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GUEST EDITORIAL

We are stronger than we think



Alexis Wensowski

SURVIVAL IN THE COLLECTIVE TRAUMA OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Just over a year ago, Jewish community professionals gathered at JHamilton to discuss the new reality a global pandemic had forced upon us. Our discussions focused on how we could come together to support the most vulnerable members among us during a crisis we probably thought would last a few months and be gone. Looking back, I have to smile at our naivety. We had no idea that we were about to leap into a great unknown.

I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a collective trauma event. While many of us have experienced some type of trauma at least once in our lives, what we are experiencing with this pandemic is unparalleled in scope. It will help us to be mindful of that in our interactions with others and with ourselves. Be gentle. Be kind. We don't know the emotional weight others are carrying.

The pandemic uprooted our lives in so many ways and is causing us to question our own identity. How do we continue to exist as ourselves within a radically different world? How do we serve others? How do we show others we care?

I remember being very overwhelmed in the first few weeks of lockdown. Hamilton Jewish Family Services was trying to ensure the delivery of Passover essentials to the vulnerable. Government information and protective personal equipment were scarce. Many of our clients felt isolated and afraid. On a personal level, I was worried about my aging parents and how COVID-19 might effect my father's long-term care home. "When you're going through hell, keep going," Churchill once said. Each of us has experienced a

personal hell over the last year, and yet we keep going.

Looking back on a chapter in my own life experience has helped me navigate this pandemic. From the ages of 27 to 32, I lived in an isolated Cree community in Northern Saskatchewan. During that period, I had to learn to adapt without the conveniences I'd known before. I had to adjust to traveling five hours to get to my dentist, to manage without a cell phone, and to endure having friends and family far away. I took up snowmobiling and kayaking. I organized different community programs. My students were struggling both academically and personally, and this caused me to question my own thoughts about Canada as a progressive society. I had to learn how to build relationships in a community facing its own collective and individual traumas arising from colonization. Those five years — tough and yet rewarding — made me who I am today.

Over the last year, I've thought a lot about my time in the North, and I've come up with the following five gifts from that period that guide me in the present circumstances: Perspective is everything; Try new things; take time for you; communal life matters; people remember how you made them feel.

A year into the pandemic, our world looks different, yet, I believe that we are stronger and more resilient than we think. We are more connected than we could ever imagine, and our actions really can create a better tomorrow. I hope we are able to draw upon the gifts that carried us forward in the past year. Our historical experiences will shape future generations.

A HJN READER WRITES

WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO LIVE IN THIS COMMUNITY

I HAVE FELT so fortunate to be part of the Hamilton Jewish community. I do not have adequate words to describe my gratitude for and appreciation of the wonderful individuals in the community and my sense of wonder at the organizations involved.

First, Rabbi Hillel and the Beth Jacob Synagogue have been so caring and so thoughtful, making calls of concern, sending messages, making donations in my name and delivering food from the Kosher Food Bank (I think). I understand that the shul has a Caring Committee, who are just that. The Hamilton Jewish Federation also made calls of concern. I am a member of Na'amat, who sent flowers, and whose members called to offer rides and food. I understand that Jewish Family Services was also involved in some of the kind messages — honestly, I lost track of who was calling and what organization they represented. Of course, my personal friends added to the provision of practical help. My point is that living in the Jewish community of Hamilton is a privilege and a stroke of luck that cannot be underestimated.

Helen Metz

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



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Pandemic Pals



Former Hamiltonian Sari Richter, a published children's book author, illustrator, and muralist, with her daughter Rosalind in their Toronto home. Richter designed the front cover of this issue.

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What is happening to our mental health

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Many of us are suffering from the effects of isolation – loneliness, longing and despair, others have found silver linings throughout our lockdowns

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

A DISTRAUGHT SON mourns his elderly mother after she dies alone in a long-term care home in Montreal. A woman sits shiva for her husband alone, denied the company of family and friends. A previously active senior, cut off from the activity that once brought meaning to his life, battles loneliness and depression. A mother, overwhelmed by juggling working from home with home schooling her children, asks herself, “What’s the point?” A developmentally delayed group home resident whose daily routines have been disrupted by the pandemic suffers from severe psychological distress.

As the coronavirus pandemic enters its second year, with new variants threatening renewed lockdowns, and no sign of most of us getting vaccinated any time soon, it’s no wonder many members of our community are struggling with intensified stress and anxiety. They’re not alone. The Canadian Mental Health Association recently published data that shows “alarming levels of despair, suicidal thoughts and hopelessness in the Canadian population.”

To understand the toll the pandemic has taken on Jewish Hamiltonians’ mental health, the Hamilton Jewish News reached out to professionals and community members over the last several weeks. While nearly everyone we interviewed spoke to the fear, uncertainty and anxiety arising out of months of social isolation, we also heard, in the words of the young mother who designed this issue’s front page artwork about “extraordinary gratitude, creativity and charity.”

What it’s like on the front lines

You can probably name at least one of your acquaintances who is struggling with his or her mental health. It may be someone elderly, someone who’s struggled with trauma from their past, an overwhelmed parent or a young person. The Hamilton Jewish News heard from a community member who wrote that, while she’s been through

“The bereavement group built a support group for each other afterwards, which was wonderful.”

GABRIELE MCSWEEN
Social worker,
Hamilton Jewish
Family Services

“There are a lot of rhythms of Jewish life that just aren’t there anymore and that’s very unsettling for people.”

RABBI DANIEL GREEN
Adas Israel
Congregation

“I tell them we, as a community, will make sure their mother has a proper burial.”

RABBI HILLEL LAVERY-YISRAELI
Beth Jacob
Synagogue



much worse in her life, she often finds herself “sinking into despair.” She often feels afraid, for herself, her daughter and for the “future of us all.” Though she’s enjoyed some “really good productive days” during the pandemic, on other days, she feels like she’s “holding on to the edge of the cliff.”

Gabriele McSween, a social worker with Hamilton Jewish Family Services (HJFS), has heard many stories like this one. Since starting with the agency last July, McSween has seen a huge increase in people seeking her services. By mid-February, she was counselling more than 100 clients every month, some of whom are long-time HJFS clients, but also many who reached out after attending one of her online mental health workshops. The most well-attended of these was a six-week bereavement course, which McSween plans to offer again due to popular demand. “That group was very connected with one another and they actually built a support group for each other afterwards, which was wonderful,” she said.

HJFS counselling services are provided free of charge and McSween’s clients, who range in age from people in their 20s to 90-year-old Holocaust survivors, are suffering from ongoing anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. McSween encourages people to set up daily routines like starting a gratitude journal, reaching out to family, friends or neighbours, limiting the time they watch the news and taking advantage of community resources like the HJFS kibitz corner, a phone-in program for seniors. Some of McSween’s clients are seniors who are terribly burned out from caring for a spouse who suffers from dementia. To them, McSween provides gentle advice about how to deal with someone with Alzheimer’s, while advocating on their behalf with a long-term care home.

McSween says she gets a lot of satisfaction from her work, especially when she sees clients feeling better.

The pandemic’s impact on the developmentally delayed

When the province first went into lockdown last March, residents at Beth Tikvah, the Jewish community’s group home for adults with developmental disabilities experienced “a tremendous

amount of anxiety” due to an abrupt change in their routines, according to Beth Tikvah executive director Chris Barone. Not being able to walk from their Westdale home to their day programs, neighbourhood coffee shop or library, and denied the opportunity to meet with friends and family, had a profoundly negative affect on residents, said Barone. With the easing of restrictions last summer, Beth Tikvah folks were “just overjoyed that they could get back to some resemblance of routine,” but when COVID-19 numbers spiked again in the fall and winter, they experienced “frustration and exhaustion” from having their routines disrupted yet again.

The disruption of Jewish communal rituals

One of the most significant ways in which the pandemic has affected Jewish life is in how it’s disrupted communal rituals.

“There are a lot of rhythms of Jewish life that just aren’t there anymore and that’s very unsettling for people,” said the Adas Israel’s Rabbi Daniel Green. Nowhere is this more deeply felt than mourning rituals. “It isn’t so much what a person says when they’re coming to do a shiva visit. They’re next to you,” said Green. “The image that’s often used is you find yourself in a pit and you just want someone to come down into that pit with you. I don’t think Zoom enables people to come into a pit. From a soulfulness point of view, it doesn’t really fill that void.”

Rabbi Hillel Lavery-Yisraeli from Beth Jacob Synagogue said he’s had difficult conversations with the children of an ailing Shalom Village resident who have told him no one from the family, all of whom reside outside the country, will be able to attend her funeral should she die before COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. “I tell them that we as a community will take care of her, make sure she has a proper burial,” he said. “It’s absolutely heartbreaking, but what can we do? That’s where we are.”

People are, however, still finding spiritual sustenance when they need it. Attendance at Temple Anshe Sholom’s online services and adult education

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

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There is a brighter side to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns

CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE

“I’m seeing people actively reaching out by engaging in communal activities, in learning and in worship.”

classes has tripled over the last year, according to Rabbi Jordan Cohen. His conversion classes have gone from an average of four or five applicants per year to 18 people in the current year. “On the one hand, I think the isolation’s really making an impact on people’s mental and emotional health, but at the same time, I’m seeing people actively reaching out trying to combat that by engaging in communal activities, in learning and in worship,” he said.

Hana Werner, a Toronto-based teacher of the Bible and Jewish history, would probably agree with that assessment. Seventy students regularly attend her Sunday morning Zoom Bible classes, up from the 40 to 50 regulars at her pre-COVID in-person classes at Toronto’s Adath Israel Congregation. Werner transitioned to online teaching last June with the technological assistance of former Hamiltonian Alan Cohen, who has uploaded all of her lectures to his YouTube channel.

Werner is a strong believer that a healthy mind is connected to having a sense of purpose. Many of her contemporaries have lost that.

“People, especially elderly people, you know what they do? They have a plan for one thing per day,” she said, such as an outing with a friend, an exercise class or a volunteer commitment. Now that that’s been taken from them, “there’s despair, tremendous fear and a tremendous loss of freedom.”

Werner though, appears to be thriving. Part of it is the mental stimulation from the hours she spends meticulously planning her 75-minute lectures. But there is another reason.

“Never, in the winter time, did I venture out the way I’ve been venturing out. I don’t like winter,” she said, “But by the time I get dressed up with a mask and a scarf, coat, boots and gloves and all of that, I’m ready to go.” And go she does, at least three times a week, for 90-minute outings around her North York neighbourhood.

Vulnerable seniors see cognitive decline

For many seniors, however, health conditions like poor eyesight, arthritis

““Never, in the winter time, did I venture out the way I’m venturing out.”

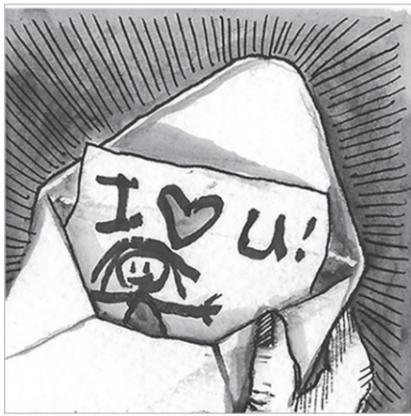
HANA WERNER
Bible and Jewish history teacher, Toronto

““Many days seemed to be exactly the same, but I loved the smell of her curls after a day outside together.”

SARI RICHTER
Artist and mother, Toronto

““I have a strong hunch that this COVID year may be one of the most successful years in my life.”

BENSON HONIG
Professor, McMaster University



or Parkinson’s disease, are keeping them confined to their homes, leading to, what Rabbi Green observed, is an alarming increase in cognitive decline among some of his congregants.

“The people who were having cognitive difficulties, they now have limited all their interactions with the outside world and are curling up. The decline is often astonishing,” he said.

But the rabbi is just as concerned for parents of young children, who he senses are having a difficult time, particularly when schools turn to online.

“Parents need space. They need space even if they’re not working, but particularly if they’re working. It’s really untenable,” he said.

Janet Weisz, who practices pediatric medicine in Burlington, is not surprised that parents are stressed. In an op-ed she penned for the Hamilton Spectator in February, Weisz referenced the significant increase in anxiety, depression, anger and eating disorders that she’s seen in children and teens since the onset of the pandemic. She told the HJN that much of this is related to the cyberbullying, which has worsened with younger people spending so much time in front of their screens. Weisz said she fears these issues will remain a problem after the pandemic due to a lack of funding for children’s mental health.

It’s not all bad news

The pandemic has had a negative impact on countless individuals, businesses and society at large, but it has also presented us with a unique opportunity to reflect on our lives and evaluate how we spend our time. Former Hamiltonian Sari Richter and her husband are raising a toddler in a Toronto neighbourhood with many other young families. Richter told the HJN that she enjoyed the way life slowed down “to a glacial pace” in the early months of the pandemic.

“There were no programs and activities to run off to. Parents weren’t spending hours commuting,” she said. “My husband was working long hours from home, but it still afforded him more time with us.” From May to November, Richter enjoyed a newfound simplicity of daily walks with her daughter to the park.

“We’d watch dogs, kick a ball, read under a tree, chat with friends and playground acquaintances from a distance in the big field,” she said. “Many days seemed to be exactly the same, and I missed our family and friends terribly, but I loved the grassy, sun-drenched smell of her curls after a day together outside.”

Before the pandemic, Benson Honig, a McMaster University professor in the DeGroote School of Business, was accustomed to boarding a plane every six weeks for a faraway destination to give a talk at an international conference. Now, he spends his time writing grants for programs to support budding entrepreneurs in developing countries. Honig said the COVID-19 pandemic has given him the time “to sit and think about what’s important.”

“I have a very strong hunch that this COVID year may be one of the most important and successful years in my life in terms of creating new opportunities, rethinking what I’m going to do... given the tools that I have and the opportunities that are available to me.”

When Cindy Mark’s income from her dental consulting business took a drastic hit during the first lockdown, her sense of self took a similar nosedive. But Mark eventually used her freed-up time to pursue an idea that had been percolating inside her head for quite a while. Today, she’s transitioned from coaching dentists to facilitating mutual support and accountability groups for solo entrepreneurs. Mark also volunteers with Out of the Cold and Hamilton Jewish Family Services, where she heads up its food bank committee. Mark says that losing her income was a huge hit on her self-worth, but she is very grateful that COVID-19 brought her back to volunteering.

Richter feels grateful too, although there were moments, especially at the beginning of the pandemic when she had to remind herself that she was “incredibly lucky.”

“At the very least, I can use ‘It’s fine, you don’t need to call. I only raised you in a pandemic,’” as my go-to Jewish guilt line on my daughter for the rest of my life.”

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Alexis Wenzowski nominated for prestigious award

Jewish Family Services executive director recognized for her visionary leadership through the pandemic

BY **ABIGAIL CUKIER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

IF YOU WANT to get something done, it may be a good idea to give it to Alexis Wenzowski.

Shortly after becoming executive director of Hamilton Jewish Family Services (HJFS) in April 2019, Wenzowski reached out to develop working relationships with other Hamilton social agencies, instituted learning sessions for seniors and began running mental health workshops. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, she guided staff in adapting their roles to create an online, socially distanced agency and expanded community supports to include dedicated case management, mental health counselling and enhanced food security programs.

“The needs of our agency have grown exponentially during COVID-19. So many have lost jobs, been ill and lost income, and demand for our services has grown significantly. Alexis has been a visionary, not only in meeting these needs, but going above and beyond to serve our growing client base,” says Susan Roth, past president of the HJFS board of directors.

Wenzowski was recently recognized for her hard work and dedication as a nominee for the YWCA Hamilton’s 2021 Women of Distinction Awards. The awards were retooled to reflect this

year’s theme—The Courage of COVID. The YWCA Hamilton honoured women who have shown exceptional courage in the face of the pandemic with awards in the categories of frontline workers, healthcare heroes, pandemic innovators, community champions and young trailblazers. There was also a lifetime achievement award. Wenzowski was nominated in the Community Champion category.

“When I found out I was being nominated, there really weren’t words to describe how I felt, humbled, privileged, emotional and grateful,” Wenzowski says. “I knew that the nomination from (Hamilton Jewish) Federation was also a testament to the work being done by my team and the impact we were having in the Jewish community and broader community. And, also, that this nomination wouldn’t have been possible without the support of the HJFS team and the community.”

According to Roth though, Wenzowski plays a large part in fostering that staff and volunteer engagement. “Alexis has enticed so many volunteers; young adults who have never volunteered before. Alexis definitely brings out the best in everyone,” says Roth.

With the pause on the hot lunch program for seniors in the agency’s day program, Wenzowski spearheaded the creation of the



PHOTO BY WENDY SCHNEIDER, HJN

Hamilton Jewish Family Services executive director Alexis Wenzowski speaking at the organization’s annual general meeting in 2019.

Kosher Meals on Wheels program, partnering with Adas Israel Synagogue and Hamilton Jewish Federation. With the help of volunteers, local schools and churches, Wenzowski ran the agency’s first community garden project, with the harvest going toward food bank recipients. Wenzowski also established a distanced grocery pick-up and delivery system.

“In the serious and sometimes heartbreaking work that needs to be done, Alexis still manages to make us laugh. Her humour endears her to both clients and staff and bridges our common humanity,” says Hanna Schayer, president, HJFS board of directors. “HJFS is recognized in the Jewish and larger community as the little engine that could and there is no doubt that the driving force behind that change is

Alexis. With a sizable toolbox of skills and smarts, which she delivers with loving kindness, she has made herself as indispensable to the community as any one person can be.”

Wenzowski’s contributions also reach beyond her daily work. A member of the Rotary Club of Dundas Valley Sunrise since January 2020, she took over leadership of one of the program organization teams in April. For two months, she steered the club on Zoom through the new processes required in response to COVID-19. She also envisioned a virtual Victoria Day Fireworks event to adapt the club’s popular traditional community celebration.

In July, Wenzowski joined the club’s board of directors as chair of the International Services Committee. In six months,

she finished a project with Six Nations Polytechnic, providing more than \$6,000 in support of the school’s robotics project. Her committee has also been pursuing a joint international literacy and community education project with a Nairobi Kenya Rotary Club.

Wenzowski’s interest in making a difference goes back a long way. In high school, she volunteered at McMaster Hospital and at the Westdale Library Reading Program. She says she followed the example of her parents and the many organizations they were involved in.

“My mother and her parents struggled when they first came to Canada. Being poor in the 1950s and ’60s was incredibly stigmatizing and my mom grew up with that. My grandparents both worked really hard and eventually bought their first home on Gary Avenue,” she says. Though life got easier, Wenzowski said her mother and grandparents never forgot how ashamed society made them feel for being poor, how services had let them down and that we all need help sometimes.

“I carried their stories with me, and I believe it shapes my work today. It is a reminder about the dignity of the person,” Wenzowski says. “It’s never been about choosing the easy path for me, but rather the one that is most interesting. The people I meet with, the communities I engage with, and the lessons I learn through helping, all make life interesting and more enriched.”

As we come together to celebrate Passover, Shalom Village extends our warmest wishes for a joyous and reflective holiday

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Hamilton and Windsor present online Jewish Film Festival

Hamilton and Windsor Jewish Federations see this as the first of new partnership opportunities

BY **ALYSON WENZOWSKI**
SPECIAL TO THE HJN

The Jewish Federations of Hamilton and Windsor are collaborating this May on a joint online Jewish Film Festival. The partnership between the popular Ruth and Bernard Friedman Windsor Jewish Film and the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival will feature 10 dynamic and acclaimed films. “The Hamilton Jewish Federation is delighted to partner with Windsor Jewish Federation in the creation of a Jewish Film Festival, allowing two small Jewish communities to engage in projects and initiatives that preserve and strengthen Jewish values and culture in both Canada and the United States,” said Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg.

The Windsor Jewish Festival, ongoing for more than 17 years, regularly attracts members of both the Windsor and Detroit Jewish communities.

“During these times of isolation, it is as important as ever for communities to connect and this partnership provides an exciting opportunity for our two great communities to connect through Jewish film,” said Richard Kamen, the Windsor Jewish Federation’s director of programming and senior services.

Rymberg is equally delighted by the prospect of a joint Jewish Film Festival. “With the combined online power of both the Windsor and Hamilton Jewish communities, we are bringing films with Jewish themes to a broader audience on both sides of the Canada-US border,” he said.

The Festival, which takes place from May 2 to 13, features the following acclaimed films:

THE KEEPER

United Kingdom, 2019; 113 minutes
A British-German biographical film about

Bert Trautmann, a German professional footballer who played as a goalkeeper for Manchester City from 1949 to 1964. His signing outrages thousands of fans. But Trautmann wins support from an unexpected direction: Rabbi Altmann, a Man City supporter who fled the Nazis, who publishes an open letter opposing the campaign against him. Audience Favorite Award - Baltimore Jewish Film Festival 2020.

THE MOVER

Latvia 2019 – Latvian with English subtitles, 87 minutes
Latvia’s official Academy Award entry for Best International Feature Film recounts the gripping true story of blue-collar worker Žanis Lipke’s epic rescue operation of Jews during the Second World War, for which he was later called “Latvia’s Schindler,” and was honored as one of the ‘Righteous Among the Nations’ for his heroic deeds. At the risk of endangering their own family, the Lipkes transported Jews from the Riga ghetto to an underground bunker hidden on their property. Winner - Best Foreign Film, 35th Haifa International Film Festival.

CRESCENDO

Germany, 2020 - English and German; 106 minutes
When a world-famous conductor tries to create an Israeli-Palestinian orchestra, it takes all his skill and resources to overcome the discord and get them to play in harmony, rising to a tense and emotional finale. Loosely inspired by Daniel Barenboim’s West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. Winner, Audience Award, San Diego Jewish Film Festival 2020.

THE CROSSING

Norway 2020 – Norwegian with English subtitles; 96 minutes

The story of 10-year-old Gerda and her brother Otto, whose parents are in the Norwegian resistance movement during the Second World War. The Crossing demonstrates that children, like adults, have the power to shape their world and make it better. Recommended for ages 11 and up. Winner of Best Children’s Film, Amanda Awards Norway.

MY NAME IS SARA

Poland-USA 2019 - English and Polish with English subtitles; 111 minutes
The true life story of Sara Goralnik, a 13-year-old Polish Jew whose entire family was killed by Nazis in September 1942. After a grueling escape to the Ukrainian countryside, Sara steals her Christian best friend’s identity and finds refuge in a small village, where she is taken in by a farmer and his young wife. She soon discovers the dark secrets of her employers’ marriage, compounding her own greatest secret that she must strive to protect, her true identity.

FIDDLER – A MIRACLE OF MIRACLES

USA 2019 – English; 1 hr 36 minutes
This documentary, that chronicles the life and themes of the iconic musical, Fiddler on the Roof, is essential to the understanding of why the story of Tevye the milkman is reborn again and again as beloved entertainment and cultural touchstone the world over. Audience Award, Toronto Jewish Film Fest 2019

LOVE IN SUSPENDERS

Israel 2019; Hebrew with English subtitles; 79 minutes
When an absent-minded widow accidentally hits a 70-year-old widower with her car, the last thing on her mind is love and romance. The two fall in love, but will their budding relationship survive the scrutiny of their children? A charming romantic

comedy for the young and young at heart.

SHEPHERD: THE STORY OF A JEWISH DOG

Hungary-USA 2019; English; 93 minutes
Kaleb, a beloved German Shepherd, is separated from his Jewish family when the Nuremberg Laws are enacted in Second World War Berlin. He is adopted by an SS Officer who trains him to attack and round up Jews at a concentration camp. His original master, a young boy named Joshua, arrives as a prisoner and boy and dog escape together.

UPSIDE DOWN TREE

Israel 2018; Hebrew with English subtitles; 73 minutes
Eva, a Jewish girl orphaned during the Second World War, is raised by an Ukrainian couple. After a mysterious woman presents herself as the child’s mother, Eva eventually decides to join her mother on a journey to Israel.

HERE WE ARE

Israel 2020 – Hebrew with subtitles; 94 minutes.
Aharon has devoted his life to raising his son Uri. They live together in a gentle routine, away from the real world. But Uri is autistic, and now as a young adult it might be time for him to live in a specialized home. While on their way to the institution, Aharon decides to run away with his son and hits the road, knowing that Uri is not ready for this separation. Or is it, in fact, his father who is not ready?

The Festival will also feature three Zoom Q&As moderated by The Westdale’s Fred Fuchs. Tickets are \$12.50 per film and can be purchased through jewishhamilton.org. More information about the films and Q&A sessions will also be available at jewishhamilton.org.



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McMaster's Department of Religious Studies appoints first Jewish chair

Department also welcomed Israel-based professor to its ranks

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

MCMMASTER UNIVERSITY'S Department of Religious Studies has announced that Professor Celia Rothenberg will begin a five-year term as chair of the department on July 1, 2021. As department chair, Rothenberg will oversee the graduate and undergraduate programs in Religious Studies, as well as represent the department in the Faculty of Social Sciences. In the past, Professors Adele Reinhart and Alan Mendelson have played pivotal roles in the Department of Religious Studies, but Rothenberg's appointment is the first Jewish Chair in the department's history and the second woman (the first woman was Professor Eileen Schuller).

Rothenberg started in the department in 2004, after completing her PhD at the University of Toronto. In 2006, she and her family moved to Dundas. Most recently, she has been researching and teaching in the areas of Jewish film and culture. Her most recent published work examined the work of film director and producer Robin Saexe Garbose, an Orthodox Jewish woman who produces films intended for female-only audiences. She has also published work on Star Wars, Jewish yoga, Jewish healing practices, and the work of Jewish



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCMMASTER UNIVERSITY

Professor Celia Rothenberg is slated to begin a five-year term as Chair of McMaster University's Department of Religious Studies.



PHOTO BY TAMAR ABADI

Dr. Meirav Jones came to the Department of Religious Studies under a three-year contract.

shaman Gershon Winkler.

Rothenberg said she is delighted for the opportunity to foster the study of religion for McMaster University undergraduate and graduate students, as well as for the Hamilton community. "Understanding religious practices and beliefs here and around the world is more important now than ever before," she said.

The Department of Religious Studies also welcomed Dr. Meirav Jones to its faculty in September.

Meirav and her family moved to Toronto from Israel this summer.

Originally from Australia, Jones received her PhD in Political Science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2013 and has since held research and teaching positions at the University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, Tel Aviv University, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research examines the intersection between religion and political and legal thought, recovering religious roots of secular legal and political ideas, and critically approaching the secular establishment with a rethinking of the role of religion at its foundations.

Jones, who taught two undergraduate courses on Religion and Law and Religion and Diversity this year, said it's been "very strange" to take on a new teaching position in a foreign country, during a pandemic. But she also says teaching at McMaster has been a learning experience.

"I've never taught such a diverse student body," she said. "Something I noticed last semester [is] that students from different socio-economic backgrounds were affected very differently from the pandemic. The ones who had to support their families were the same ones who got sick."

That's why Jones is devoting much of her time to working with students online on a one on one basis. "There's a lot of work in bridging gaps here which there wasn't at all in the past."

Beth Jacob town hall addresses possible cohabitation with Temple Anshe Sholom

BY **ABIGAIL CUKIER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

BETH JACOB Synagogue's building committee and executive held a virtual town hall Feb. 18 to update synagogue members on their work toward possible cohabitation with Temple Anshe Sholom, and to give members a chance to ask questions about the process.

Last June, leaders of Temple Anshe Sholom and Beth Jacob Synagogue sent letters to their members saying declining membership and rising debt compelled them into considering sharing space. The boards of both congregations endorsed moving ahead with the idea, though any final deal will have to be ratified by both congregations.

Leaders of both congregations said member dues, cost-cutting and fundraising drives are not enough to keep up with financial demands of two aging buildings—a situation only worsened by the cancellation of major fundraising events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both synagogues said they expect the challenges to only worsen.

At the Feb. 18 meeting, the committee shared results from its research, where they have evaluated various options to solve a problem that many synagogues in smaller communities are experiencing—a change in real estate needs, the costs associated with maintaining a large building and a reduction in membership dues. The committee told members that

the cohabitation concept is not new, citing numerous examples throughout North America.

The committee recognizes the potential for other options but says the benefits of cohabitation far outweigh those of other possibilities explored. Cohabitation will lead to financial savings by allowing the congregations to share operational costs and delivery of education. It will also provide greater opportunity for collaborative celebrations of holidays and programing (while maintaining each congregation's individual identity and services).

Cohabitation would help secure the sustainability of both congregations, while strengthening the overall Jewish community in Hamilton, committee members say. The collaboration is in the early stages and the two groups are working to ensure that cooperation is aligned between the lay leadership of each congregation. The committee says the collaboration phase will allow for full transparency with each congregation and for engagement from their members in determining and identifying needs and terms that will govern a successful cohabitation.

Beth Jacob Synagogue, on Aberdeen Avenue, was built in 1955 and extensively remodeled in 2011. Temple Anshe Sholom's current home on Cline Avenue North was opened in 1952 and expanded in 1965. Both shuls have active memberships of about 250 families. Hamilton has a Jewish population of about 5,000.

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Honouring the memories

Shalom Village mourns the loss of 20 residents to the COVID-19 outbreak. Now, as residents and staff emerge from the grief, we pause to acknowledge our shared loss

BY LAURIE PRINGLE

DIRECTOR, COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT, SHALOM VILLAGE

TO SAY THE PAST YEAR has been difficult would be the understatement of the century. Regardless of who you are or where you live, your life has been affected by COVID-19. Shalom Village is no different. The past year has taken us through so many ups and downs, that a roller coaster ride would've been more serene.

Like you, we have endured stress, sadness, frustration, humility, fear, anger, grief, heartbreak and more. On the other hand, we have also witnessed remarkable courage, resilience, generosity, kindness, compassion, and even joy. On some days, we cycle through these emotions as quickly as a roller coaster rises and plummets. It is dizzying and exhausting.

As you can imagine, caring for seniors in this environment results in sleepless nights, and worrisome days. Thanks to the wonderful scientists who worked tirelessly to develop vaccines, we now stand at the precipice of what we hope will be a period of recovery, joy, and celebration. As we, and the world prepare to move on from the pandemic, we know that first, we must acknowledge the pain and loss that each of us has experienced.

As many of you know, during the recent outbreak, Shalom Village lost 20 residents to COVID-19. Some of our staff members are also mourning loved ones lost to the pandemic. At the same time, family members of residents who passed away from other causes during the outbreak, mourned the passing of their loved ones without the support we typically provide to families.

We also wish to acknowledge our staff, many of whom have built deep, meaningful relationships with the residents they care for, and haven't had a moment to address their own grief and mourn their loss. We know that many of you may feel alone, or you may be struggling to deal with grief, or other emotions resulting from pandemic related loss, or isolation. To address this, Shalom Village will host a two-part memorial to remember all those we lost during the outbreak.

The first part of the memorial will take place in early April online, and feature video tributes to the remarkable people (whose families have agreed to participate) we lost during the outbreak. Our goal is to ensure that they will be remembered for all the uniquely wonderful contributions and characteristics they gave to each of us and to the world.

If circumstances allow, we will hold the second part of the memorial in the summer, when we will dedicate a memorial garden in honour of those lost during the outbreak. The "Lock in Your Love Garden" will enable people to reflect on the lives of their loved ones and leave behind something to honour their memory. Like the lovers' bridge in Paris, the garden will contain

a structure where loved ones can secure a lock, ribbon, or other small item amid the flowers and trees.

We hope that, by the summer, the pandemic will be in retreat, so that we can bring our little village together for the dedication, as a way to repair our world and move as one into the future. We envision the dedication ceremony to be a celebration of life, renewal, and with a little luck, a future without COVID-19. We hope it will be safe for you to join us, as we reflect on the past, and renew our spirits with optimism, hope and joy.

Our village is made up of a diverse group of people who come together

to support the seniors who call Shalom Village home. Our seniors, their family members, staff members, donors, the Jewish and Greater Hamilton communities have steadfastly supported Shalom Village throughout the pandemic. You have held us accountable, while also lifting our spirits. You have donated. You have brought signs to remind staff of your gratitude. You have shared your thoughts, fears, and grief with us. You let us lean on you when we needed balance—and thanks to your steadying influence and support, we are once again standing on solid ground.

We are here to work on your behalf to provide care, compassion, and a better life for the seniors who depend on Shalom Village. And it is in that spirit that we call upon our community to come together to remember, comfort, and celebrate a new future.

The saying "it takes a village" has become a cliché, but here at Shalom Village, we know that it takes a village to build, sustain and support our community. You have done all these things and more for our seniors, and we want this garden to recognize our glorious village in a meaningful way.

Due to the pandemic, we will not be hosting a Hustle 4 Health this year. In lieu of an event, we would like to invite you to consider supporting our Lock in Your Love Memorial Garden, when we launch the campaign in spring.

We can't think of a better way to remember those we have lost, and to honour all those still with us. We hope you agree, and we look forward to working with the community to bring the Lock in Your Love Memorial Garden to fruition. Perhaps, together, we can find triumph in the face of tragedy by creating a beautiful space that celebrates life, love and the village that made it possible. Further details will be shared as we finalize arrangements and speak with family members.



Hope and resilience

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

THE NEWS, when it came, sent shock waves through the Jewish community. For the first 10 months of the pandemic, Shalom Village had managed to hold the COVID-19 coronavirus at bay through stringent protocols and screening. But the residence and long-term care home ran out of luck in December, when virus swept through the home with alarming speed, eventually killing 20 residents. The outbreak would keep residents confined to their rooms for two months, with Shalom Village staff filling in for family members.

Below, Vanessa Pazzi, wellness coordinator for the apartments, and Brigitte Bonas, recreation manager for long term care reflect on the resilience they witnessed during the lockdown.

HJN: What was it like for residents during the lockdown?

BONAS: They were so scared. Can you imagine all of a sudden you're locked in a room? A lot of people are not well, and the staff changed, and there weren't people they knew anymore. We had such a buzz here—we had great events, parties and trips ... and all of a sudden we were on pause. Some of them didn't even know who we were when we walked in their room with all the PPE we had to wear.

PAZZI: Some (of the apartment residents) coped better than others. Some were quite fearful, especially not having family able to visit. Some said they felt really grateful that they were living in a place like Shalom and not isolated out in the community.

HJN: What changed for the staff during this period?

BONAS: The recreation team at the Shalom Village nursing home stepped in like family. The residents recognize us and they're kind of secure with us. We brought them treat carts, did art in the room, and we spent a lot of our time facilitating Zoom calls with family members.

PAZZI: We used our in-house cable channel to offer exercise, Jewish Family Services' Kibitz program, and movies right to their apartments, and most days they'd have a visit from a staff member just to sit with them. Residents also received phone calls from people in the community so that was helpful too.



PHOTO BY DONNA WAXMAN

Above: "Love locked in" is a daily reality at Shalom Village as is apparent in this 2019 photo of resident Pat Procter enjoying a moment with staff member Emma Villanueva.

HJN: What were some of the hardest moments during that period?

BONAS: I had one man return from hospital and I was quite close to him. I walked into his room and he said, 'when did you start working here?' He was so happy to know it was me and then he said to me, 'hug me,' but I can't hug him so I said, 'let me take your arms' and I just held him. And I gave him his dinner. He'd gone through a lot. He'd been away, came back to Shalom, and then he died. Some people are family. We spend so much time with them. You just get so close to them. You can't help it.

PAZZI: The residents certainly missed their families, and the lack of touch affected them. But I'm actually blown away by how some of them have taken to using technology, like learning an iPad in their 90s and how to connect to programs over the telephone. So although I think they have struggled, I am surprised by how resilient they've been.

HJN: How have things changed since the lockdown?

BONAS: I love the people that live here. We're really close now because we've all been through this, and I have a lot of respect for my staff. These are young people who care and work crazy long shifts. I have recreation and music therapy students coming back. They'll be tested and they'll be brought back to work with the residents. They still want to come intern at Shalom even if they have to get COVID tested, and have a placement in an environment that is really safe.

PAZZI: Our residents are so happy just to be out in the hall. They can walk in the hallways with their mask on. They can go for a walk outside if they choose to. They've been vaccinated, and so has the staff. Having that little light of hope has made a big difference in their world. We are a very close-knit community. We've had residents who have lived in other communities say they came here because it feels more like a family here. The Jewish community has been so supportive. They've reached out to us with special deliveries, donations and phone calls. I think that's what sets us apart as well. Even if you're not Jewish, that support is still available to you as a resident and has been a really big part of getting through this.



STRONGER THAN EVER, STRONGER TOGETHER.

Our entire community, along with much of the world, has been impacted by the pandemic.

Since the beginning of March of 2020, when the Great Lockdown gradually extended its tentacles across the globe, as an initial response to the exponential spread of a novel coronavirus, few may have thought that a year later, we were going to still be ensconced as if in a state of siege. This overwhelming reality has separated us from our loved ones, friends, and co-workers. It has imposed rigid norms that have forced us to alter and adapt our behaviours and routines to strict social distancing. Going out of our houses for a leisurely walk, socializing, or working at our convenience did not figure as substantial earlier. These current times, however, have made the four walls of our houses visible and tangible. The world has shrunk to the boundaries of our homes. The idea of roaming around freely did not feel 'normal' anymore. This pandemic has forced us to witness life in a very unusual way.

Our Jewish day schools have cancelled in-person classes and shifted to online learning. Many synagogues have cancelled in-person services; at JHamilton we have cancelled all our in-person events, and for an extended period, our staff worked remotely. The way we work has changed, but we continue to operate at total capacity to deliver the services our community needs. During a crisis like this, Federation's role as a vital community resource becomes crystal clear:

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COVID-19 will remain part of our lives until its vaccine becomes available; it is perhaps too soon to ask, "how is life going to look like post-COVID-19," but it is a given that life before and after Covid-19 will not be the same.

Still, Hamilton Jewish Federation will be there working for you, your family and the entire community.

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You can't go home again



Ben Shragge

I DIDN'T MOVE very far from my hometown. Boston is about an eight-hour drive from the Greater Hamilton-Toronto Area: farther than Montreal, but closer than most of Canada's other scattered cities. The language is the same (with some differences in accent), the culture is similar (if more individualistic), and the winters are still cold (though measured in Fahrenheit). I'm even in the same time zone.

Of course, there's a border in the way, but that hasn't been closed since the war of 1812. Since I moved to Boston in 2016, I've been back to Southern Ontario annually, whether by car or by a flight that's faster and cheaper than most flights within Canada. My main inconvenience was having to wait in a separate visa line when returning through US airports.

Then came COVID19. It's now been almost two years since I've been back to Canada and seen my family: an unwanted personal record. To be clear, though Canada has closed its borders to non-essential travel, I'm a Canadian citizen and can return at any time. However, as a green card applicant, I can't leave the US without forfeiting my application: and because of the pandemic, visa processing is interminably delayed. So we circle right back to COVID as the cause.

Even before COVID, I felt the meaning of the expression "you can't go home again." You can't go home again because you've changed, and home has changed, so all you can go back to is a memory. To move from the abstract to the personal: before I left for the US, my dad passed away, my family home was sold, and I'd outgrown my job. Even if I'd remained in Canada, I couldn't have stayed where I once was: there was no more "once was" to stay at. The lesson, which goes back to Adam and Eve leaving Eden, is to move forward and create a new

home of your own.

In Genesis, the Lord places cherubim and a flaming sword at Eden's entrance to prevent reentry. Pandemic-related bureaucracy is a much less dramatic barrier, and the Golden Horseshoe is far from paradise. Nonetheless, COVID has similarly functioned as a spur for me to move on in life, even while sheltering in place. I got married, as planned, in a much more isolated way than planned. We bought a house, driven by a quarantine-accelerated appreciation for more space. And I felt all in on my life here, after previous spells of homesickness and doubt.

Beyond the rather old example of Adam and Eve, I can look to more recent ancestors for inspiration. My great grandparents journeyed from late Tsarist and Hapsburg decrepitude to remotest Winnipeg, where they were among the subjects of the 1883 Free Press article "Hebrew Refugees Perishing from Hunger and Cold." They made a new life in a new land, adjusting and ultimately flourishing in a foreign language,

climate, and culture. By comparison, my own journey from the English-speaking, industrialized Great Lakes of Canada to the English-speaking, industrialized east coast of the US was a small skip. Only recently have I felt a fraction of what they must have felt as permanent exiles from the Old World.

Of course, in today's world (at least before COVID, and hopefully after), making a new home for yourself is not mutually exclusive with visiting your birthplace, seeing international family and friends, and connecting new roots with old roots. Migration and independence don't have to mean banishment and estrangement. As much as I've tried to make some good out of it, a pandemic is one of the few things all humans can agree is unambiguously, objectively very bad. I look forward to herd immunity and open borders, speedily in our days: hopefully by the summer.

Ben Shragge is the digital editor of the Hamilton Jewish News. He currently lives in Boston.

Hillel worked hard at creating a virtual community this year



Judith Dworkin

LIFE CHANGED VERY suddenly for McMaster Hillel students on March 17, 2020. I remember sitting with the Hillel student president and saying that I thought everything was going to shut down, and that the formal that we had planned for the following week would have to be cancelled. Sure enough, a few hours later, the announcements started coming in.

Students have had a very different academic year, one that they have never experienced before. There has been isolation, lack of extracurricular activities and little to no in-person contact. During a recent McMaster Hillel student executive meeting on Zoom, I told the students that we are in the business of community so we need to think creatively about what it feels like to be part of this community. How does one do this in a pandemic, when campus is

closed and when we don't see each other at all? How do we know how each of us are doing? Are we alone? Are we lonely? Are we coping? Do we bring our best selves to a Zoom and then grapple alone with our worries? These are the questions that I struggle with when trying to support the Jewish student community.

From the beginning, Hillel pulled out all the pandemic stops to connect with students. Shabbat in a box and delivered to you? Yes! Zoom games night? Yes! Mental health and wellness box? Sign up here! We have you covered. These programs and services were created to keep our community together while at our own homes. We are able to connect through a screen and eat dinner, not together, but knowing that there were more than 70 students enjoying the same meal in the comfort of their own homes as well. And we connected face to face over Zoom before and after, while enjoying our rugelach, of course.

All of these programs are great, but the individual connections are even more paramount. A text to a student to check in, a

happy birthday wish on their special day or a condolence call to those who have lost loved ones. For me, it's about making the extra effort to make a student feel special. Does the student have dietary needs that we can fulfill and can we make this student feel seen by making a special box for them? Did a student forget to sign up for a Shabbat box, and do we have an extra meal for them anyway? Can we put an extra dessert in a bag, just because we know that student had a tough week? Even though we are in Hamilton, can we make an extra effort so that our Toronto or out-of-province students also feel a part of our community by sending them mailings and deliveries so they feel part of our programming? Having inclusive programming is a cornerstone of Hillel's mandate. In a pandemic, that's even more true.

There are so many feelings of missing the social connection and of loss. A weekly bagel lunch was something that students looked forward to, a chance to hang out and eat lunch together. Trying to replicate that on Zoom isn't the same and that

is something we have been missing a lot. The feelings of loss will take some time to unpack. There is also the loss of living in residence for a first year or a graduation ceremony for graduates. Important milestones in a young person's life have changed and these events can't be replicated in the same way.

I miss seeing the students. I miss hanging out in the Hillel office and chatting over a bagel and cracking jokes over the lineup at the toaster. I miss bumping into students on campus, catching up on their lives, and being part of a place where they come for comfort and support (and food!). With all the programming and outreach we have done in the past 10 months, I hope that we can continue to maintain our virtual community, and that even though we are not in person, our students know we are still here for them. While the medium may have changed, the sentiment certainly has not.

Judith Dworkin is the director of McMaster Hillel.

Online hate has gone viral during COVID



Judy Zelikovitz

SINCE THE BEGINNING of the pandemic, we have been confronted by two viruses: COVID-19 and, in its wake, the rampant spread of online hate.

As much of the world has been forced indoors, our time on the internet using social media has increased, which has advantages. We have found new ways to engage, stay in touch with our loved ones, and maintain and transform our connections to our workplaces and the world.

But the same technologies that have allowed us keep connected have also served as springboards for the spread of online hate and conspiracy theories, which form the perfect Venn diagram of antisemitism.

Since the pandemic broke, we have witnessed the emergence of ludicrous conspiracy theories accusing Jews of being responsible for the spread of COVID-19 or of profiting from the havoc. As a community that has consistently encouraged compliance with public health measures, we may be tempted to dismiss these outlandish conspiracy theories as nonsense. It is a type of nonsense, however, that spreads quickly and remains a cause for great concern.

Recent history has taught us that what begins online as the absurd mutterings of a few haters can, and too often does, turn into real-world violence.

What we witnessed in Pittsburgh, Christchurch, and Halle can certainly happen again. The threat is even greater today because people are spending more time online while also under considerable financial and emotional stress, a combination that makes people even more

susceptible to messages online hate-mongers are peddling.

Curbing online hate has been a priority for our community – and therefore for CIJA – for nearly a decade. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have remained on high alert, monitoring the emergence of antisemitic and hateful activity and bringing it to the attention of law enforcement and social media platforms.

Recently, we launched Stop the Transmission! a campaign powered by CIJA and funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Anti-Racism Action Program. The campaign has provided practical tools and tips to hundreds of thousands of Canadians to identify and slow the spread of conspiracy theories, misinformation, and deliberate disinformation.

We have also engaged directly with social media giants and are proud to have collaborated with our colleagues at the World

Jewish Congress to urge Facebook to ban Holocaust denial, one of the most pernicious forms of Jew-hatred, from its platform, an action the company took earlier this year.

We continue to call on social media companies to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism, the most widely accepted definition in use today, including by the Government of Canada who adopted it as formal policy in its 2019 Anti-Racism Strategy. In response to the global collective effort of our community, Facebook's COO Sheryl Sandberg said that "the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism has been invaluable – both in informing our own approach" and that Facebook would "continue to refine" its "policy lines as speech and society evolve."

Judy Zelikovitz is vice president, University and Local Partner Services, The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA).

Friendship in the time of the pandemic

A local author finds through writing that our stories need people just as much as people need stories

BY HARVEY STARKMAN
SPECIAL TO THE HJN

THIS STORY begins with a name on a wall. A name on a wall in a very cold and nearly empty synagogue in Bayonne, France on a cool but sunny Shabbat morning in early March, just before the world began to take COVID-19 seriously. It was an Ashkenazi name in a 19th century Judeo Portuguese Temple, a name I pronounced in the Ashkenazi manner, forgetting that in France the sound of words matters, so the ending of ‘Ginsburger’ is pronounced ‘jay.’

Ernest Ginsburger was the Grand Rabbin, the Great Rabbi, of Bayonne. He arrived there in 1930, a 54-year-old widower with two small children, already famous for his scholarship. He was arrested there in 1942 by the occupying German authorities on charges of scheming against Germany. In February 1943, after nine months of detention as a political prisoner, he was transported to Auschwitz where he died within hours of stepping onto the railway platform.

These are hard facts easily obtained through simple online searches. But could I write about Ernest Ginsburger in a way that would interest my readers? Actually, I was having trouble writing about anything during my initial weeks of quarantine and province-wide lock down. I wanted to write. I wanted to return to some semblance of regular life where I would have research and work that would fill the hours of the day.

In distancing myself from the reality of the here and now, I wrapped myself up in Bayonne and its Jewish past. I considered writing about how Converso Jews, a step ahead of the Inquisition, arrived in the city in the late 15th century, turned their backs on Spain and Portugal and claimed their Jewish faith again. Or about how and why the Jewish community grew and prospered over time, reaching its peak in the mid 19th century, when it began to decline. Its grand Temple, built with pride and confidence in 1837 is now in disrepair, its aging congregation shrinking year by year like small Jewish communities everywhere.

It was while stumbling along these paths of inquiry, still not knowing where I was going, that I made an unexpected discovery.

The descendants of the Judeo Portuguese communities in France built three major ‘Temples’ in the 19th century, known as the three ‘B’s for their locations: Bayonne, Bordeaux, and Buffault. Temple Buffault is actually in Paris, on the Rue Buffault in the fashionable Opera district. The Temple’s website is rich with information on the history of the Jews in France, architectural periods in synagogue design, and more. But it was while browsing the Contacts page that I made my most important discovery: I found the Ginsburger name again.

Ernest Ginsburger in the Temple in Bayonne; P. Ginsburger in the Temple

Buffault? On the pretext of thanking the synagogue for its valuable resources, I emailed P. Ginsburger. At the end, as if an after thought, I asked if perhaps he might be related to the late Grand Rabbin of Bayonne?

‘I am the son of Ernest Ginsburger and a Second World War veteran,’ Philippe Ginsburger replied. Then he offered me a book that his father had written on the Jewish community of Bayonne along with a promise to show me his synagogue when we returned to Paris at the end of the pandemic.

I was first struck by the warmth and incredible generosity of his reply; then by the recognition that if Philippe Ginsburger was the son of the Rabbi and a veteran of the Second World War, he had to be ... old. Just how old, I wondered. The answer came a few weeks later, in the biographical introduction to Ernest Ginsburger’s history, *Les Juifs de Bayonne*. Philippe was born in 1922. My correspondent was about to turn 98.

When sociologists analyse the dynamics of friendships, they distinguish between strong tie and weak tie connections. The relative strength of the tie is likely a combination of four factors: the length of the relationship, its emotional intensity, the degree of intimacy or emotional sharing, and the ratio of shared giving and taking that occurs.

Philippe, a stranger, had opened a door. In my reply, I spoke of the research I was doing, my personal connection and attachment to France, and the work I had already completed. ‘Your father’s book will be a great help to me,’ I concluded. ‘So would an ongoing conversation, and perhaps a long-distance friendship, if you are willing.’

Re-reading this now, I am surprised at my boldness and that I spoke of ‘friendship.’ I do not use ‘friend’ easily. I have argued with others — sometimes heatedly — when they used it to describe what I considered casual connections with people I’d call ‘acquaintances’ if I characterized them at all.

For whatever reason, Philippe did write back and our email exchanges increased. Our early conversations focused on my questions about events or details — the who, what, and when? — mostly about his father’s life or the Bayonne community. But even in these early letters, I found myself giving information in return, making connections whenever I could.

The more I write, the better I understand that stories need people just as much as people need stories. Readers look for a human connection, if only as an anchor for whatever idea or subject is to be the writer’s focus. If I was going to write about Ernest Ginsburger, I needed more than facts. I needed a sense of his inner life, and how his personality and tragic death affected those closest to him. I knew that these questions would be difficult for Philippe,



PHOTO: NAME GOES HERE



Labo. Itat vere, aute volupid estrum quatur? Equi tem solenis soluptaest ea dolorpor sitiis sum iminuscius et,

Labo. Itat vere, aute volupid estrum quatur? Equi tem solenis soluptaest ea dolorpor sitiis sum iminuscius et,

even though the actual events happened decades before. I knew this because when discussing his own life during the Second World War, whether as a ‘resistant’ hiding in the hill country of central France or as a much decorated ‘combatant’ fighting the German army in bloody final stage battles before Liberation, he always focused on factual details, never on his feelings. And I needed to ask for just that, for a sharing of feelings. ‘Now comes the really hard part,’ I wrote, ‘because it is so personal.’

I believe that if you ask someone to share their feelings, you should be prepared to give no less in return. So I told Philippe this story about myself:

When I was a child, my father told me that his mother and two brothers had been ‘lost’ in the War. He didn’t talk to me about the Holocaust, and we were not yet using the word Shoah. Because I was a child who loved his father, I wanted very much to ‘find’ them for him. Every time we travelled, I would look in the telephone

book to see if I could find their names, call them, and return them to him. I did that for a long time, even when I knew better.

Then I waited to see how Philippe would reply.

‘I am able, as a very old man, to answer your questions,’ his email began. And so we move forward.

Perhaps being isolated in this time of COVID adds intensity to an appreciation of friendship; maybe it makes us recognize and even acknowledge our need for connection with others. In our case, maybe it’s the distance; maybe it’s the very real consciousness of time. Whatever drives Philippe and me, our conversations continue week after week. I eagerly anticipate each email. I hope he does too.

“There are always more questions” I wrote in one of my Subject Lines.

“There is always an answer,” he replied.

New mother finds pandemic parenting takes a village

Raising a newborn during a lockdown wasn't easy, so Abiella King found a solution that worked for everyone

BY **ABIELLA KING**
SPECIAL TO THE HJN

I WAS FIVE MONTHS pregnant when the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. I had only recently started to show, had just felt the first thrill of recognition when a stranger offered me their seat on the subway. We were (we are) incredibly lucky. Toronto was soon under lockdown, but my husband, Brian, and I were both able to keep working remotely. The baby was small, requiring frequent ultrasounds, but otherwise healthy. New restrictions meant that Brian was not allowed to accompany me to appointments, but we took solace in the knowledge that he would be allowed at the birth.

Everything was unusual until it wasn't. We Zoomed for work, for holidays, for happy birthdays sung woe-fully out of sync. We quarantined the baby gifts his parents dropped off during chilly driveway visits. We walked, winding through neighbourhood sidewalks, exchanging knowing glances with families we passed, six feet apart. An induction was scheduled and we crossed remaining days off on the calendar with childlike wonder, marveling at the intensity of kicks and hiccups. There was this too – a plan to anchor us when the idea of learning how to parent alone, without visitors, left our heads spinning.

When I told friends that we were contemplating moving in with my parents, I would say that since Brian was now working from home, we wanted to bubble with family and enjoy the help and company while we could.

I explained the move as if it was the result of a global pandemic, something we would not have considered otherwise. We were in our thirties, about to have a baby. We were on the precipice of what we imagined would be a different kind of adulthood, one that marked the end of being parented. If afforded the choice and privilege, why go back?

And then he arrived.

It started in the hospital; the first time Evan really cried. I cradled his small body and the weight of responsibility, his utter helplessness, bore heavy into my chest. I underestimated the reality of our new existence, as most new parents are wont to do. It wouldn't have made a difference – it's difficult to anticipate the shape of those early weeks without knowing which edges will be made sharpest for you. Our labour was uncomplicated and fast. Evan was calm, and easy to soothe. But I could not feed him.

I tried not to panic when he rooted, willing this feed to be different, for him to latch. When he didn't, my husband would feed him with a small tube, and I would wallow in my failure, prickling with adrenaline and a dulling pain that would return with force with each successive attempt. I had no sense of when or how it would get better, but I knew we could not do it alone. So it was that we found ourselves leaving the apartment my husband had so lovingly prepared for Evan, his room unused, and made the three-hour trip to my parents' home. I was a mother, yes, who needed to be mothered.

Moving home did not make nursing easier, but it was the salve that allowed me to work at it. I did nothing else. My parents fed us, did our laundry, loved Evan fiercely. When my husband went back to work, my mom took time off so she could stay up instead, sending me to bed between each nighttime feed and holding Evan while he slept.

I had avoided sharing my real reason for moving home, which was that I feared we could not do this ourselves, because it felt like admitting failure. It should have felt like gratitude. Gratitude for our ability to be with family when too many could not. Gratitude for our parents – mine and Brian's – who were here and offering every ounce of support they could.

My name, roughly translated from Hebrew, means "a gift from our fathers." I was named to honour the grandfathers I never met, who died before my parents met, when they were younger than I am now. Creating a home of your own is an immense privilege, but so is having the choice to go back. When I think of parenting in a pandemic, I think of this gift afforded to us by sheer happenstance. I think of the stories of parents struggling in isolation, of the impossibility of working and parenting at the same time, without help, without rest, and I know that we are the lucky few. When I tell Evan about his birth, and the months that followed, I will tell him that we were rarely alone. I will tell him that most weeks were spent in his grandparents' homes. I will tell him that we quickly lost count of our blessings.

Six weeks passed and breastfeeding was no longer painful. Free of this singular focus, my experience of mothering expanded, making space for new



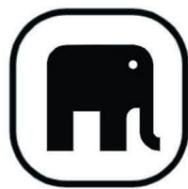
PHOTO BY CLIVE SCHNEIDER FRIEDMAN

Above: Brian and Abiella King with their child, Evan.



Left: Brynah Schneider Friedman cherished the time she spent with her newborn grandson.

and unimaginable joys. To grow into motherhood alongside my parents was like this - to be stunned by the love I felt for my son, to see him in my parents' arms. To know they held me this way once, they loved me this way still.



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An excerpt from Gary Barwin's imaginative new novel

Barwin's latest book, *Nothing the Same, Everything Haunted*, explores genocide, persecution, colonialism and masculinity with characteristic irony

BY **GARY BARWIN**
SPECIAL TO HJN

1. *Vilnius (Vilna), Lithuania.*
July 1941

Motl. Jewish cowpoke. Brisket Boy. My grandfather.

As usual, he was bent over the kitchen table, his mottled and hairy nose deep in the pale valley of a book, half-finished plate of herring beside his elbow, half-eaten egg bread slumped beside a Shabbos candlestick. His old mother was out shopping for food while she still could.

So, this Motl, was he a reader?

If the world was ending, he would keep reading.

The world was ending. He was still reading.

So, what was this book he had to read despite everything?

One of the great westerns of the American frontier, of course. Even though he knew that Hitler adored them.

"The master race should be brave as Indians," Der Führer had said, and sent boxes of Karl May's *Winnetou* noble savage novels to the eastern front to inspire his troops – those same manifest destiny soldiers crossing the country with orders to kill Motl, his mother and all the other Jews.

Did Motl intend to do something about this?

Yes. He would sit at the table, his shlumpy jacket turned up at

the collar, his hat like a shroud of mice askew on his sallow head, and read.

Was Motl a man of action?

"If parking his tuches all day and all night on a chair doing nothing but reading is action," his mother would say, "he's a man of action. Action, sure. Every day he gets older and more in my way."

Why was he still reading this western?

Because Motl, this Litvak, this Lithuanian Jew, this inconceivable zaidy, my grandfather, this citizen of the Wild East—that brave old world of ever-present sorrow, a sorrow that had just gotten worse—had chosen the life of the cowboy.

He would be that hombre who sits on his chair and imagines being calm and steady and manly, speaking only the fewest of well-chosen words, doing only what he wanted and what he must under that vast, unpatented western sky.

"And why not?" he would say. "Should my life be nothing but the minced despair and boiled hope of an aging Jew, too thin to be anything but borscht made by Nazis? I choose to think myself a Paleface chuck line rider of the doleful countenance, a Quixotic Ashkenazi of the bronco, riding the Ostland trail. Like my mother said when I told her I wanted to be a doctor, 'Mazel tov, Motl. Nothing is impossible when it's an illusion.'"

He would say, "What's the difference between a Jewish cowpoke

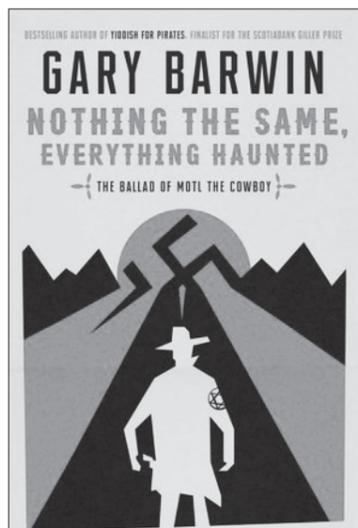
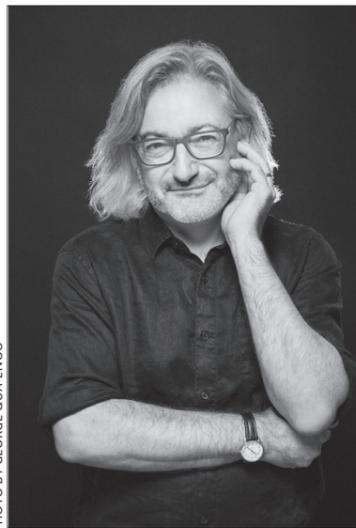


PHOTO BY GEORGE OUA-ENOO



Gary Barwin is a writer, composer, and multidisciplinary artist, and the author of 23 books of poetry, fiction and books for children. His recent national bestselling novel, *Yiddish for Pirates*, won the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour as well as the Canadian Jewish Literary Award and the Hamilton Literary Award. It was also a finalist for both the Scotiabank Giller Prize and the Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction. A PhD in music composition, Barwin has taught creative writing at a number of colleges and universities. Born in Northern Ireland to South African parents of Ashkenazi descent, Barwin lives in Hamilton, Ontario.

and beef jerky? It's the hat. And feeling empty as a broken barrel. Jerky don't never feel such hollowness, least not by the time it's jerky. But the cowboy, the cowboy keeps riding. He don't look back. Eventually, if he's lucky, he too becomes leathernand feels only what jerky feels."

Motl. Citizen of Vilna. Saddlebag of pain. Feedbag of Regret.

At forty-five, he had a history. As a Lithuanian Jew, he was pickled in it.

But though neither he nor his mother knew it at the time, something had changed. Somewhere, deep down in the overworked mine shaft of his imagination, it had been determined that he would set out on a perilous adventure, this time of his own choosing. He would get up on his horse and ride.

And he would have a child.

At his age.

And avoid being killed.

Sometimes you have to save your own bacon, when you're a Jew.

The next day, he went to the barber's. Even a grown man will cave in to his mother's demands that he groom if she won't make food for him. Eyes closed, a Texas reverie floating through his mind like the scent of campfire, Motl lay back in the red chair and awaited his shave.

But then:

"Under a hot towel, a cowpoke can think big thoughts, but to act he must stand up," he said.

He stood up.

For a moment, the towel hung from his jowls, the Santa beard of a Hebrew god. Then it fell away.

"Barber," Motl said. "I must seize these last days while the possibility of life remains."

The barber said nothing, wet blade held between trembling fingers.

"The kabbalists speak of repairing the world, healing what is broken. It's my time," he said, looking round that hair-strewn palace of strop and whisker, that little

shop of Hebrews.

"Barber, I thank you, for I have learned much under your towel." Shave and a haircut.

Did the barber, Shmuel, expect payment? Two bits.

Did Motl toss him these two coins before his impromptu departure?

Having had neither shave nor haircut, he only waved, then high-tailed it into the bright sun of Shnipishok, that region of Vilna whose name sounds like scissor blades. He ran through its streets, feeling open to possibility and getaway.

Did Shmuel chase him with his blade?

Let's say it was a close shave.

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Seven years ago, Louis Stroud fell into tree care through a chance phone call. After working for a large company for two years, he decided to take the leap and start his own company. Thanks to your support, 2021 will be Westwood Tree Care's sixth year in business.

As an effort to offset the footprint they create as a company, Westwood Tree Care started the "We cut one. We plant one" initiative. They have helped plant more than 8,000 trees in countries that are in the direst of need, and over the last year they planted 10 trees for every one they cut down.

This job is his passion and aside from the beauty of working outdoors all year, Louis and his team cherish the fact that they get to work for amazing customers like yourselves. Wishing the community a happy Passover. Thank you so much for supporting Westwood Tree Care.

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Kehila Students planting seeds indoors, which will then be transplanted into our community garden in May.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEHILA HESCHEL

Kehila Heschel School

ANITA BERNSTEIN

Social action and environmental stewardship are fundamental pillars of the Kehila Heschel school philosophy. In the past three years, our students have been cultivating vegetable gardens, which donate their produce to the Hamilton Jewish Family Services Food Bank.

Through Kehila Heschel's integrated curriculum, the gardens are an experiential learning tool for enhancing academic success, supporting students' well-being and cultivating the development of the whole student – cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. The gardens are a vehicle to achieve learning goals within the curriculum such as measurement, business, eco system, environment, science, literacy, food and nutrition, and art. In addition, students learn about their civic duty to help others who are in need as well as history as they study the planting of complementary crops such as the three sisters (corn, squash and beans) in indigenous gardens. Inclusion in the planning and growth of the gardens further enhances students' sense of belonging, social skills, problem solving and abilities in planning and negotiating. They develop leadership and collaborative

skills by identifying shared goals and priorities that are responsive to the needs of the community. Kehila Heschel students learn the impact their efforts can make in Tikkun Olam – taking care of the earth – and in helping others through tzedakah and justice.

This year, Kehila Heschel school is delighted to join with a number of community partners to further expand the objectives of our community gardens.

How does your Garden grow: Planting the Seeds for Youth and Philanthropy Partnership Project has as its mission to encourage young people to become involved in positive change in their community. The goals of this project are to increase awareness of important issues such as environmental changes, food security and social networks; increase young students' awareness of how they may contribute through generosity and philanthropy; and collaborate with community partners to improve quality of life. Community partners will include Kehila Heschel School, Hamilton Jewish Family Services, Na'amat Hamilton and Women for Change.

TAS Religious School

DORA ANN COHEN ELLISON

TEMPLE STUDENTS are Zooming into class twice a week for engaging, creative and hands-on Jewish learning. I would like to take the opportunity to thank our amazing teachers, Ellen Orgel, Rebecca Sampson, Sonja Botnick, Cantor Baruch and Rabbi Cohen, for creating new and exciting lessons that utilize some amazing digital resources available to Jewish educators. We've also made connections with Beth Jacob students for a number of joint programs. Our students came together for a virtual Chanukah performance that was shared with Shalom Village. In January, we held a Tu BiShevat learning session, with many guest instructors, including an educator from JNF. Our students learned and sang together, and planted succulents generously donated by Tropical Expressions. The highlight thus far was an amazing virtual Purim program with Judy and David Gershon where Temple and Beth Jacob

families pre-recorded hilarious "host" segments that were integrated into an interactive digital presentation and Purim costume parade. Many of our students and families were featured with Judy and David in our Family Purim Shpiel. Thank you to all who participated. We are looking forward to our next joint learning program in May, when, hopefully, we can be together outside for Shavuot activities, safely distanced of course. Our family activities continue in March for Pesach. Families with children of all ages are invited to Zoom into our Family Seder with Morah Dora-Ann on Sunday, March 28 at 5 p.m. This 30-minute seder will engage our families in an interactive and age-appropriate setting. Get your matzah, charoset, maror, parsley and egg ready as we come together for the seder. All are welcome! For more information, please email dacellison@anshesholom.ca or visit anshesholom.ca.

Temple Anshe Sholom

RABBI JORDAN COHEN

AS THE PANDEMIC lingers on, Temple Anshe Sholom continues to offer all of our services, learning opportunities and programs online. While our Re-opening Task Force has been actively discussing all possible scenarios, we still do not know when we will be able to safely re-open. What we do know is that the new normal will not be the same as synagogue life before COVID-19.

We have learned that strident health and safety protocols will remain with us for the foreseeable future, including masks, physical distancing, sanitation stations and limited sharing of food and drink. The health and well-being of our community is our ultimate concern and anything we need to do to assure the safety of our community members will become part of our common practice. Live streaming of services and programs will continue even when

in-person gatherings are again allowed. The success of our online offerings has demonstrated the need to make all of our services, programs, and other events as accessible as possible to as many congregants and community members as possible, no matter where they live or their mobility. Lastly, the pandemic has taught us the continuing importance of partnering with the other essential Jewish communal organization such as the Hamilton Jewish Federation, Hamilton Jewish Family Services and Shalom Village to assure that the needs of all Jewish community members are met no matter what the circumstances. We hope to strengthen these relationships as we move forward into the new normal. In the meanwhile, we invite you to join us as we joyfully celebrate Pesach online. All details are available at anshesholom.ca.

CHAG SAMEACH FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT JNF HAMILTON

Happy PASSOVER

חג כשר ושמח

Wishing everyone a Chag Kasher & Same'ach!

~ Moishe, Eli & Gabe Chaimovitz & their families ~

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JNF volunteers volunteering for Leket, Israel's largest food bank.

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- supporting people with special needs and their families
- protection of victims of domestic abuse
- supporting therapy and rehabilitation centres for Israelis with PTSD
- delivering Holocaust education
- strengthening education in the periphery of Israel
- empowering at-risk youth and more.

When you donate to JNF Canada, you direct your funds to the project of your choice.

JNF Canada's mission of Building Israel Together focuses

on building Israel's community and social infrastructure. We are launching a new initiative known as the Builders' Circle, which is a great opportunity for you and your family to choose a specific project and make your mark in Israel while having an immeasurable impact on the lives of Israelis. You may support a project close to your heart. Whether in health-care, education, the environment, research and development, or supporting vulnerable populations such as seniors and citizens living in poverty, we will find a project that's right for you.

This has been a dark year for so many in Canada, Israel and around the world. The challenges facing humanity are staggering. JNF Canada has and will continue to do its part to bring some light into this world. Our projects are not just bricks and mortar. They demonstrate to the Israeli public that Canadians care deeply about them, especially the vulnerable. JNF Canada will do our part to make life just a little bit brighter and we could not do it without you.

Thank you and we wish you and your family a happy Passover.

For more information about JNF Canada's work in Israel, please visit us at jnf.ca

Hamilton Jewish Family Services

ALEXIS WENZOWSKI

HAPPY PASSOVER, Hamilton! Hamilton Jewish Family Services continues to be hard at work in our community. Throughout March, April, and May, our case management, food security and community garden staff will facilitate community webinars on different topics. Our hope is that these workshops will be interesting and informative, and we hope you to attend. Information about these workshops will be shared in our newsletters. To find out more, please e-mail info@hamiltonjfs.ca.

Kol Hakavod to the Kibitz Corner program. This free program runs Monday through Thursday, and is entirely run over the phone. Headed by Chris, this program changes daily. Our community has many volunteers involved in this initiative, and



Christine Nusca facilitates HJFS's Kibitz Corner program.

guest speakers have been from a variety of organization including Ontario Jewish Archives, Hamilton Council on Aging, and the Dundas Museum. The Kibitz Corner is aimed at reducing social isolation during COVID-19. We

invite you to attend or to volunteer as a guest activity facilitator. For more info, please e-mail Chris at christinen@hamiltonjfs.ca.

On Feb. 28, HJFS held its first virtual fundraiser, A Night Out (In). The fundraiser included entertainment, beer samples, a silent auction, and the opportunity to place Passover wine orders. With your support, we were able to raise more than \$30,000 for our Food Security Programs. A special thank you to all of our supporters, volunteers, and team for making sure food insecurity is unacceptable in our community.

To learn more about HJFS, or to access our services (including counselling, community education, seniors support, and the kosher food bank), please visit hamiltonjfs.ca or call 905-627-9922. We

Beth Jacob Synagogue

SHIRA KATES

BETH JACOB STAFF and volunteers have been working hard to continue outreach and engagement efforts through the ongoing pandemic. Realizing that feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst our most vulnerable members has grown, many committees have sprung into action: dropping off candles for those observing yahrzeit, calling each other to check in, even providing groceries and meals to homes who could use that extra support during challenging life events.

Following the success of our Chanukah gift bags distributed to each member, we were delighted that two more donors generously came forward to anonymously

sponsor mishloach manot for our congregation. Thank you to these families, and to all the volunteers who helped safely distribute them throughout the Hamilton and Toronto areas.

Will we be meeting in person for Pesach 2021? We hope so, but who knows these days! In case we will be facing another socially-distanced Passover, we've prepared a three-part series to help you navigate the realities of an online holiday, and to learn how to lead your most successful seder ever—over Zoom.

We are also delighted to announce a new program series, Girls in Trouble, highlighting the under-studied stories of powerful and influential girls and women

of the Torah. In each lesson of this project by Jewish scholar Alicia Jo Rabins, participants are encouraged to engage with the Torah text alongside inspiring creative interpretations including music, art, midrash, and more. This is not a women's only class: everyone is welcome! This series has been generously sponsored in recognition of the 50th yahrzeit of Molly Richter, z"l, by her sons Lorne, Ron, and Lowell.

Thank you for your continued support of our efforts. We are proud of the way Hamilton's vibrant Jewish community has come together through the past year, and look forward to meeting again in-person soon.

The lawyers and staff of Ross & McBride LLP wish the entire Community

Happy Passover



Jeffrey Manishen



Barry Yellin



Brad Wiseman



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I am pleased to welcome Yves Apel and his team to the CIBC Wealth Management office of Hamilton.



Yves is an accomplished industry leader who has built a substantial and well respected practice in the GTHA. His passion for client care is unparalleled.

Yves is supported by a Private Banker, Financial Planner, Tax and Estate Planner, Insurance Specialist, Foreign exchange specialists, Commercial banking, Private company Transition and Investment Banking, Trust Services, and a Portfolio research group.

Welcome to the team Yves!

*Tom Cosentino
Vice President and Branch Manager
Hamilton, Ontario*

For a confidential discussion, please contact:

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