute.”

She returned from the session with a renewed belief that leadership isn’t reserved for a select few, but a result of people of different backgrounds coming together with a shared dedication to learning, listening, and strengthening their communities.

Daryn Epstein

A lifelong Hamiltonian, alumnus of the Hamilton Hebrew Academy and Camp Geshet, and now raising his own family in Dundas, Daryn Epstein has spent much of his life contributing to Hamilton’s Jewish community. He currently serves on the board of Kehila Heschel School, and was recently honoured with the school’s 2026 Shem Tov Award in recognition of his outstanding volunteer service.

Epstein says the Wexner program has given him an opportunity to step back from his day-to-day volunteer roles and reflect on leadership alongside peers from Jewish communities across Canada. He was particularly struck at the opening

session by the diversity of experiences around the room and the opportunity to learn from people whose perspectives differed from his own.

“What stood out most was being in a room where everyone is coming from a different place, but trying to build something together,” he said.

While each participant brought a unique perspective to the Wexner program, they returned to Hamilton united by a renewed

sense of purpose and a deeper appreciation of leadership rooted in learning, relationships and service.

The Welcome Seminar in Winnipeg marked just the beginning of a two-year journey. As Hamilton’s inaugural Wexner Heritage cohort continues its learning, the insights and relationships they build will strengthen both their own leadership and the future of Jewish life in Hamilton.



“The program felt like another step towards understanding myself as a Jewish person.”

NATALY MINSTER



“The more that I dive into the learning, and the lessons, the more curious I become.”

NICHOLAS DALEO



“The conversations were so open... You really feel that everyone has something to contribute.”

SORAYA CHUSYD



“Everyone is coming from a different place, but trying to build something together.”

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A new voice on the bimah



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Rabbi Michael Weiss takes a moment to pose outside Temple Anshe Sholom.

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

TEMPLE ANSHE Sholom's new rabbi was, in many ways, born into the role.

Rabbi Michael Weiss, who began his position on July 1, is the son of Rabbi Cory Weiss, spiritual leader of Temple Har Zion in Thornhill. The 35-year-old said he knew by age 16 that he wanted to follow in the family business.

Born in Connecticut and raised in part in Toronto, Weiss is a graduate of McGill University and was ordained at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. For the past six years, he served as associate rabbi at Congregation Scharai Zedek in Tampa, Florida.

For Weiss, the move to Hamilton represents an opportunity to lead a congregation of his own. But it was the people of Temple Anshe Sholom who ultimately convinced him. Visiting Hamilton for an interview during a frigid January cold snap, he said he was struck by the warmth of the congregation and felt it was a community he wanted to help build.

Weiss sees engagement as one of the

central challenges facing Reform Judaism today. With people's time and attention pulled in countless directions, synagogues must demonstrate the value of community and offer experiences that are meaningful, joyful and worth prioritizing.

"Jewish joy is sort of an act of resistance," he said.

Weiss believes Temple Anshe Sholom already has important strengths to build upon, particularly its vibrant religious school and active multigenerational membership. He plans to spend considerable time listening to congregants and learning what they want from synagogue life and where they feel needs are not being met.

Congregants attending services under Weiss's leadership can expect a strong musical component. An enthusiastic singer who enjoys harmonizing, he looks forward to collaborating with Cantor Paula Baruch to create worship experiences marked by spirited music, and communal participation.

His goal, he said, is to help foster a synagogue community where people feel connected — to Judaism, to one another and to something larger than themselves.

Hamilton Homecoming

A full house gathered at JHamilton on June 24 for a Pride Month event co-sponsored by the Hamilton Jewish Federation and Hamilton Jewish Family Services, featuring Hamilton native and Judge Harvey Brownstone (right, with good friend Larry Paikin). Brownstone spoke about growing up in Hamilton, coming out, and the dramatic shift in attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people over his lifetime, themes explored in his memoir, "Without Prejudice: My Life as a Gay Judge." Calling the evening a "full circle" moment, he described the acceptance he has experienced in Hamilton as a "miraculous transformation" and closed with the message that has guided his life: "Success is the best revenge."

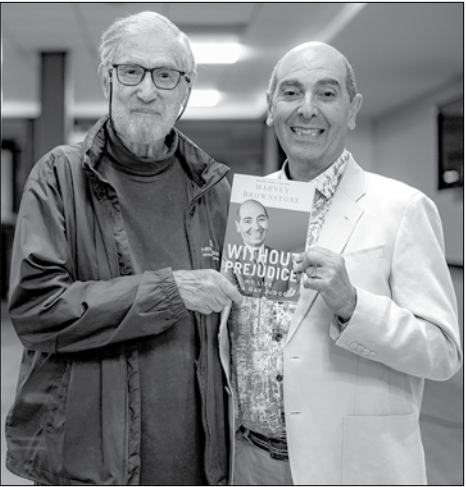


PHOTO: DONNA WAXMAN PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

When Gretzky calls

When hockey legend Wayne Gretzky recently reposted a tribute to his former elementary school teacher Dennis Nash, he highlighted the educator who helped change his attitude toward school. Gretzky recalled that Nash was the first teacher to let him write a book report on his hockey hero, Gordie Howe—an experience that earned him an "A" and "kind of changed my whole life in school." After reconnecting with Nash by phone, Gretzky thanked him as both a teacher and mentor. For Nash, a convert to Judaism, the moment reflected the Jewish values that guided his decades-long career in education. "I came with Jewish values when I started teaching," he said. "That's all I want to get out there."

A well-deserved honour

The HJN extends a heartfelt Mazel Tov to Lloyd Orson on receiving the 2025 Ontario Senior Achievement Award in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the Hamilton community. As the Government of Ontario noted, Lloyd is "the heart of Carol's Cupboard Food Bank in Hamilton." Orson was recognized for ensuring that every person who walks through the doors is treated as a neighbour. Beyond providing food, Orson has helped reorganize the food bank, recruited more than 30 volunteers, established a community garden to supply fresh produce, and arranged appointments and deliveries for those unable to visit in person. His unwavering commitment to serving others has made a lasting difference in the lives of countless Hamilton residents.



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Against forgetting: A visual record of Jewish life and loss

In a stunning coffee table book, Toronto photographer David Kaufman documented the remnants of Jewish life across Eastern Europe

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

DAVID KAUFMAN has spent his life telling stories. From his days growing up in Montreal, when he dreamed of a career in folk music, to his years producing documentaries for the CBC, to his more recent work documenting the legacy of Jewish communities across Eastern Europe, the Toronto filmmaker and architectural photographer has consistently been drawn to people, places, and histories at risk of being forgotten.

The story Kaufman tells in his 2025 coffee table book, *The Posthumous Landscape: Remnants of Jewish Life in Eastern Europe*, is of a civilization largely destroyed in the Holocaust, yet one that continues to speak through the cemeteries, synagogues, and buildings that remain. Produced using a large-format architectural camera, his photographs capture extraordinary detail of elaborately carved tombstones emerging from overgrown Jewish cemeteries, restored synagogues standing in towns without Jews, and landscapes forever scarred by mass murder.

The origins of Kaufman's passion project can be traced to a high school soccer field in a small town outside Warsaw, where he came upon a pile of weathered Jewish tombstones. The encounter took place in 1992, when Kaufman, now 78, was in Poland filming a documentary on child survivors of the Holocaust for CBC's investigative program, *The Fifth Estate*.

"I had never seen Jewish grave-stones of such beauty," he recalled. "The calligraphy was beautiful, and the artwork at the top of the grave-stones was beautiful. And this made a huge impression on me."

Kaufman returned to Poland twice more in the years that followed to produce documentaries on the Warsaw and Łódź ghettos before devoting himself fully, beginning in 2007, to photographing cemeteries, synagogues, and other surviving traces of Jewish history across Poland and the broader region.

His book opens with photographs of the vast Jewish cemeteries of Warsaw and Łódź, each of which contains hundreds of thousands of burial sites, including individual and mass graves of Holocaust victims. Kaufman's images capture the untamed character of these landscapes, where rows of intricately carved tombstones compete for space with dense, uncontrolled vegetation.

Yet the photographs also reveal a striking contrast between the two cities. Little remains of Warsaw's once vibrant Jewish world beyond its cemetery and the Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters, erected shortly after the end of the Second World War, while in Łódź, by contrast, buildings from the former ghetto remain remarkably intact, as well as the sprawling textile empire and grand residence of the nineteenth-century Polish-Jewish industrialist



PHOTO: DAVID KAUFMAN

A path leads into Warsaw's Jewish cemetery, where moss-covered tombstones and monuments preserve the memory of a vanished world.



“The task of preserving Jewish artifacts is just enormous, and the resources available are completely inadequate.”

DAVID KAUFMAN
Photographer

and philanthropist Israel Kalman Poznanski, whose grand mausoleum in the Łódź cemetery stands as a reminder of the wealth and cultural vitality once enjoyed by the city's Jewish community.

Kaufman also photographed several small, often unmarked Jewish cemeteries in towns across Poland, locating them through a combination of his own research and the assistance of Poles he and his wife encountered along the way. On one occasion, after asking a woman at a playground for the Polish word for “cemetery,” she immediately pulled out her phone and made a call.

“Ten minutes later, the person in charge of the cemetery pulls up on a bicycle and takes us there,” Kaufman recalled. “You could do that almost anywhere in Poland because people are genuinely welcoming to Jewish visitors.”

The experience brought to mind a conversation Kaufman had during his first trip to Poland, when the caretaker of Warsaw's Jewish cemetery explained that much of the early preservation work at neglected Jewish cemeteries in small towns had been undertaken by people who themselves felt like outsiders. Some were young gay men who took it upon themselves to protect cemeteries from vandalism, illegal dumping, and encroachment by neighbouring farmers. Others were high school teachers interested in local history, or municipal officials who recognized the value of preserving heritage sites. Since the fall of communism, said Kaufman, a growing number of Poles have become interested in learning about a community who were such an important part of their country's history.

Kaufman's photographs of restored synagogues in Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania are particularly beautiful, revealing the remarkable diversity of Eastern European synagogue architecture. Some, such as the seventeenth-century synagogue in Lesko, a town in southeastern Poland, were

built in the style of a “fortress synagogue,” designed to serve both as a house of worship and as a place of refuge during periods of unrest. Others, including the Great Synagogue of Tykocin and the synagogue in Łancut, feature vaulted ceilings supported by four central columns, their interiors richly decorated with Hebrew inscriptions, ornamental motifs, and zodiac symbols.

The fate of the seventeenth-century Great Synagogue of Zamosc is representative of many of the region's surviving synagogues. Severely damaged during the Nazi occupation, it was later rebuilt under Communist rule and converted into a public library. In 2000, the building was returned to the Jewish community and subsequently restored under the auspices of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. Today, it serves simultaneously as a prayer space, museum, and cultural venue.

Kaufman and his wife would ultimately travel to roughly 50 locations across Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states over a decade of travel, experiences that led him to conclude that the Holocaust was a local phenomenon.

“Everywhere you go, you

understand that there were local heroes and local collaborators, people who were willing to turn against their Jewish neighbours to help in their murder or their deportation.” But the landscape itself still bears witness to the communities that once lived there, Kaufman said.

“Even if it's an empty field, there may be a cemetery ... or remnants of a synagogue, and people locally will know where those places are,” he said. “So the task of preserving Jewish artifacts in Eastern Europe is just enormous ... and the resources available are completely inadequate. So everywhere that some synagogue is restored or a cemetery is saved or restored, is a miracle.”

Kaufman views his photography not only a record of what was destroyed, but testimony to what remains. In that sense, the project is driven by urgency as much as observation — an effort to preserve and make visible the traces of Jewish life in Eastern Europe before they disappear forever.

The Posthumous Landscape: Remnants of Jewish Life in Eastern Europe, can be ordered from davidkaufmanphotography.com, online retailers and local bookstores.



PHOTO: DAVID KAUFMAN

The interior of the Great Synagogue in Włodawa, Poland.

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SECURE COMMUNITY NETWORK

FINDING THEIR PEOPLE

How unaffiliated young families are finding their way back to community



“The Hamilton Jewish community is here to welcome everyone, no matter how they look or feel.”

JEN GILBERT
jgilbert@jewishhamilton.org

Part Two of Jen Gilbert’s ongoing profiles of unaffiliated young families as they reconnect with their roots and Jewish life

BY JEN GILBERT
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

GOOSE BUMPS. I don’t get them often, so when I did, I knew it was a sign. My energy had shifted; I felt inspired. Lishai Peel, Alyse Nishimura, and Rebecca Kloosterman gave me goose bumps, and I knew I had to share their stories.

These three women found their way back to the Jewish community after Oct. 7, in seemingly different journeys. Underneath, however, each journey was deeply rooted in a sense of Jewish identity, identity the women had as kids and had perhaps left behind as young adults. This was consistent with the stories shared in Part 1 of this series.

Yet something new came up: the notion of being an outlier if someone doesn’t “look Jewish,” feel “Jewish enough,” or is wrestling with multiple identities. To be clear: the Hamilton Jewish community is here to welcome everyone, no matter how they look or feel. “There’s no such thing as too Jewish or not Jewish enough,” said Kloosterman. “It’s whoever you are, who you want to be, and how you want to express yourself.”

It takes tremendous strength and courage to open the portal that houses our painful memories of what we faced after Oct. 7, and even more bravery to relive them publicly. The women featured here have done just that in the hopes of reaching others who may feel isolated or disconnected, and to offer a sense of belonging, possibility, and hope at a time of rising antisemitism and growing uncertainty.

Thank you to Lishai, Alyse, and Rebecca for sharing your stories.

Can you relate? Do you feel Oct. 7 made you more driven to seek Jewish connections? I want to hear your story and continue this conversation next issue.

Connect with me at:
jgilbert@jewishhamilton.org

Lishai Peel’s journey from unaffiliated to Jewish community leader



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

“This is a really difficult moment in the world for Jewish people, and I think that if we just continue to reinforce what Jewish joy is for young people, then they can stand firm in who they are.”

LISHAI PEEL
Principal, Kehila Heschel School

Lishai Peel, principal at Kehila Heschel School, believes in the power of Jewish education to get through the tough times we’re facing, and that teaching our kids to be proudly Jewish is one of the best tricks we’ve had up our sleeve for centuries.

Jewish upbringing

Peel was born in Israel and grew up in England, where she had a very Jewish upbringing. Her mother is Bene Israel — born in Mumbai, and raised in Israel — and her father is from England. Her Jewish identity was complex. In her high school years, she moved back to Israel, and eventually moved to Canada at 18 years old. Her relationship with Israel was complicated, thorny. Hebrew wasn’t her first language, but all her friends were there. And, she lived there during a challenging time in her life. By the time she moved to Canada, she was ready to distance herself from her Jewish identity.

Unaffiliated as a young adult

In her 20s, she started working in the arts and culture sector. She was working for a student-run newspaper when she found herself pushing up against a poorly written and researched article about Israel — it was anti-Israel just for the sake of it. She identified with being on the

left, but kept finding herself in uncomfortable moments where the left did not identify with her. Eventually, it all came to a head when she found herself telling someone, “I’m Israeli, but I’m not that kind of Israeli. I’m critical of Israel.” Feeling small, something about that incident stuck with her.

Journey to affiliation

After Oct. 7, a lot changed for Peel. As she kept encountering group-think and bold statements made about Israel without context, deeper understanding, and rationale within progressive left circles, she felt increasingly uncomfortable. She felt like she had to downplay and hide her Jewish identity. She didn’t mind doing that in her 20s, but in her 30s, things had shifted. Raising a Jewish son, it felt more and more in contradiction to how she wanted to live, and how she wanted to raise her son to be a proud Jew.

Peel felt like she was living a double life: one evening, she found herself at an event that celebrated South Asian creators — the oppressed; while weeks later, the same group endorsed the boycott of Israeli cultural workers. It was time for her to be in the Jewish community where she could be her whole self, not just parts of herself, where she could funnel her skills

and experience. Her decision was made.

It took Oct. 7 for her to realize that she deeply cares, in her bones, that Israel not only has a right to exist, but has a right to defend its people. In the same way that Canada exists, Israel exists.

About community

Today, Peel’s Jewish identity is so intricate to who she is. She laughs at her younger self, wanting to be distanced from her Jewish identity. She feels empowered and free working in the Jewish community, yet also a little bit sad. Sad that one can only be their whole self if they’re in the company of others like them, and that her expansiveness and willingness to engage with the world isn’t necessarily reciprocated by virtue of her place of birth.

She sees beauty in the idea of a tribe and showing up for it, in giving back to and uplifting the Jewish community, yet she doesn’t think it’s always pragmatic. In addition to leaning into our Jewishness, she says we should also lean into our Canadianness. To Peel, the only way we can thrive in Canada is if we don’t have to retreat to our own communities to feel safe. We should be able to be proudly Jewish outside of the community without fear.

Alyse Nishimura found strength, support, and belonging through community



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

“I think there’s a lot of people that want to be involved but don’t feel like they’re Jewish enough.”

ALYSE NISHIMURA
Social Worker

Alyse Nishimura sees value in finding Jewish community in multiple places. From Oakville to Hamilton to summer camp, the more involved she and her family gets, and the bigger their community, the more connected they feel.

Jewish upbringing

Nishimura always knew that she was Jewish. She went to religious school on Sundays, had a Bat Mitzvah, and celebrated some holidays with her extended family. At school in Oakville, she was the only Jewish student. Her first experience around other Jewish people was at overnight camp, and it was a really good feeling. In university, she made friends with other Jewish students, and having Jewish people in her everyday life was enough.

Journey to affiliation

In 2020, Nishimura and her Jewish husband moved from Oakville to Hamilton. They stayed members of their synagogue in Oakville — it was the same synagogue Nishimura belonged to as a kid — and recognized the importance of building community with like-minded people after Oct. 7. There was antisemitism in their neighbourhood.

Her daughter wore dreidel pants to school one day, attracting the only other Jewish student there. They became instant friends, and subsequently their families became friends — Nishimura’s first taste of Jewish community in Hamilton. Through this family, Nishimura and her family have become more

involved here. They still go to shul in Oakville, but there’s often collaboration between the synagogues in Hamilton and Oakville.

When her daughter experienced antisemitism at school, Gustavo Rymberg, then CEO of the Hamilton Jewish Federation, advocated for Nishimura and her family, helping connect them with the right people and resources. Having the support and backing from the Federation helped her family have more confidence.

About community

Nishimura is all about community; recognizing how being part of a community, connected to people, and seeing how to advocate helped her kids know they don’t have to put up with hate at school. They have the tools to stand up for themselves and to know what’s right.

For Nishimura, being connected to the Jewish community is more than just religion: it’s having culture, tradition, and a sense of belonging. Everyone wants to feel a sense of belonging, and the Jewish community provides that for her and her family. It also supports their mental health.

It’s easy to get stuck or repel from a group with a target on its back. There’s power in community, and when we’re connected, changes can be made on a bigger scale. She says there’s no judgment; show up how you can show up, and you’ll be part of the community. And the more you want to be here, the more you’ll be welcomed.

Rebecca Kloosterman: Reclaiming her Jewish identity after years of distance



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

“I didn’t know how much I needed to come home... and it’s been so good to find my place again.”

REBECCA KLOOSTERMAN
Director, Hillel McMaster

Rebecca Kloosterman, always the “Jewish friend” in her circles regardless of her connection to Judaism, was lost in the diaspora. Simmering in her subconscious were reminders of her Jewish ethnicity, and she wrestled with the question of how she could come home to who she was and not feel like an outsider within and outside of the Jewish community.

Jewish upbringing

Kloosterman grew up in a home with strong Jewish traditions, identity, and excitement. She went to synagogue, Sunday school, camps, and events. When she was about 10 years old, her parents split, pausing everything Jewish they did as a family. It was the start of a big disconnect for Kloosterman. Surrounded mostly by people who weren’t Jewish, Kloosterman’s priorities took her away from Judaism — it simply wasn’t on her radar. However, she always felt Jewish.

Journey to affiliation

In her late 20s, Kloosterman went on Birthright, responding to a calling she felt to reconnect. She was driven by a curiosity to explore what being Jewish meant, and it was life changing.

When Oct. 7 happened, it became very apparent that there was a level of hate being directed at people just for who they were — for existing. Kloosterman knew her life would likely never be the same.

Her first reaction was to think she should probably never tell anyone ever again about who she is. She was in her 30s and was very rooted in her Jewish

identity, but not connected within the Jewish community. When her friends and neighbours were posting scary things about Jews online, she was faced with a decision: she could either shut down or find a way to move through this and connect with people where she could be herself. With her connection to her Jewish identity threatened, she realized she was deeply rooted to that identity. It brought her home to herself and into the Jewish community.

She accessed Jewish therapist services, now sends her kids to Jewish day school, and has a circle of Jewish friends. She threw herself in. When she meets other Jewish people, there is relief, and she doesn’t have to hide anymore. Today, she is filled with Jewish pride.

About community

When she first went to pick up her kids from school, she was a bundle of nerves. With all her tattoos, she doesn’t see herself as looking like a Jewish woman or a Jewish mother, but she immediately felt safe at the school. It’s about who we are on the inside.

Kloosterman doesn’t subscribe to picking a side, even within the Jewish community. She believes we can fight against a system that wants to separate us by proudly reconnecting with each other and with who we are.

She wants all the Jewish people who feel they look different or don’t fit in to come out. There has to be a space for us to come when there’s nowhere else to go, and she wants you to know: There’s space for you. Come as you are.

Rethinking how we teach Israel

Preparing the next generation for the realities they will face



Devora Liss

I AM a time traveler. I have seen our kids' future and it contains collisions.

In 2000, I was an incoming freshman at the University of California, Berkeley. I'd moved to California from Jerusalem, a few months after the second intifada broke out. I found my comfort zone at Hillel and ended up living in a pluralistic Jewish cooperative house.

Shortly, I began witnessing collisions between my Jewish peers' pre-college identity and reality. Hailing from proudly Jewish families and having attended Jewish schools and summer camps, these students had enthusiastically chosen to engage with Jewish life on campus. But for many, something inside of them was slowly breaking.

They had been raised on stories of a perfect and wonderful Israel, but in the early aughts, Israel was making the news daily. Instead of cherry tomatoes and drip irrigation, headlines now screamed checkpoints, occupation, and human rights violations. Large anti-Israel protests sprouted up on campus, and a mock checkpoint, replete with students dressed as IDF soldiers, delayed students en route to class.

In the meanwhile, the crises I repeatedly observed among Jewish students grew out of a single question: why was I raised on half-truths? This identity crisis led to different outcomes. Some students disengaged from Jewish life, while others became determined to deepen their knowledge and engagement with Judaism and Israeli politics.

Twenty five years later, I again left Jerusalem. In July 2025 my family moved to Canada, and we have been living in Hamilton since December. We decided to enroll our kids in Jewish school, where they hear and learn Hebrew daily. They have made Canadian and Israeli friends, and are surrounded by people who understand their lived experience of wars, sirens, and trauma.

As a parent, I now have a deeper understanding of my college friends' upbringing

and source of distress. To protect our children from similar crises in the future, I propose a pedagogical shift in how we teach, talk about, and celebrate Israel.

To better understand the shift, let us think about how parenting styles have changed over the last century. If a 1950s parent was a strict authoritarian, evoking force and power, then a 21st century parent aims to cultivate their child's personality, critical thinking, and inner self. Today, we value children who can speak their mind and constructively engage with the world.

The pedagogical shift vis à vis Israel follows similar lines. Let us dismount the post-1967 wave of might and miracles, and bring Israel down to earth. We must teach Israel in such a way that provides our children with the skills and knowledge to engage with Israel (and its detractors) in the future.

Thankfully, a curriculum already exists—Israel's Declaration of Independence. It promises an ingathering of exiles; equality regardless of religion, race, or sex; social and political equality; freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture; aspirations for peace and hopes of being a good regional neighbour.

At school and community celebrations, let us place these aspirational promises front and centre; replace oversimplifications with depth and knowledge, go into detail about what makes Israel special.

Consider two hypothetical students of the future, encountering anti-Israeli sentiment on campus. The first student can dutifully recite that Israel is the Jewish homeland. The second can talk about Israeli democracy, and explain how citizens of all religions can vote. Which student will be able to engage in conversation? Which student will have a more constructive experience?

This pedagogical shift will not be easy. It requires brave leaders and educators to step away from blue-and-white bacchanalia and carve out a new space. A space less defined by Jewish right and might, and more shaped by humble promises made 78 years ago.

Devora Liss was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan and has lived in Dayton, Berkeley, Washington, DC, and Hamilton, but Jerusalem is home.

Don't despair. Have kids instead

In uncertain times, children offer hope for the future



Ben Shragge

BETWEEN THE decline in literacy and attention spans, the rise in conspiracy theories and antisemitism, the collapse of the rules-based international order, and the incipient AI apocalypse — to name just a few signs of our times — it's easy to despair of humanity's future. Who isn't tempted to say with the Psalmist in haste, "All men are false"? I, for one, have certainly entertained the thought. But I've also found an effective antidote to doom and gloom: becoming a parent.

This may seem counterintuitive. After all, if the world is going to hell in a handbasket, why bring new lives along for the ride? I'll answer in ascending order of seriousness.

First, little kids keep you too busy to curl up into a fetal ball. Who has time to doomscroll when, at any given moment, there's half a pint of strawberries to slice? To be honest, even as the father of a four-year-old and a two-year-old, I still find time to doomscroll. But if I didn't have kids, even more of my supposed "free time" would go towards device enslavement. The regular, predictable routine imposed by highly dependent dependents leaves little mental space for existential angst.

More importantly, you can't give up on the future when you're directly invested in its viability. As much as I hope to live until 120, I'm unlikely to make it to the next century. But my kids, God willing, will be there to greet the year 2100. What kind of world will they inherit? Will they have robot servants or be serving robots?

Obviously, I can't say, but I'm personally motivated to work towards a better future. Moreover, raising decent human beings is a small but meaningful way to help avert, or at least mitigate, doomsday. We need more smart, capable, and moral people to solve the problems of the future, let alone the problems plaguing us now. As we read in Pirkei Avot, "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it." Ensuring the intergenerational transmission of values

that were once passed down to me is my modest contribution to the project.

Hannah Arendt writes that parents "have not only summoned their children into life through conception and birth, they have simultaneously introduced them into a world." We then, through education, "assume responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world." The world doesn't just roll on through inertia. Or, to be more precise, the world may continue without human effort, but not a recognizably human world. If we want our children to inherit more than just ruins, we need to help preserve the civilization we've inherited, and teach them to treasure and preserve it in turn.

The world also requires rejuvenation, which is the gift that children give us. As Arendt puts it, in order to preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants, "it must be constantly set right anew." Education is the process of teaching children (and, indeed, adults) to set the world right anew, based on the wisdom of the past.

Our personal decision about starting a family has massive cumulative consequences. Birth rates have been falling worldwide, raising the prospect of a drastic shortage of workers, taxpayers, and, most importantly, citizens, which could lead to economic and social collapse. Over two-thirds of all countries now have below-replacement fertility. Likely causes include the isolation brought about by phones and technology, changing norms regarding marriage and parenthood, an educational arms race that delays or overrides family formation, and the high costs of housing and child care. But in a New York Times essay, Anna Louie Sussman also points to a broader sense of existential doubt: "young people's inescapable and crushing sense that the future is too uncertain for the lifelong commitment of parenthood."

On the contrary, I'd argue, parenthood is the best way to resolve existential doubt. I haven't gained any certainty about the future by having kids, but I've been granted a sense of purpose that gets me through the day, and an unwillingness to give up on humanity that you could even call faith.



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Finding joy in a freezer cleanout

A simple chore revealed memories of life’s small satisfactions



Helaine Ortmann

SOMETIMES, even the mundane can be remarkable.

The other day, I decided it was time to clean and reorganize my chest freezer. Yes, in hindsight I wish I had bought an upright self-defrost, but who knew? I had no lived experience to draw on. This was an appliance we did not have at home, and even so my mother managed all those years with a husband who loved to eat, three children, and extended family who happily crowded around our small dining room table at holiday get-togethers and simchas.

I bought my freezer when it became clear that a garden was finally within reach. There were a couple of reasons for this: our once grand 100-year-old maple tree had to be sacrificed (because of disease) revealing a backyard fully exposed to the sun; and, I was due to retire in the coming years leaving me time and capacity to attempt a new hobby.

No mean feat to carry the new purchase down our narrow steep basement steps and through to the corner of the room that would later become my pandemic-era exercise space, the freezer was installed. It soon became a repository for pasta sauces made from our Roma and heirloom tomatoes; vegetable soups cooked with our herbs, celery, carrots, onions, and beans (green and yellow); bags of washed and cut strawberries, peaches and apples bought at local farm stands; as well as crisps, muffins and cakes baked from these gorgeous seasonal fruits. Later, during a heightened period of breadmaking, I added challahs to the rotation, two to four at a time, in anticipation of our sons’ visits home.

Really, what could be more wonderful, during the cold winter months, or anytime, than rummaging through the freezer to find and heat up a pot of home-made tomato or carrot soup; serve a bowl of pasta with fresh marinara or pomodoro sauce; or warm up a sweet peach muffin or strawberry scone at teatime; each as colourful and aromatic as summer itself?

The freezer made me feel, not like a natural woman, but like a real balabusta.

As usual, I digress.

Armed only with a container of hot water to give off steam and a reusable microfiber cloth for gentle meditative rubbing, I set myself to the task at hand with all the intention and purpose of a schooled archeologist; excavating the layers of ice that had formed on the inside walls of my chest freezer to find and identify the artifacts of summers past.

My 4’11” frame leaned in deeply, enthused by the systematic and steady progress I was making; but more so exhilarated by the hip hinge I was able to achieve after months of practice in my somatic movement class; a real-life application of knowledge transfer. I couldn’t help but wonder what would happen if I were to fall in. I’d be “in situ,” while my husband, bless him, watched YouTube on the third floor of our house; engrossed in basketball podcasts analyzing the Raptors game of the night before, and videos about how to carve musical instruments using only hand tools. Much to my relief, I did not fall in, and less than two hours later, I declared my afternoon mission complete.

While sorting and reorganizing the freezer contents, I marvelled at the bags of bright yellow cherry tomatoes (the size of jumbo marbles), as vibrant and fresh-looking as the day I picked them. I was less than thrilled however when I unearthed several bags of bread crumbs that I had processed in my Cuisinart; stored as an homage to my mother who taught me it was a sin to throw bread away. I kissed each bag before I emptied it into my food waste bin; just as she would have.

On a lighter note, in preparation for that night’s supper, I pulled out a bag of minestrone soup (circa August 2024), a round challah bedecked with sesame seeds, and a wrapped package of flank steak that turned out to be salmon portions, mislabelled.

For the next three days, I retraced my steps to the basement: to open the freezer, survey the interior and kvell at the new order: herbs and fruit here; soups and sauces there.

Halevai, I have the *koach* to do it all over again soon. I have two chest freezers.

A would-be novelist’s dream

Can AI rescue me from my plot problems?



Phyllis Shragge

ACCEPT YOUR limitations. Reach for the moon.

The first option may be the safe choice, but the second option propels you into that intangible state of mind called hope. True, your dream of success may be elusive, but let’s face it, the moon isn’t that far away. Just ask the Artemis II astronauts.

No matter what our age or circumstances, we are happier if we strive for almost-impossible goals. Just imagining our success makes each day seem a bit brighter.

When I was a young girl, I imagined myself as a dancer in Broadway musicals. As it turned out, even after years of ballet and modern jazz training, this dream was not to be. But eventually, I found a career I loved when I became a staff writer for a city newspaper.

My job required me to write succinctly with little room or time for elaboration. Now, when I write, my journalism training is both an advantage and a disadvantage. I believe I can get to the point with minimal words, but I find it a challenge to expand when few words tell the tale. There lies just one of the problems when it comes to that dream I mentioned earlier. Keep this under your hat: I’d love to write a novel.

I’d love to write a novel that keeps readers hooked page after page. Good writing, in my opinion, is easy-to-read writing. It’s a joy to find a page-turner among so many books that meander here and stall there.

I believe many award-winning novels are a struggle to read, with plodding pacing and overdrawn details. As I read these books, I silently admonish the editors for not weeding out the many pages of description.

Often, we assume that fast-paced novels lack literary value, but they can be complex, with powerful themes and well-developed characters. And if they just entertain, so what? A good read is a good read.

Although I’d love to write a novel, my biggest challenge is my nemesis: plot

development. I manage when it comes to constructing a short story that moves to an unplanned but reasonable conclusion. When I write a short story, I begin without knowing how it will end. The story takes me to the end, rather than vice versa. I’m surprised by how things turn out.

However, writing a novel is quite different, not just because of the length, but because of the complexity. I once attempted to write a novel, completing about 50,000 words, when it hit me: I had no idea where I was going. I had reached a dead end. And I realized my characters were as flummoxed as I was about the direction we were heading.

I’m a great planner when it comes to my real life, but when it comes to writing a novel, I get stuck. Indeed, writing a novel requires planning, and, in most cases, an outline.

True, there are some novelists who can wing it page after page and reach a logical ending, but these authors are few and far between. Most authors know how things will turn out before they set pen to page, or actually, fingers to keyboard.

When I write, I sail along with the characters through the choppy waters of my creative sea. But unfortunately, unless the story is short, I drown.

Wistfully, I dream about someday writing a full-length novel. Maybe I will try again, but I know myself. I might be able to come up with a vague storyline, but when it comes to creating a well-developed plot, I don’t know if I’m capable.

If only someone else would write the outline.

You might know where I’m going with this. Someone else won’t write the outline, but something else will, and that something is AI. It seems ChatGPT is ready and willing to come to my assistance. But if I turn to ChatGPT for help, does that make me a fraud? An immoral fraud at that?

What to do? I’m tempted to use an AI-generated outline, but I wonder about the ethics in all of this. I tell myself it doesn’t matter if I do the actual writing. After all, AI’s assistance could be considered a well-drawn-out writing prompt.

Should I accept my limitations? Or should I reach for the moon?



Shana Tova

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McMaster’s Donald Abelson shapes minds, inspires hope

McMaster political scientist professor Donald Abelson on teaching, Israel, and finding meaning in turbulent times

BY **HELAINE ORTMANN**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

NUMBERS HAVE never been my strong suit. That is why it was with some degree of disbelief that I calculated 56: the number of years ago that I set foot on campus; making my way across the quad to Togo Salmon Hall (then, Arts II) at McMaster University. During my five years there, I soaked up knowledge and ideas, delivered by professors who were passionate, dedicated, erudite and accessible. I was smitten with this brave new world of academe.

It was those same qualities that resonated with me in my wide-ranging conversation, via Zoom, with Donald E. Abelson, PhD, Social Sciences Professor of Canada U.S. Relations, and Professor, Political Science at McMaster University. I had reached out to him after reading one of his opinion columns in The Spectator, “Let trauma guide, not constrain, decisions,” where he discussed, against the backdrop of the U.S.-Israel-Iran war, whether people and states can move beyond trauma; and summon the strength, moral fortitude and will to embrace a more constructive path forward.

I caught up with him while he was visiting the Halbert Centre for Canadian Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; established by Canadian philanthropists Ralph and Roz



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

Donald E. Abelson, PhD, says the path forward requires new thinking, young leaders and a renewed commitment to hope and possibility.

“If we are able to encourage bright, young people to pursue roles in leadership at an early stage, we can begin to change the climate over time.”

DONALD E. ABELSON
Social Sciences Professor, McMaster University

Halbert in the 1970s to bring Canadian and Israeli scholars together. He was there, for a month, to share the work he and his McMaster colleagues were doing on civic engagement and political leadership.

Early in our conversation, Professor Abelson shared a piece of advice he received when he began his academic career at Western: “If you ever find yourself being the smartest person in the room, find another room.” Reflecting on his month at Hebrew University’s Halbert Centre, he laughed that there was never any danger of that. Surrounded by world-class scholars and students, he said, “I couldn’t ask for anything more.”

Many of his Israeli colleagues thanked him for coming, saying the rest of the world had turned their backs on them. Abelson lamented that people who were trained to be objective and engage in critical thinking had allowed politics to interfere. “It’s a mitzvah for me,” he said. “I encourage my Canadian colleagues to take advantage of coming to a place like Israel. The universities here are

first-class, world-class.” Professor Abelson shared another deeply moving experience when he saw units of 18-and-19-year-old soldiers, rifles slung over their shoulders, taking part in a military ceremony at the Wall.

“We in the diaspora... have a tendency to complain about things that will pass in a day or two. Then you come to Israel and see these young people who should be at university, and going out and enjoying themselves. Their ultimate goal is to put their lives on the line to protect not only the State of Israel, but Jews around the world. I knew this intellectually... but as a parent, as a Jew... it really took hold of me.”

I asked Professor Abelson what drew him to the study of American politics and U.S. foreign policy. The roots, it turns out, run deep. His paternal grandparents were from the United States, and dinner-table conversations often revolved around Canada-U.S. relations and American presidents. His interest grew through high school and was cemented at the University of Toronto, where a “fabulous” professor opened up a new world for him.

Asked about the relevance of his work at this moment, Abelson replied, “Would there ever be a better time? Probably not.” Yet despite spending his entire adult life as a political scientist, he said he actually “hates politics” and is far more interested in process and how people make decisions. What he loves, he explained, is “the responsibility of shaping the minds of others in a constructive way.”

Abelson credits the smart and caring professors he encountered at

the University of Toronto and later at Queen’s with seeing potential in him that he did not see in himself. Today, he tries to do the same for his students. “They might look in the mirror and not see that in themselves,” he said, “but if I see it in them, and I can help, that’s what I do.” He views that commitment as something he owes both to his students and to McMaster University, which he describes as “a fabulous university” and “a special place.”

As we talked about current events in the Middle East and prospects for peace, I asked Professor Abelson if he was optimistic about the future. “If we are able to encourage bright, young people to pursue roles in leadership at an early stage, we can begin to change the climate over time. The only thing that’s going to change the situation we’re in, is new thinking: people who embrace peace more than war, and see alternatives we may not have considered.”

Abelson remains hopeful about a path forward “so long as the human spirit and condition is alive,” though he expects more trauma before that point and that “it’s not going to be easy.” He pointed to past breakthroughs as proof of what’s possible: “Who imagined a handshake between Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat? Who expected Yitzhak Rabin to meet in the Rose Garden with Yasser Arafat? It’s happened before, and it has to happen again.”

Fast forward 56 years, across time zones and connected by virtual technology once deemed science fiction, this lifelong learner was transported to the realms of hope and possibility inspired by the ideas and perspectives of yet another great teacher.

HAMILTON'S OLDEST SYNAGOGUE

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Make every day a High Holy Day



RABBI MICHAEL WEISS

WE COME to Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the new year, but in the Mishnah, at the very beginning of the tractate dealing with Rosh Hashanah,

we learn that this is not the only new year. There are, in fact, four new years in the rabbinic tradition. The first of Nissan is the new year for the calendar, the first of Elul is the new year for animals, Tu B'Shevat is the new year for trees and, of course, the first of Tishrei is the new year for counting years. These all served as different moments for accounting of what you had. It was all a matter of figuring out whether your sheep or trees or crops were part of this year's tithe or the next. Most of us no longer have sheep to tithe and yet we all have things to account for. How much good have we put out into the world this year? How much

harm have we done? Where have we stagnated and where have we grown? Who do we want to be and what can we do to get there? That's a lot of pressure to put on ten days a year, but the rabbis are telling us that we have more than enough opportunities to do the hard work of a *chesh-bon nefesh*, an accounting of the soul. If Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the only time of year we examine ourselves closely and commit to bettering ourselves, then we haven't understood the assignment. The best time to take an accounting of our souls and make up for our mistakes was yesterday. The next best time is right now! I hope that each of us will allow the purpose and meaning of these High Holy Days into our hearts, reminding us that any day that we take time to improve ourselves and the world is most certainly a High Holy Day as well. At this season of new beginnings, I am so honoured to begin my work as rabbi at Temple Anshe Sholom and in Hamilton's Jewish community!

HAMILTON HEBREW ACADEMY

HHA High opens its doors

OLIVER BORR

THIS SEPTEMBER will mark an important milestone in Jewish education in Hamilton as HHA High opens its doors to its first Grade 9 class. The school's educational vision combines academic excellence with meaningful Jewish learning, practical experience and leadership development within a close and supportive community. Its goal is not only to prepare students for academic success, but also to equip them with the knowledge, confidence and strong sense of identity they will carry throughout their lives. Students will be encouraged to think critically, engage with their community and develop the leadership skills needed for an ever-changing world. HHA High is opening at a time when Jewish students are entering an increasingly complex world. They are likely to face questions about their identity, Israel and the place of the Jewish people in the broader community. HHA High has been designed to prepare students for those realities with knowledge, resilience and confidence. Students will explore Jewish identity, history, resilience, Israel, antisemitism, advocacy and civic engagement while

examining the experiences that have shaped the Jewish people and continue to influence Jewish life today. The program equips students with a strong foundation in Jewish history, Judaism and Israel while developing the confidence and skills to communicate thoughtfully, respectfully and persuasively in classrooms, on university campuses and within the broader community. HHA High is also launching PATHWAYS, an after-school Ontario credit program open to Jewish students from across the Hamilton community, including those attending other secondary schools. The program combines hands-on learning with mentorship from local professionals and community leaders. Students will develop practical life skills, explore Jewish traditions and culture, and create business or community ventures that culminate in presentations to the community. The opening of HHA High represents more than the launch of a new school — it marks the beginning of a new chapter in Jewish education in Hamilton. These two new programs reflect HHA High's commitment to preparing students for success both inside and outside the classroom. For more information, visit HHA.ca/highschool.

BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE

A “come from away” experience

JEFF MANISHEN

FIVE INTREPID members of the Beth Jacob congregation joined Rabbi Beni Wajnberg and his family to spend Shabbat with the wonderful congregants of Beth El Synagogue, the newest USCJ-affiliated synagogue in Canada, in St. John's, Newfoundland from July 10–12. Rabbi Beni initiated the outreach program to connect our members with the Jewish community in the Maritimes and Bette, the dynamic president of Beth El readily accepted. Beth El has a rich history, having been established initially as an Orthodox congregation in 1909 and becoming egalitarian Conservative in 1992. They are the only synagogue in Newfoundland and own the only Jewish cemetery in the province. Our weekend visit commenced with a trip to The Rooms, Newfoundland's largest public cultural space, where Beth El congregant Justin, whose family goes back generations in the province, gave us background about the section of the museum outlining the history of the Jewish people going back to the 1700s. Later in the afternoon, we met with Bette and several members of the congregation to hear about their history, including the efforts of then-president



PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF MANISHEN

Beth Jacob members at Beth El Synagogue in St. John's, Newfoundland. Dr. Michael Paul, of blessed memory, to assist the Jewish passengers stranded in Gander and St. John's on Sept. 11, 2001. One of the rabbis gave a *d'var Torah* on Sept. 14 and sent the congregation boxes of *Shmura* matzah for the next decade to show his appreciation. The Shabbat services that evening were lovely and were followed by a bountiful Shabbat dinner where new friendships were quickly made.

MCMASTER HILLEL

Hillel welcomes new director

HILLEL ONTARIO

HILLEL ONTARIO is thrilled to welcome Rebecca Kloosterman as the new Director of Jewish Student Life at Hillel McMaster. Kloosterman brings a wealth of experience to this role, with a strong professional background rooted in clinical and community mental health and well-being. Having spent years supporting individuals and families in the mental health sector, she is incredibly excited to bring her specialized skills, compassionate leadership, and experience directly to McMaster's Jewish student community. Kloosterman is dedicated to helping students feel comfortable and confident in their Jewish identity. Her ultimate hope is to cultivate an environment where every student feels empowered, supported, and a deep sense of belonging. Kloosterman's Jewish identity is rooted in community service and living by Jewish values in a modern world. She is committed to creating a safe, inclusive,



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCMASTER HILLEL

Rebecca Kloosterman and vibrant space where McMaster students can truly thrive both personally and academically. Kloosterman is a proud mother of two young children. When she isn't busy with work or spending time with her family, she is an avid reader and lifelong learner who is deeply passionate about food and friendship. Kloosterman looks forward to connecting with students, families, and community partners in the upcoming academic year.

Shana Tova

Wishing our Hamilton Jewish Community a Happy, Healthy and Sweet New Year.

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SHALOM VILLAGE

A reason to celebrate



MARIANNE KLEIN

AS ROSH Hashanah approaches, we find ourselves reflecting on the year behind us with deep gratitude — for the people who make

Shalom Village what it is, for the trust placed in us, and for the opportunities ahead to keep growing together.

There is much to celebrate at Shalom Village, and there is also much that continues to inspire us. Every day, we are reminded that meaningful care is built through kindness, compassion and the relationships we share with residents and their families.

This past year, our residents told us they feel respected, supported and genuinely cared for. In our annual Long-Term Care resident survey, 100 per cent of respondents agreed that staff treat them with dignity and respect, and that our staff are compassionate, friendly and supportive. For us, those results are especially meaningful because they speak not only to the care we provide, but to how that care is felt by the people who call Shalom Village home.

Our Long-Term Care Nursing Team also completed the first phase of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario's Clinical Pathways initiative — an important step in strengthening consistency, communication and evidence-informed care across our home.

Beyond Long-Term Care, Senior's Spark has continued to bring older adults and caregivers together through free fitness, wellness and social programming. Across our campus, we have also invested in safety, technology, accessible equipment, refreshed gathering spaces,

music therapy, palliative care and staff development — each one strengthening daily life for residents, families, staff and community participants. These improvements reflect our ongoing commitment to creating an environment where people can thrive, remain engaged and enjoy the highest possible quality of life.

Of course, none of this happens because of one person or one program. It happens because of dedicated staff, engaged residents and families, committed volunteers, trusted community partners and generous donors who continue to believe in the importance of Shalom Village.

On Sept.18, Shalom Village joins long-term care homes across Ontario for LTC Community Engagement Day.

The purpose of the day is simple, but important: to strengthen relationships and help elected officials and community leaders better understand life inside long-term care.

Long-term care is more than a building or a health-care service. It is home. It is where friendships are formed, traditions are shared, birthdays are celebrated, concerns are heard and small, meaningful moments happen every day.

LTC Community Engagement Day gives us a chance to share that story — proudly, honestly and through the voices of the residents, families and staff who know it best. We hope it also reminds our broader community of the vital role long-term care plays in supporting older adults with dignity, purpose and belonging.

We enter this new year with gratitude for what we have accomplished together, pride in the people who make this work possible, and a renewed commitment to continue building a strong, caring and connected future for those we care for, their loved ones and our community.

HAMILTON JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES

The gift of being needed



PHOTO COURTESY OF HJFS

Birding is just one example of what can be shared at HJFS's Seniors Skill Share program.

CARA BENSIMON

AS ROSH HASHANAH approaches, we make resolutions, set intentions, and ask ourselves what we might do differently. But perhaps there is another question worth asking: What do I still have to give, and who might need it?

At HJFS, we work with people at every stage of life. Some come to us seeking counselling, financial assistance, food security, or help adjusting to a major transition. Others join us through Café Europa, Seniors Living Well programming, or community gatherings. Across all these programs, one truth appears again and again: people need connection, purpose and the knowledge that they still matter. This is especially important as we grow older. Retirement, the loss of a spouse, changes in health or fewer opportunities for social connection can gradually affect a person's sense of identity. Our community's seniors hold decades of practical knowledge, cultural memory, resilience and lived experience. They are teachers, mentors, storytellers and contributors.

This idea is helping to shape a new Seniors Skill Share initiative at HJFS. We are exploring opportunities for older

adults to share something they know with others. It might be cooking a traditional recipe, making art, knitting, gardening, birding, writing poetry, teaching a card game, leading laughter yoga, sharing basic Hebrew or Yiddish, navigating hearing loss, writing a memoir, offering estate-planning knowledge, telling a family story, or introducing others to positive psychology.

The skill itself matters, but the deeper value lies in the exchange. One person experiences the dignity of being needed. Another gains knowledge, companionship, and a connection to someone they may not otherwise have met. Giving and receiving are rarely fixed roles, and over a lifetime, most of us will do both.

As we enter a new Jewish year, perhaps renewal can also mean recognizing what is already within us — and offering it to someone else. Everyone has something to teach. And everyone deserves the gift of knowing they are still needed.

If you have a skill or life experience you would be willing to share, please contact Erika McMeekin at erikam@hamiltonjfs.ca. From all of us at HJFS, we wish you and your loved ones a sweet, healthy and meaningful new year. Shanah Tovah U'Metukah.

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Shana Tova!

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20 HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS • SEPTEMBER 2026

KEHILA HESCHEL

We must raise Jewish kids



LISHAI PEEL

EVERYWHERE I look, I see an increasingly hostile world for Jews. Some of the hostility is direct and unmistakable. Some

of it is hidden behind coded language, casual comments and the widespread use of “Zio” as though it were not simply another way to speak about Jews with contempt.

In response, many Jews have become hypervigilant. Some are retreating from the non-Jewish world. Others are playing down their Jewishness, hoping that if they are quiet enough, agreeable enough or sufficiently critical of Israel, the hostility will pass them by.

As a mother, I feel the impossible contradiction of this moment. How do I tell my son, who attends public school, to be proud of who he is while also warning him to be careful about what he shares? How do we teach our children to speak openly about their families, traditions and connection to Israel while preparing them for the possibility that these very things may be used against them?

This moment is asking us difficult questions about survival and about what

it means to be Jewish right now. It is asking us to recognize not only obvious danger, but also the quieter ways harm reaches our children: through exclusion, misinformation, social pressure and the suggestion that Jewish identity is something requiring explanation or apology.

I know many people are strategizing, ringing alarm bells and fighting the endless waves of Jew hatred online. That work matters. But as a mother and a Jewish day school principal, I believe one of the most important answers is also the simplest. It is an answer that has been with us throughout our long history: Raise Jewish kids.

Raise children who know their stories, their language, their traditions and their people. Give them Jewish friendships and Jewish places where they do not have to shrink themselves. Teach them that Judaism is not merely something to defend. It is something to live, question, celebrate and cherish.

Raising Jewish children with knowledge and confidence is an insistence on Jewish joy, Jewish perseverance and Jewish peoplehood. In a world that may ask them to become quieter, our task is to give them a Jewish identity strong enough to remain fully, unapologetically their own.

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

An exciting new year lies ahead

DORA-ANN COHEN ELLISON

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM is excited to welcome Rabbi Michael Weiss! Meet him at our Potluck in the Park on Sept. 2 from 4:30–6 p.m. Visit anshesholom.ca for details.

We look forward to welcoming students back for an exciting new school year beginning Sept. 9, kicking things off with a family apple-picking event at Carluke Orchard in partnership with Kehila Heschel.

Our Temple Learning Program invites students in JK through Grade 7 to join more than 70 peers for engaging Shabbat morning and Wednesday evening programs. Wednesday classes make Hebrew learning fun through hands-on electives including art, cooking, gardening, STEM, music and physical education. Registration and school information are available at anshesholom.ca.

Teens in Grades 8–10 are invited to join B’Yachad — Making a Difference in Your Community, our Thursday evening program open to all local Jewish teens. Highlights include a Montreal trip for

registered Grade 8–9 students, monthly sessions with Rabbi Weiss and social events throughout the year.

Our High Holiday programs include a family Rosh Hashanah service and Tashlich at the creek, Kol Nidre and family Yom Kippur morning service and engaging afternoon programs for all ages. Sukkot will feature a morning of family festival activities followed by lunch. We are also introducing a new Tot Rosh Hashanah Circle Time on Sept. 13, followed by shofar and a festive luncheon. Our popular Tot Shabbat resumes on Oct. 17, with weekly songs, stories and community for toddlers and caregivers. Junior and Senior Youth Groups, led by Yael Morais, offer monthly social events and meaningful social action opportunities. Families can also look forward to potluck Shabbat dinners, hikes, trivia nights and a family skate throughout the year.

We hope your family will join us to start something new, strengthen connections and celebrate Jewish life together. Visit anshesholom.ca to register today. Shanah Tovah!

ADAS ISRAEL

NCSY Hamilton

OLIVER BORR

IT HAS been an incredible year for Jewish teens in Hamilton, and looking ahead, the coming year promises to be our most exciting one yet.

Last year’s calendar was packed with unforgettable moments. Our local Shabbatons provided fully immersive Shabbat experiences, complete with meaningful discussions, beautiful singing, and delicious meals. Each experience culminated in high-energy group outings, including an epic afternoon at the Flying Squirrel trampoline park. We also hosted welcoming Friday night Shabbat dinners and thrilled our teens with classic social outings like escape rooms, bowling, and the action-packed challenges at Activate.

At our flagship weekly Learn ‘n Earn program, teens gathered for authentic Torah learning paired with a fresh pizza dinner. For spending 45 minutes diving

into Jewish wisdom, they earned \$10 per session, which was followed by another 45 minutes of fun group activities. We wrapped up the main season with a massive end-of-year BBQ and patio party extravaganza.

This summer, we hosted a three-week teen summer camp with high-octane activities like tubing down the Grand River, rock climbing, and more.

This coming year, we are expanding our signature Learn ‘n Earn program to reach even more teens, scheduling more local Shabbatons, hosting more frequent Friday night dinners, and lining up a brand-new array of social outings.

NCSY Hamilton is proud to provide a space where every Jewish teen can find a home, build lasting friendships, and connect with their heritage. Whether you are a returning face or checking us out for the first time, we cannot wait to welcome you to our biggest and best year yet!

BBYO

The new face of BBYO Hamilton

JACK ROSENBAUM

EVERYONE at BBYO Eastern Canada joins me in warmly welcoming our new Hamilton Engagement Associate, Abby Gourley-Rein, who brings a wealth of leadership experience and a passion for building vibrant Jewish community.

From the moment Gourley-Rein arrived at McMaster University, she immersed herself in Jewish campus life, taking on leadership roles with Hillel McMaster and earning a prestigious StandWithUs Emerson Fellowship, which equips students to combat antisemitism and strengthen Jewish identity on campus..

Recognizing a gap in Jewish campus life following the closure of McMaster’s Delta Pi chapter during the pandemic, Gourley-Rein and a group of friends set out to bring a new Jewish sorority rooted in Jewish values to McMaster, where members could form lifelong friendships and develop as future leaders. Abby founded and served as president of Zeta Beta Omega McMaster. Under her leadership, the chapter attracted more than 20 active members and is still growing.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BBYO

Abby Gourley-Rein

Gourley-Rein is a joy to interact with. She’ll fit right into BBYO Hamilton with her positive energy, friendly nature, and passion for empowering others. I’m looking forward to working with her as I transition into my role as the community engagement director of BBYO Eastern Canada — where I will continue to support Hamilton BBYO.

I can’t wait for you to meet Abby Gourley-Rein (hamilton@bbyo.ca) at BBYO Hamilton’s Open House on Tuesday, Sept. 15. Check out bbyo.ca/openhouse for registration and more details.



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On behalf of KMB Law, we wish you a **Shana Tova**

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A language beyond words: turning life into art

Chani Rothschild’s art is her way to explore emotions, memories and experiences that exist beyond words

BY **JEN GILBERT**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

LIFE MOVES fast, especially when we’re busy. For Israeli-born artist Chani Rothschild, work ethic and productivity were ingrained in every-day life from a young age; they were simply the norm.

“Why are you sitting idle?” her mother would ask whenever Rothschild was doing nothing. That mindset stayed with her, carrying her through multiple careers, motherhood, moves between countries, and a lifelong commitment to making art.

Rothschild’s journey eventually brought her to Hamilton, where she found a home at Beth Jacob Synagogue. “You have a piece of my heart there,” she said fondly. It was there that her curatorial career first took shape. But more on that later. For now, let’s go back to the beginning.

Rothschild was meant to be an artist. She approaches art in a way that’s original, thought-provoking, and instinctual. She’s always been a creator, even as a child, encouraged by her parents to paint, taught by her father to weld; it was never in an organized, sign-up-your-kid-for-art-classes kind of way. “I think I always created in a different way,” she said. In their spare time her parents were creators, so naturally Rothschild was aligned with this way of life. She wanted to study art in school, but sought a practical profession, studying industrial design at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem. After graduation, she worked as an art director designing entertaining information — infotainment — for kids.

She became a teacher, studied carpentry, moved to Canada, studied art therapy, worked with refugees in Hamilton, obtained her Master’s in Social Work, worked as a clinical



PHOTO: Yael Lichtenstein, Tel Aviv Biennale of Crafts and Design: Works and Days, Muza, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv

therapist, and finally studied curatorial studies in Israel, where she now works as a curator. It’s safe to say she doesn’t sit idle.

When Beth Jacob received a donation to purchase an artwork, Rothschild proposed a different idea. “Let’s make this wall into a gallery,” she said. The result was a community art space that brought together Jewish and non-Jewish artists, featuring local talent alongside Israeli artists living in Ontario. “I just wanted to bring artists [together], write about them, and engage the community,” she said. “I think as a social worker, I do things for the community, and they somehow always involve art. So it’s a way of connecting and a place for people to share their stories.”

At the same time, Rothschild was creating her own art, using it to explore emotions that often lay beyond words. Her art is a language that taps into the nonverbal; it’s a gateway to

understanding her feelings, feelings from which she often felt detached. When she creates, she does so entirely for herself. Her work serves as a diary, tracing the story of her life.

Expressing her feelings in an obvious, expected way isn’t how Rothschild works, and perhaps this is a key to her success. No one has ever done what she’s done, and she never knows what’s going to come out of her projects. Leaning into her instincts is how she starts. “I’m walking into the unknown, and I just have to trust that I’ll know something good will come out of it,” she said. And although her intentions are to find meaning for herself, others have found her work meaningful — a wonderful side-effect.

Rothschild is happiest when her work raises questions and elicits a visceral response. She enjoys when people feel something, whether they’re unsettled or unsure of exactly

Israeli artist Chani Rothschild with a woven human hair artwork she created through a painstaking process of collecting, sewing, and embroidery.

“You have a piece of my heart [at Beth Jacob Synagogue].”

CHANI ROTHSCCHILD

what they’re looking at. Her latest work, *Why are you sitting idle?*, does just that. The multi-generational piece weaves together human hair — a material that holds memory and meaning — while inviting reflection on the relationship between life and death, where the human spirit resides, and what materials are considered acceptable to work with.

After moving back to Israel in 2020, Rothschild spent six years collecting hair — her own, her mother’s, and her daughter’s. The resulting work explores what she describes as the DNA of labour. To Rothschild, hair is a living material, carrying memory, time, and generations of work within a single strand. By collecting, sewing, and embroidering with hair, she transforms an intimate biological material into a language of memory, identity, and continuity. The piece records stories of female diligence, constant movement, and the need to hold, repair, and carry on — stories that can’t always be spoken.

Today, Rothschild believes deeply in the importance of personal voices. She values artists who are willing to be brave, speak honestly, create work that matters, and share it with the world. But after a lifetime of motion, she has also learned the importance of stillness. There’s benefit to allowing our brains to just be and heal, she says, giving room to thoughts that weren’t there before.

These days, Rothschild finds herself balancing both impulses: working on a new project exploring her relationship with her mother, who died in December 2025, while also reminding herself to slow down, sit still, and let her mind wander.

Rothschild’s piece “Why are you sitting idle?” is on exhibit at Tel Aviv’s Eretz Israel Museum, curated by Galit Gaon and Henrietta Eliezer Brunner, until Nov. 30, 2026.

High Holiday Campaign | 5787/2026

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SHANA TOVA שנה טובה

Marvid Kosher
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20006825_KG

3⁹⁹lb
8.80/kg



Kol Yam Atlantic
salmon fillet skin on

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14⁹⁹
454 g



Nanuk smoked
sockeye salmon
frozen

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10⁹⁹
85 g



Beetology
red whole
beets
product
of Turkey

21635440_EA

2⁹⁹
500 g



Zeta Kosher
extra virgin
olive oil

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12⁹⁹
750 mL



3⁹⁹
450 g

Achva cake
selected
varieties
20106953002_EA/
20106953003_EA

Crown Natural
pure honey

21543937_EA

12⁹⁹
1 kg



B'gan
apple juice

21572849_EA

4⁹⁹
1.89 L



White Rock seltzer 1 L
or Achva Halva bar
50 g, selected varieties

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.79
each



5⁹⁹
1 L

Pierre Bonne
pickles or
dill tomatoes
selected varieties
21730050_EA/21707121_EA



9⁹⁹
567 g

Ungar's
gefilte fish
frozen
21219843_EA

Ariel
gluten free
puff pastry

21452851_EA

9⁹⁹
445 g



Crown or
Ta'anti
Bourekas
selected varieties

20306238001_EA/20653790002_EA

7⁹⁹
600-800 g



Snappy Snax
pretzels
selected varieties

21237451_EA

2⁴⁹
425/426 g



Foulds
mac & cheese

20122898_EA

2⁹⁹
156 g



Crown
hearts of
palm cuts

20214491001_EA/21178970_EA

1⁹⁹
400 g



Manischewitz
or Streit's
matzo ball
or soup mix
selected varieties

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2⁹⁹
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Kliyatgat
sunflower
seeds

20070700_EA

2⁹⁹
200 g



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