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**Hamilton
Jewish**

News

SIVAN 5781

The voice of Jewish Hamilton June 2021

The Mayor takes a stand on antisemitism

Mayor Fred Eisenberger's abhorrence of discrimination of any kind finds expression in his adoption of a new definition of antisemitism

STORY BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
THE HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

AS ANTISEMITIC incidents have reached near historic levels in this city, Hamilton Mayor Fred Eisenberger's March 31 announcement that his office would adopt a document that provides a comprehensive description of antisemitism was received enthusiastically by local and national Jewish organizations. Drafted in 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) document provides examples of contemporary antisemitism, ranging from the use of age-old anti-Jewish tropes, to Holocaust denial, to certain expressions of animus toward the Jewish State of Israel that may at times cross the line into antisemitism. In adopting the IHRA working definition, the mayor joins a growing list of countries and government bodies around the world, including the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario and several Canadian municipalities.

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Federation president Jacki Levin and Mayor Fred Eisenberger at the 2019 Yom HaShoah commemoration, which was held at City Hall



JHamilton expansion

Federation announces plans to open new wellness centre at JHamilton location

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“When you're named after someone, you're a continuation of their story.”

Ben Shragge on an unusual inheritance

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Despite the pandemic much was achieved



Gustavo Rymberg

CEO, HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

WHEN THE WORLD changed in March 2020, members of Hamilton's Jewish community were forced to adapt to a new reality. Along the way, as individuals and as a community, we discovered what was essential.

Despite all negative predictions, our community responded to the crisis in an exemplary way. What followed were new emergency programs, new community partnerships, new volunteers, new government support and new grants; and we just wrapped up our Annual Community Campaign, which surpassed all our expectations.

We may not have been able to meet in person, but we were nevertheless able to connect with each other through Zoom, fulfilling our sacred mission to protect the vulnerable; advocate for Jewish issues and for Israel; and educate, engage and strengthen our Jewish community. Over the last year, all our signature programs went virtual. The second annual Marvin Caplan Jewish Book Festival, Hamilton Jewish Film Festival, Teachers Seminar on the Holocaust, Holocaust Education Week, Kristallnacht and Yom Hashoah commemorations, and Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration were all well attended and deeply appreciated. Most importantly, we kept our community together and connected. We were physically apart but closer than ever.

I want to tell you about two recent events that filled me with emotion and pride. The first was Mayor Fred Eisenberger's adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism on March 31. The IHRA definition, which

has been adopted by many countries and cities around the world, provides a comprehensive description of anti-semitism in its various forms, including hatred and discrimination against Jews, Holocaust denial and the way antisemitism relates to how criticism of Israel is expressed. Mayor Eisenberger's gesture sent a clear message to hate-mongers in our city that there is no room for antisemitism in Hamilton.

The second event was seeing the Israeli flag flying at Hamilton City Hall in commemoration of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut. Again, the gesture was a very important statement that Hamilton supports and recognizes the State of Israel.

The Hamilton Jewish Federation will hold its Annual General Meeting on May 27, marking the end of our fiscal year and the culmination of Jacki Levin's four years as president of our organization. It was a real privilege to share my first four years as CEO with Jacki, whose passion and love for the community was always evident in her leadership decisions. Jacki supported me during difficult moments, and was always there for me when I tried to think outside the box. I am very proud to say that, together, we accomplished all our goals. Working and learning with Jacki over the last four years was a real privilege. Thank you, Jacki, for making the Hamilton Jewish community a better place for all of us.

I hope you'll join us on Thursday, May 27 at 7 p.m. for our virtual AGM to recognize Jacki's accomplishments and to welcome Federation's incoming president, Howard Eisenberg.

A COMMUNITY MEMBER WRITES

PLEASE KNOW THE DIFFERENCE YOU HAVE MADE

Since COVID began, I can go many days without interacting with others. Two gifts have kept me going — my Jewish faith and my Jewish community. Prior to Pesach I was taking my walk in a nearby park when I received a phone call telling me a hamper had been left at my door. When I arrived home, I found a large dose of kindness in the form of a huge box that I could not get it in the house! I had to remove all the food attached on top and then push it into my kitchen. Once the perishables were refrigerated, I made a cup of tea and sat down to investigate this bottomless well of goodies. Everything for a Seder and so much more. For weeks afterwards, both my heart and my belly were full. How can I thank so many and let them know how much their thoughts and hard work were embedded in every item? Please know the difference you have made, one individual at a time. This is not the first time I have benefitted from my Hamilton Jewish community. You are a special group of people who strengthen its members as we all continue to share kindness and care in these challenging times! A special thank you to the staff at Hamilton Jewish Family Services for allowing me the space to hug you back. Shalom.

Anonymous

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Sharon Enkin Student Award winners



Hamilton Jewish Federation staff member Elaine Levine with some of the multi-media items from the winning entries for the 2nd Annual Sharon Enkin Student Award on the Holocaust. Students from Grades 10 through 12 submitted videos, poems, artwork and essays in response to the question, "Why is it so important in 2021 for young people to learn the lessons of the Holocaust?" Winners from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board were Beth Hughes, Ivor Hathaway, Jappreet Gill and Naomi Martin; Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board winners were Andrew Scheer, Lyvia Carroll and Kaitlyn Fegan. A virtual awards ceremony took place earlier this month.

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Mayor takes a stand

CONTINUED FROM P1

Hamilton Mayor Fred Eisenberger decided his office would take a lead in adopting the new definition of antisemitism after a series of meetings between Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg and the mayor's advisor of community relations, Christopher Cutler. Rymberg lobbied for Hamilton to join a growing number of Canadian provinces and municipalities in adopting the IHRC definition.

"Hamilton's black and Jewish communities share the dubious honour of having the highest number of hate incidents and crimes," Eisenberger told the HJN. "That's reason enough in my view to at least highlight, once again, those incidents and demonstrate to the community at large that we're paying attention to that, and hopefully the city staff and council will come together and adopt this broader definition."

Childhood experiences informed mayor's world view

Eisenberger told the HJN his views on antisemitism are rooted in growing up during the Second World War in Amsterdam in a family that was involved in the Dutch underground. Eisenberger's father was arrested for his political activism and sent to a labour camp in Germany where he witnessed numerous atrocities. "Certainly that history was related to us at an early age and beyond, so that connection resonates with me very, very strongly," he said.

Even after his family immigrated to Canada, Eisenberger remained sensitive to any form of discrimination, which, in those post-war years, was often directed towards Italian immigrants "who didn't quite mesh with the Anglo-Saxon, puritan ethic that was very prominent then," he says. "A lot of my friends were Italian and I remember witnessing and being angry about how they were being treated in school. They might have been in Grade 6 and were put into Grade 1. That discrimination made me very angry then, still with me today."

Eisenberger pointed to "a lot of racist hate comments" his office received after the city welcomed more than 1,000 Syrian refugees in 2015, asking why the mayor wasn't in favour of Canadians as opposed to "other people."

"I don't see 'other people.' I see people who are running away from strife and

harm and looking to do what we've all done, which is to find a place of respect and opportunity and community for them and their children," he says.

"So the story continues in many different ways. The good news is that, in my view, that it's still a minority of individuals that bear these racist, discriminatory tendencies. But it's certainly something that we need to continue to guard against because that kind of division is the foundation of the kind of atrocity that was the Holocaust."

Jewish community responds

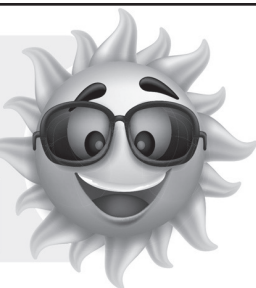
On the day of the mayor's announcement, Federation sent out a statement to the Jewish community, in which Rymberg and Federation president Jacki Levin wrote, "We are pleased to have worked closely with our partners at CIJA and in the mayor's office to secure an endorsement of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Definition of Antisemitism ... the Jewish community continues to be the most frequently targeted group for hate crime, and ... With this adoption, Mayor Eisenberger recognizes that need to actively combat antisemitism in our city, and leads the way as mayor of one of the largest cities in Canada to endorse the IHRA Definition."

The Hamilton Jewish Federation also organized a Zoom call on April 5, during which leaders took the opportunity to express their gratitude to the mayor directly. "In a year when very few commemorations and celebrations were marked as they normally would be, Mayor Fred made sure that our city leaders took time last week to commemorate and reflect on the meaning of Yom Hashoah," said Tom Weisz, adding that, as a child of Holocaust survivors, he had experienced antisemitism as a child and in his business life. He called the mayor's actions "an important step towards recognizing and focusing on the recently increasing vile rhetoric and propaganda directed against our Jewish community which ... remains the most targeted minority group for hate crimes in Canada."

Weisz called the mayor's actions meaningful and comforting and praised him for his "leadership, support and understanding of the issues and concerns of Hamilton's Jewish community."

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JHamilton opens new wellness centre

Expansion a response to increased demand for mental health and wellness support in the Jewish community

BY **ABIGAIL CUKIER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

HAMILTON JEWISH Federation/JCC Beth Tikvah Foundation and Hamilton Jewish Family Services (HJFS) are partnering to open a new centre for wellness at the JHamilton location on Main Street West.

Set to open in June, the centre, which will take up an additional 3,600 square feet of office space, will serve as a hub for wellness, providing education, programs and counselling to support community members' spiritual, social, mental and physical wellness.

"The experience of COVID-19 has shone a light on the need for a gathering place that will offer social and emotional support to people dealing with mental health challenges associated or exacerbated by the pandemic," says Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg. "The centre will aim to reduce the social isolation and anxiety that so many people are experiencing, by offering a place for people to come together and connect."

The Centre for Wellness will offer informal activities, groups and drop-in programs, including public education on wellness topics, group support, social and spiritual programs, and individual counselling. The centre will also serve as an entry and referral point for people who need more comprehensive support and offer educational programs in collaboration with the mental health community in Hamilton.



The need for increased mental health and wellness support was highlighted by a marked increase in demand for counselling at Hamilton Jewish Family Services over the last year. In response, the organization pioneered a mental health program, which started with a part-time social worker. Due to community demand, the position shifted to full time in January 2021. On average, the program is providing 110 mental health counselling sessions per month.

The local experience is part of a wider need for mental health services. A policy paper written by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health showed that COVID-19 has magnified a mental health crisis that existed in Canada even before the pandemic and cited a survey that found that 50 per cent of Canadians reported worsening

mental health since the pandemic began. Even before that, a 2019 Ontario Child Health Study found that one in every five children in Hamilton has a mental health struggle, however, only one-third of those struggling have access to mental health support.

Hamilton Jewish Family Services will offer its mental health counselling out of the new location, along with workshops and therapeutic groups. The agency will also work with Beth Tikvah and Federation to foster other areas of wellness, including physical health, social events, and inclusion opportunities.

Alexis Wenzowski, executive director of Hamilton Jewish Family Services, says the collaborative environment will promote partnership across the three agencies. "We all believe in the promotion of, and

Beth Tikvah Foundation executive director Chris Barone, Hamilton Jewish Family Services executive director, Alexis Wenzowski and Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg pose in front of what will be an entrance into JHamilton's new Centre for Wellness.

investment in, the wellness of our community members. The expanded space presents a unique opportunity for us to work hand-in-hand to strengthen and rebuild during and after COVID," she said.

Beth Tikvah Foundation has been experiencing rapid growth over the last couple of years. Executive director Chris Barone said he's very excited that the new space can accommodate his agency's growing management team. "We would also like to give a warm welcome to Hamilton Jewish Family Services who will be moving into the new space and become part of the JHamilton community," says Barone.

Rymberg says the centre will focus on providing support in four key areas of health—mental, physical, spiritual and social. "To help every age group cope with these concerns, there needs to be holistic clinical and non-clinical supports. These supports need to focus upon capacity-building and empowerment, while being accessible to all in need," says Rymberg.

Community is also extremely important, says Rymberg. "A lack of connection to community increases feelings of loneliness and social isolation, which can impact one's health and well-being," he says. "The Jewish community of Hamilton needs to continue to offer social programming to its members, as has traditionally been done through both the JCC and Hamilton Jewish Family Services.

"The new Centre for Wellness is inspired and grounded in the Jewish values of social justice and repairing the world (tzedakah and tikkun olam). It will offer the Jewish and broader community a safe and comfortable place to stay healthy, physically, socially and emotionally."

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From ‘in the dark’ to ‘in the know’

New podcast seeks to empower those facing serious illness

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

“WHY DIDN’T anyone ever tell me this before?” That anguished question, asked of her countless times over years of working with terminally ill patients, is why palliative care physician Samantha Winemaker wanted to start a healthcare revolution.

That is exactly what the podcast, *Waiting Room Revolution*, intends to achieve. Created by Winemaker and healthcare researcher Hsien Seow, the podcast’s 10 half-hour episodes walk listeners through what its creators call the “keys to a better illness experience.”

From interviews with thousands of patients and families who have faced serious illness, Winemaker and Seow have seen how some healthcare providers withhold information from patients out of a misguided concern that knowing how much time they have left will be detrimental to a patient’s well-being. In fact, says Winemaker, keeping patients in the dark about the likely outcome of their disease is taking away their ability to use the time they have left in the most meaningful way.

“I can’t begin to tell you how many times families have said to me, ‘I asked the doctor, but the doctor said, I’m sorry we have no crystal ball,’” Winemaker told the HJN. “But we do. We know the average timeline of every illness, and we can actually tell someone where they’re at in the illness journey and, at some point, we can even tell them if they have months, weeks or days left. That’s a crystal ball if you ask me.”

In the podcast’s opening episode, Winemaker tells the story of a 58-year-old man with progressive lung disease who had been referred to her towards the end of his life. Three years earlier, he’d been told that he would die without a lung transplant, which became his singular focus while his symptoms worsened, and he became increasingly terrified of the prospect of suffocating to death. When the bad news came that he did not qualify for a lung transplant, he felt he had no choice but to seek medical assistance in dying. It was at that point that he was referred to Winemaker.

When Winemaker told him that he would not suffocate to death with the proper care, he and his family were shocked. “I can’t help but think how profoundly disappointed he would be to know that there were many ways to treat his breathlessness the whole way along,” she said during the episode. “He knew nothing about treatment for his symptoms or other supports available to him and his family during his journey. The focus was purely on getting a transplant.”

Winemaker’s encounter with that patient was a galvanizing incident in transforming her despair about what she sees as a broken healthcare system into action. “It is sickening to me that thousands of people have



PHOTO BY WANDA OLDFIELD

NEED TO KNOW

- The *Waiting Room Revolution* can be downloaded wherever you get your podcasts.
- The series’ third season, to be released this fall, will get even deeper into the heart of the matter through interviews with physicians, medical students, residents, caregivers and patients.
- The *Waiting Room Revolution* podcast club is also available to listeners wanting to delve further into the issues.
- More information can be found at waitingroomrevolution.com

died by medical assistance in dying (MAiD) who have not been offered all the information they should’ve had before they got to that point,” she told the HJN.

Transforming patients’ and families’ time in waiting rooms from helpless anticipation of negative test results delivered by an all-powerful clinician into a time in which they can formulate questions that will give them a roadmap for what lies ahead is the goal of the *Waiting Room Revolution* podcast.

Since its launch on March 1, the podcast has garnered more than 10,000 listens and 2,000 followers on social media, many of whom are healthcare providers.

“I was very worried that we revealed too much of the dirty laundry,” said Winemaker. “But surprisingly, I’ve had more healthcare workers contact me and say that they think that this should be mandatory listening for medical students and nursing students.”

Statistics show that only 10 per cent of deaths are sudden, which means 90 per cent of us will be diagnosed with a progressive illness, like dementia, cancer or heart, lung or kidney disease.

“People don’t normally just sit in their chair, close their eyes and go to bed. Some people will die like that, but most of us don’t die that way. Time is like currency, and if you know that you are perhaps in the last year of your life, you can use that time however you want, with no regrets.”

Delivering palliative care in people’s homes for all these years has made Winemaker realize she’d prefer not to die a sudden death. “I have seen amazing, incredible, beautiful loving, tender, important moments for those people who are in the know. They wouldn’t change it for the world.”

Waiting Room Revolution

creators healthcare researcher, Dr. Hsien Seow and palliative care physician, Dr. Samantha Winemaker, want to empower patients and families to initiate difficult conversations about what to expect in the progression of a serious illness.

Partners bring historic Hamilton buildings back to life

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

PATRICK BERMINGHAM likes to take credit for introducing Malcolm Silver to the Hamilton real estate market and jokes that, “now, we can’t get rid of him,” but the friendship between these business partners runs deep. Bermingham is a talented artist and member of a prosperous Hamilton family with deep roots in the building/engineering industry. Silver is a courtly, silver-haired, orthodox Jew with an Irish lilt. The two met at a leadership forum in Toronto in the early 2000s and soon discovered they shared a passion for ethical business practices and values-based investment. Bermingham became an avid investor in Silver’s syndicate of commercial properties in Toronto, and when that market dried up, decided to partner with Silver in purchasing buildings in Hamilton’s historic downtown core.

The first building the partners purchased reminded Silver of a New York brownstone when he first saw it. The former site of Chester’s Beers of the World at 62 King S. E. had sat empty for three years. Their next purchase was the building next door at 64 King E., followed by another elegant building at 103 King St. E., which they’ve since renovated and leased to a global escape room conglomerate.

The concept Bermingham and Silver eventually settled on for 62 and 64 King St. E. which they’re

calling the King John Building, is of a mixed space commercial complex that can accommodate offices, retail, a restaurant, and weekly programs or events in its light-filled atrium.

Despite the devastating effects the pandemic has had on downtown businesses, Bermingham and Silver are optimistic that a building boom, which has shown no signs of slowing down over the last year, stands to transform the lower city.

“The number of people living in the downtown core is going up,” said Bermingham, “and young professionals will want to walk to a restaurant and go here and there,” said Bermingham, adding that he thinks people are “dying to go back to offices.”

For his part, Silver said he believes “fervently” that Hamilton stands to become Toronto’s equivalent of Brooklyn over the next few years, a change he anticipates will transform Hamilton into “a completely different city.”

Bermingham and Silver are hoping to find Hamilton-based investors who share their dream of a revitalized downtown core.

“Malcolm’s generated a 100 per cent return for me on everything that we’ve done,” said Bermingham. “We have confidence in Hamilton. we’re digging in and we’re digging in more. Spring will come again.”

For more information about leasing space at the King John Building or investment opportunities, visit msilver.ca.



PHOTO BY GRAHAM POWELL

Toronto real estate investor Malcolm Silver and Hamilton’s Patrick Bermingham at the construction site of 62 and 64 King St. E.

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"I found a fruitful world, because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise I am planting for my children."

– Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 23a

HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

#Here for Good



The rewards of living off the grid in the Yukon

Dundas native Emily Schneider on a lifestyle in which resourcefulness is rewarded and rigidity and laziness are not

BY EMILY SCHNEIDER
SPECIAL TO THE HJN



Emily Schneider and her rescued Alaskan husky, Decha, enjoy a quiet moment on the banks of Silver Creek with Outpost Mountain in the distance behind.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the globe last spring, it was a big moment of change for most people around the world. They were suddenly no longer able to go to the movies or attend big gatherings. Weddings were cancelled and funerals were held on Zoom. To most, the isolation was shocking, heart-breaking and anxiety inducing. The support system that people held on to was no longer there. For me, however, I was already living in an isolated corner of the world, in a little off-grid cabin in the Yukon Territory.

I would make the same decision again, pandemic or not, in a heartbeat. There's nothing quite like waking up to the silence of -40°C and knowing the only thing that will keep you warm is getting the wood yourself in the forest to heat up the cabin. It's hard to put into words the joy I get from this lifestyle. I like that nothing is easy, that you can't just press a few buttons to get your heat, electricity and entertainment. There's something humbling about working hard for your basic necessities and hauling water around in blue jugs. It may not be for everyone, but I've heard the call of the Yukon wild, and this socially isolated life is the life for me.

To the people living south of latitude 60°N, my family included, my life choices seem odd. The question I am most asked by those not living in the North is how I use the toilet when it's -30°C outside—a temperature that can be felt from November all the way into April.

Our little off-grid cabin has no running water and electricity comes from four big car batteries that get charged by the sun via solar panel. It is an environment in which resourcefulness and

flexibility is rewarded and rigidity and laziness are not. Instead of a shower and a toilet, we have a wood-stove-heated sauna and an outhouse. Gardening means keeping all your seedlings and plants inside and then putting them in a greenhouse all the way into June just to avoid the frost that accumulates late into the spring and summer. Staying in touch with people involves driving up the Alaska Highway far enough to reach a point where you can find cellular service. This resourcefulness creates a unique and wonderful community of people known as "Yukoners," who know it takes a kind heart and open arms to make it through the harshest of winters.

Although, in this little corner of the world, there is usually a time of year when things aren't so isolated. In a normal non-COVID summer, the highway that runs to our community is packed. The Alaska Highway is usually home to thousands of adventurers making their way to Alaska and the only way to get there is via the Yukon. Finished in 1945 by the US Army, the Alaska Highway

was built as a way to connect the "lower 48" states of the United States all the way up to Alaska as a way to transport military personnel and equipment. Today, it is not unheard of to see motorcycle and RV convoys making their way all the way from the southern tip of South America way up to as far north as they can go.

The Arctic and the North bring thoughts of cold and constant darkness, but although there are a few weeks during the winter when the sun's presence is completely absent, the complete opposite is true in the summer. You don't have to wait until June 21 to have endless hours of sunlight. Even as I write this at the beginning of May, the sun is up at around 6 am and the light in the horizon can be seen well into the night, disappearing these days at around 11 pm. Come summer solstice, it will never get completely dark, even in the wee hours of the morning.

Watching the sun do a complete circle around you in the height of summer is a sight that still blows my mind. It's a magical experience that makes the biting mosquitoes

and lack of instant hot running water seem not so bad. While the darkness of the winter allows us to curl up beside the wood stove, catch up on some reading and enjoy the majesty of the aurora borealis, in the summer, the opposite happens. The constant light is an invitation to work hard and play hard. An outdoor enthusiast's dream, there are endless mountains to climb, rivers and lakes to paddle, and native and migratory wildlife to follow.

As an outdoor enthusiast and someone who works as a wilderness guide, this is my little slice of paradise. It was a job offer from a company that leads multi-week expeditions in remote places all over the world that brought me to the Yukon for the first time in 2016. The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) has a reputation for offering the ultimate outdoor educational experience and I was thrilled to accept the position of equipment coordinator for their wilderness trips.

During two summers of driving big vans with 13 canoes in tow and hopping on float planes to do

mid-expedition gear drops, I got to know the vastness and majesty of the Yukon. The NOLS job also introduced me to the community of Whitehorse, the people who have chosen to call it home, and the territory's summer music festivals. In fact, it was at a music festival in Dawson City, home of the Klondike Gold Rush, where I met my partner Luc, the engineering brain behind our off-grid cabin.

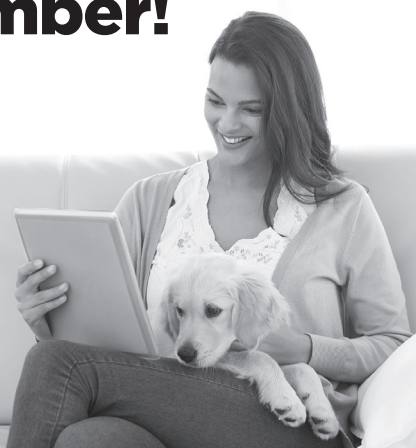
Our cabin is located in a special corner of the territory on the shores of Kluane Lake. Adjacent to a national park with the same name, Kluane is home to some of North America's highest mountain peaks and the world's largest non-polar icefield. Next to the lake and a short bike ride away from our doorstep, is an airstrip serviced by a company called Icefield Discovery that leads sightseeing tours that follow the Kaskuwalsh Glacier all the way until you reach Mount Logan, Canada's tallest mountain.

In a summer full of tourists, we can hear their plane taking off up to six times per day. These days, the buzzing of the airplane overhead isn't seen or heard as much but luckily they don't only rely on tourism but also assist mountaineers and scientists to reach destinations on the glaciers only accessible via ski-plane. I will be employed there this summer, helping out at their base camp located in the shadow of Mount Logan.

To help keep the territory, with its few medical resources and supplies, safe during the pandemic, a mandatory 14-day quarantine is in place to all those who enter the Yukon. It has meant low case numbers and almost zero tourism. But if I have piqued the interest of any readers and sparked a desire to visit this far off corner of Canada, once COVID-19 has been controlled, flights are available via Vancouver and Edmonton to Whitehorse with Air Canada and Air North. From there, adventure awaits.

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Documentary awakens long buried memory

Life imitates art in this story of how a photograph in a film triggers a flood of Holocaust-related memories



PHOTO BY WENDY SCHNEIDER, HJN

BY **ANITA BERNSTEIN**
SPECIAL TO THE HJN

HAVE YOU ever experienced the flood of memories brought on by a single photograph? That is exactly what happened to my mother, Sonia Ger, during the Hamilton Jewish Federation's virtual screening of the documentary "Still Life in Lodz" on Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day.)

Still Life in Lodz centres on a Jewish woman's emotional return to Poland 48 years after her family was expelled from the country during a wave of anti-semitic reprisals following the Six-Day War. Back in Lodz, historic researcher Lila Elbaum comes face to face with a still-life painting that hung in her family's apartment from 1945 to 1968. What follows is a deeply personal detective story and an ode to the lost generations of Jewish Lodz. Ironically, my mother experienced a similar flood of memories from her past when a photograph of four apartment buildings surrounding a central courtyard appeared on the screen.

"I lived in that building," my 91-year old mother told us, and soon, she was sharing details of her life during and immediately after the war that we had never heard before. My mother's care-free childhood in the town of Pinsk was harshly interrupted by the German invasion of Poland

when she was 13 years old. She, her parents, and a cousin survived the war, due to the kindness of their Christian housekeeper, Sofia Fiodorchenko, who hid them in her cellar for nearly two years. When Pinsk was liberated by the Red Army in 1944, they came out of hiding, to find the town destroyed and only a handful of

Jews left alive. My grandfather moved his wife and daughter to Lodz, where they lived for a year. They were so grateful to their housekeeper that they brought her with them and set her up in her own apartment in the same building where they lived. My mother went to high school in Lodz and my grandfather, who was a baker,

Top left, the Lodz apartment complex featured in the documentary Still Life in Lodz, where many Jewish families lived on the eve of the Second World War.

Top right, a photograph of Sonia Ger as a teenager.

Left, Anita Bernstein with her mother, daughter Naomi Bernstein, and her grandson Asher, at JHamilton in 2019 during an evening of personal testimony from Holocaust survivors.

opened a bakery. After a year, the family relocated to a Displaced Persons camp in Germany and Sofia remained in Lodz. My grandparents stayed in contact with Sofia and sent her packages of products to sell so that she could support herself. This went on for many years until she passed away.

After the screening, Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg connected

us with Elbaum, who had access to detailed information about pre- and post war tenants of the building featured in the film, and was happy to explore whether this was, indeed, the same place my mother's family had lived.

We provided Elbaum with the names of my mother's parents, Yisrael and Chavah Kuper, and Sofia, their housekeeper, but she could not find any information relating to my family, the high school my mother attended or the location of my grandfather's bakery, nor any documentation that confirmed my mother's family had lived in the building. In those years, there were many buildings of similar structure and appearance in Lodz. Although we did not find any additional details about my mother's family, the film stimulated many memories and allowed our family to learn more about my mother's life in her youth and our family's resilience through the horrors of the Holocaust.

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The man who wasn't Boris



Ben Shragge

WHEN I WAS growing up, a matador fighting a bull loomed large over the dining table. He taunted the black bovine with a swirling red cape, while hiding a dagger behind his back. I'm now an adult, with a home of my own, but that same scene has stayed with me: it now hangs over my couch.

"The Bullfighter," as I'll call the painting, is signed Barucci. Who was this Barucci? A witness to Spain's national fiesta, judging by the subject matter; Italian by ancestry, judging by the name. But no, the story of "The Bullfighter" is not a story of Southern Europe.

In fact, Barucci was Boris Macrovitich, my great uncle. He was born in Odessa, a bustling port city in the Russian Empire, in 1907. In 1909, he moved with his family to the decidedly less bustling, but certainly more free, frontier city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. For reasons unknown, he later settled in St. Louis, Missouri, where he owned an art shop. He had no Italian ancestry and had never, as far as the record shows, been to Spain. He died in 1981, four years before I was born.

I was named after Boris; though my parents, thankfully, decided Benjamin was close enough to Boris to count. Boris had no known children. He was survived by a wife, two nieces, and a nephew (my dad), all



"The Bullfighter" by Ben Shragge's uncle, Boris Macrovitich.

of whom have now passed away. Insofar as Boris lives on in this world, it is through his art and through my name.

I brought "The Bullfighter," which I can only assume was Boris's masterpiece, with me from Canada when I moved to the US. It's my reminder of a home full of memories that's been sold; of holiday dinners under its presence amid heirlooms now scattered. It's also a reminder of Boris himself, my enigmatic namesake, who also made the journey to a new country.

But who was Boris, really? As the world went into COVID-19 lockdown, the loneliness of quarantine, plus the lack of other things to do, increased my urgency to find out. I scoured the internet for records but

mostly came to dead ends. He was an artist, I knew that; now I wanted to find evidence of his artist's soul. Finally, in a roundabout way, I stumbled upon a clue: an obituary of my great aunt mentioned a brother, "Mr. Bruce Mack of St. Louis, Missouri."

Was my great uncle Boris Macrovitich, also known as Barucci, also known as Bruce Mack? Yes, it turns out, he was. This master of reinvention, upon moving to the US, apparently threw off his Russian bearskin and took on the most all-American name he could think of, while still remaining true to his initials.

With the name "Bruce Mack" at my fingertips, I was able to find his obituary. From the St. Louis Jewish Light, Sept. 9,

1981: "Bruce Mack died Aug. 28 at Jewish Hospital, following a brief illness. He and his wife operated Barucci Originals in Olivette for 22 years. Mack was known for his framing of pictures and restoration, as well as his artistic ability."

It now seems oddly fitting that I was named after Boris even though my name isn't Boris. After all, Boris wasn't entirely named Boris either. He was Baruch in Hebrew, Boris in Russian, Bruce in American, and Barucci in art. Like Walt Whitman, who I imagine he read on the road to America, Boris was large, he contained multitudes.

I'm glad I'm connected to him, even though we never met. When you're named after someone, in some strange way, you're a continuation of their story. It may take decades, even a global pandemic, for you to try to pick up where that story left off. But it's always there waiting, with some meaning to convey that it's up to you to interpret.

I admire the fortitude it must have taken to start a business and achieve success as an artist in another country. But although I can speculate, a number of questions remain unanswered, probably forever: Why the new name? Why the move? Why Barucci? Why St. Louis? I'm not sure I'll ever unravel the mystery of Great Uncle Boris, the Italian master from Odessa. But I'll do my best to honour his name and keep his artwork in a place of pride.

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

Baking through the pandemic



Abiella King

THE PANDEMIC BAKING BOON has been well documented. Ovens worked overtime, banana bread was trending again, and countless homemade sourdough starters were tended — a good thing too given the coming yeast shortages. An avid baker before COVID left many of us scouring the shelves for leaveners, I immediately understood the impulse.

I crave the precision baking requires, the way a new recipe demands my full attention. Baking is my version of meditation; a practice to slow the churning of an anxious mind. I forget everything else long enough to measure carefully, roll and fold the dough just so, and it is the sweetest, most delicious escape. There is nothing quite like the first bite of a flaky biscuit that sings of butter, or the satisfaction that comes from creating something wonderful with humble ingredients and our own hands.

I don't mind cooking, and when done in

anticipation of a shared meal with loved ones I might even enjoy it, but it is still work — increasingly so now that all of our meals are cooked at home with an adorable 11-month-old underfoot. Obligatory birthday cakes aside, baking is not something I need to do, and that, I think, is part of its appeal. Over a year into the pandemic, and a few weeks into another stay at home order, I choose to bake often, because I want to, and because I can.

Let me explain. I am a recovered (recovering?) dieter. It started innocently enough, with a 30-day sugar-free challenge with colleagues (fun fact: nachos and wine were deemed sugar free; apples not so much), progressed to much a more serious Whole30 (fun fact: daily consumption of steamed cauliflower and broccoli may result in gastrointestinal distress), and ended in a wholehearted embrace of a "low-carb paleo" lifestyle (nothing fun to report here). I devised a simple system that allowed me to indulge in the food I was missing with increasing intensity. From Friday evening to Sunday night, I ate whatever I wanted, and on Monday I resumed the program.

Worse than the teasing I endured at work

for heating organic hotdogs (carb-free!) first thing in the morning, were the frequent compliments I received for my efforts. "You're so good," they would say when I declined the baked goods brought in by generous colleagues, as if my eating habits were a reflection of my character. "You look amazing," they would say, and I would wonder what that meant for the body I inhabited before bread was a cheat food and exercise was penance for a big meal.

I justified my behaviour as a pursuit of health, an easy lie given our cultural obsession with wellness and the idea of food as medicine. I wasn't partaking in much refined sugar, but I was binging on podcasts and articles about the virtues of eating like our ancestors did. I don't want to dismiss the real benefits of diet and exercise; I only want to say that this way of living was, for me, deeply unhealthy.

I am incredibly lucky. I was on the precipice of serious disorder and have often wondered what would have happened had I not met my now husband when I did. I remember the day he handed me a jar of overnight oats to pack for work. It was a lovely gesture and a perfectly healthy breakfast by

any estimation, but one that my program did not allow. In my hesitation to eat them, I finally saw the hole I was in and began the slow climb out. It took years to stop feeling guilty for eating dessert on a Wednesday or pasta on a Monday. Believe me, this sentence is as ridiculous for me to write as it is to read. But it's also the truth, and my way of explaining what baking means to me. It is not just a temporary pandemic escape; it is also a small act of rebellion, a dismissal of rules that never served me, and the best way I know to take care of myself.

Baking is not a requirement of daily living, but my life is richer for it. On most nights, you'll find my husband and I indulging in a slice of something I've baked. Tonight, it was dark chocolate oat bars with a shortbread crust. Tomorrow, I'll make my favourite chocolate chip cookies to carry us to next week. The baby is asleep, and we are finding happiness on a plate. I know we aren't the only ones baking through it. Bon appetit!

Abiella King is a senior manager who recently moved back to her childhood home of London, Ontario with her husband and son.

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We must all become the voice for Sarah Halimi



Doris Strub Epstein

Sarah Halimi, 65, a retired Jewish doctor, teacher and mother of three, was brutally murdered. Her killer, 27-year-old Kobili Tratore, a devout Muslim and a neighbour in her apartment building, broke into her apartment. Screaming “Allah Akhbar” and antisemitic epithets, he beat her savagely and threw her out of her third storey window.

The supreme French court of appeals, ruled that because he was high on marijuana he was not responsible, and acquitted him. The Jewish world locally and globally was in shock. People took to the social media to express their outrage. The acquittal sent a message of impunity to the antisemites – you can get away with anything when it comes to Jews, even violence.

Virtually the entire mainstream media ignored this travesty of justice. Only Jewish news outlets and French media covered it. The New York Times, the most influential news source in North America – nothing.

Honest Reporting has said that Jews have complained that, for the last four years, mainstream media and the public have turned a blind eye to the murder, and that nobody but Jews cared if Jews were attacked. Every other group gets front page when violated – Black, Asian, Latino... When someone tore the hijab off a young woman’s head, the story got headlines all over the world.

The ruling is a disgrace. And yet, so far, only French and Jewish media have touched the story. Honest Reporting has said that the lack of coverage on a matter

constitutes a widespread media failure to take antisemitism seriously and will embolden those who seek to attack Jews.

But Jews are no longer silent as they were in the past. Thousands around the world marched, demonstrated, protested, inflamed by the court decision. Rallies in front of French embassies and consulates, were held all over the world – Paris, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Miami, Rome, London, Tel Aviv and the Hague.

Toronto’s rally demanding justice for Sarah Halimi was held on May 2 in front of the French Consulate at Bloor and Yonge streets. It was organized by 26-year-old Sami Cooper, who is a member of End Jew Hatred, a new grassroots movement that focuses on peaceful direct action against antisemitism and fights for Jewish civil rights.

B’nai Brith reported that 2020 marked the fifth consecutive year in which antisemitic incidents set a record. They sent out a petition titled, “Demand Justice in France,” which they presented to the French Ambassador to Canada on behalf of the Canadian Jewish community and all people of “good conscience.” B’nai Brith is also calling on the Government of Canada to demand that “France fill the gaps in its laws that allowed for this kind of abhorrent result.”

B’nai Brith CEO Michael Mostyn has gone on public record stating that, all over the world, antisemitism is treated differently than other forms of hatred and discrimination. Let us all heed his voice when he says, “We will not be silent and accept this ruling as legitimate. We must all become the voice for Sarah Halimi and demand equality for all victims of injustice.”

Doris Strub Epstein is a former Hamilton resident who lives in Toronto.

A serious question regarding bagels, lox and cream cheese



Bill Shugar

THERE’S AN OLD adage that says, “two Jews, three opinions.” It’s a critical way of life that can define Judaism, but that can cause divisions within families and strife at the Kiddush table. It is a staple of Jewish households, onegs, brunches; anything to do with Jews and food. It is also the source of debate amongst Bubbies, caterers, wedding planners, mothers, mothers-in-law, and even rabbis. Ensuing arguments have caused severe marital strain, damaged friendships, and rifts with the machatunim. Therapists are advising couples to discuss the issue very early in a relationship. Rabbis are beginning to insist on including a statement of agreement on ketubahs and the issue is now part of every conversion class. What is all this mishugas about? Should the ubiquitous bagel, lox and cream cheese be eaten open or closed?

To try and answer the question I polled 3,726 people—96 per cent Jewish, three per cent non Jewish and one per cent who refused to divulge. Here are some of the answers:

1. Open-faced so that I get to eat twice.
2. Open-faced so that I can choose to eat only a half and cut down on my carbs.
3. Sandwich style holds things in place in more precarious eating situations, such as at a picnic.
4. Open-faced is more aesthetically pleasing, allowing the various colours of red onion against the pink lox, with a subtle white background, to shine through. The downside is that the capers tend to fall off.

5. The filling tends to squish out of a closed sandwich.
6. It is not uncommon to get cream cheese on your nose when diving into an open faced BL&CC. A definite turnoff.
7. Eating four halves is not as fattening as eating two wholes. A belief by some nutritional psychologists.
8. Eating an open-faced allows one to get a taste of the filling rather than being overwhelmed by the bagel. A closed sandwich puts the ratio of bread to the lox and cream cheese off. This balance is crucial.
9. You might lose your dentures in a closed sandwich (that was an actual opinion!)
10. Eating a thick sandwich is not pleasant to watch, especially in close quarters around the buffet table.
11. Only a closed sandwich can be packed in your lunch box.
12. Open-faced runs the risk of getting the half without the seeds.
13. A sandwich needs a top and a bottom. Makes it easier to grab. With an open-face you have to hold on to the lox so that it doesn’t slip off. Then your fingers become slippery and smelly for the rest of the day.
14. Both. First, eat one closed. Still hungry? Eat a half open.

So there you have it. Or rather you don’t have it. My informal poll has revealed no definitive answer, no resolution. The only given is that if the bagel is not fresh, stick with the party sandwiches. Toronto or Montreal? Don’t get me started!

Bill Shugar is a husband, father, grandfather and a staunch supporter of the open faced BL&CC.



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THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN ARGENTINA

an in-depth four-part Zoom series with Rabbi Ernesto Yattah



Rabbi Ernesto Yattah is the dean of the Abraham Joshua Heschel Rabbinical School at the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano Marshall T. Meyer, in Buenos Aires, where he also teaches Bible and Jewish philosophy. He received his BA in Comparative Religions at Columbia University in 1987. He received a BA in Bible and a MA in Judaic Studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, where he also was ordained as a Rabbi in 1989.

Rabbi Yattah worked as the assistant and associate rabbi at Congregation Beth Yeshurun of Houston between 1989 and 1998. He served as president of the Houston Rabbinical Association from 1996 to 1997.

In 1999, Rabbi Yattah returned to his native Argentina where he has worked as a volunteer in different community settings such as, Chalom Community Centre, where he served as its Rabbi, and the new home for the elderly L'Dor va Dor as a member of its founding Board of Directors

Rabbi Yattah is an active participant in inter-religious dialogue in Buenos Aires.



Peron and Evita, the coming of the Nazis, and the capture of Adolph Eichmann.
TUESDAY, MAY 25 | 8 PM



Two terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires and the death of Alberto Nisman.
TUESDAY, JUNE 1 | 8 PM

We will first explore the historical, political, cultural and economic background that was the fertile ground to Argentina's neutrality in World War II. We will then look at the rise of Perón to power in the 1930s and 1940s that brought him to the presidency in 1946. How was his relationship with the Germans in general, and with the Nazi war criminals that came to Argentina in particular? How was his relationship with the Argentine Jewish community and the State of Israel? We will also cover the incredible capture of Adolph Eichmann at the hands of the Mossad, and the whereabouts of his family after his execution in Israel.

In this second part, we will look at the history of anti-Semitism in Argentina and the political relationship of Argentina with the Middle East which led to the two terrorist attacks that took place in Buenos Aires: against the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and against the AMIA in 1994, killing 29 and 85 people respectively. Hear the amazing story of Iosi, a policeman who was "planted" as a spy in the Jewish community of Buenos Aires by the Intelligence Services of the Federal Police and who, after becoming the reverse version of "Eli Cohen" in Syria, repented, married a Jewish woman, and confessed actions that may have been connected to the two attacks. We will address the story of Alberto Nisman, the prosecutor of the case of the AMIA who had brought criminal charges against then incumbent President of Argentina, Christina Kirchner and was then found dead in his apartment the day before he had to give testimony in the National Congress.

In this fourth presentation, we will have as our guest speaker Rabbi Abraham Skorka, a personal friend of Pope Francis. He will share with us the story of his close personal relationship with the Pope when he was Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. Together they co-authored a book, "On Heaven and Earth" and a TV series in which they discussed the most pressing current issues facing the world. At the request of then President of Israel Shimon Peres, Pope Francis and Rabbi Skorka travelled together to Israel in 2014, in what came to be the latest historic Papal visit to the Holy Land.

Rabbi Skorka, who was a professor at St. Joseph's University and currently a Distinguished Professor at Gratz College in Philadelphia, PA, will share memories of that trip as well, and he will address the current state of Jewish-Christian relations.



Pope Francis and Rabbis Skorka: a Catholic-Jewish friendship rooted in Argentina, with fruits around the world.
WITH SPECIAL GUEST RABBI ABRAHAM SKORKA
TUESDAY, JUNE 15 | 8 PM



The last Dictatorship, the Disappeared and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.
TUESDAY, JUNE 8 | 8 PM

In this third presentation, we will explore the political history of Argentina that led to the darkest chapter of the country's 20th century: the military dictatorship of 1976-1983. According to Human Rights organizations, around 30,000 people were kidnapped, tortured, killed and made to disappear. Courageous mothers of these young people began to gather in Plaza de Mayo (Buenos Aires' central square) and make their voices heard, and they became icons of the resistance of women around the world against authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. We will highlight the work of American rabbi and human rights activist, Marshall T. Meyer, and the story of internationally-known Argentine journalist, Jacobo Timerman, who was tortured by the military and wrote a scathing testimony against them: "Prisoner Without a Name. Cell Without a Number."