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**Hamilton
Jewish**

News

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The voice of Jewish Hamilton

POLAND'S POLIN MUSEUM

A thousand years of Jewish life



The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, built on the rubble of the former Warsaw Ghetto, is a striking architectural landmark that tells the story of a thousand years of Jewish life in Poland.

PHOTO:
WENDY SCHNEIDER,
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

For a generation raised on Holocaust memory, a visit to Warsaw's POLIN Museum illuminates a millennium of Jewish presence in Poland

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

FOR MANY Jews of my generation, Poland is synonymous with concentration camps, antisemitism, and the Holocaust. But a recent visit to Warsaw's POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews offered a far more nuanced understanding of a thousand-year relationship long—and understandably—eclipsed by the Holocaust. I first heard about POLIN from its original curator, the brilliant Canadian-born scholar Barbara

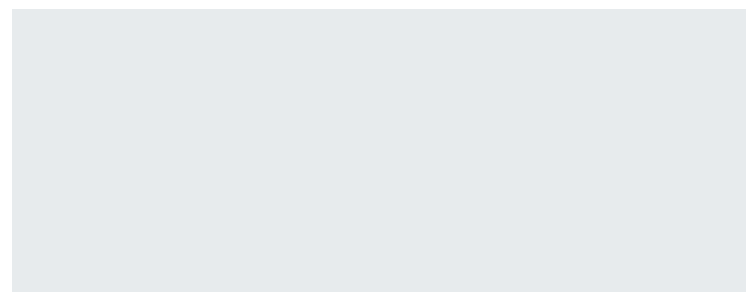
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who delivered the keynote Goldblatt Lecture at McMaster University, a Jewish Studies series endowed by my family shortly after the museum's official opening in 2014. Her presentation left a deep impression and I remember thinking then that I had to see this place for myself. So when an opportunity finally arose this past January, I seized it.

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FINDING THEIR PEOPLE

How unaffiliated Jews are finding their way back to community in a post Oct. 7 world

SEE STORY P12



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FEDERATION EDITORIAL

Together we made it happen I will never forget what we've built



Gustavo Rymberg

CEO
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

ON FEB. 23, I shared the news that I would be leaving Hamilton to accept a new role as CEO of the Rochester Jewish Federation. I knew the announcement would be emotional, but I was not prepared for the depth of the responses that followed — letters, calls, emails, and conversations that carried gratitude, reflection, and extraordinary generosity of spirit.

In the days and weeks since, I have been touched by so many messages — written notes, phone calls, texts, and heartfelt conversations. Each one carried something deeply personal: affirmation, challenge, encouragement, and care. Together, they offered a gift that leaders rarely pause long enough to receive: a chance to understand the impact of the work while still fully engaged in it.

When we lead with passion, love, and respect, we are often fully absorbed by the work itself. We focus on what needs to be done, who needs support, and how to move the community forward. We believe, often with conviction, that we are doing the best we can. But we do not often stop to ask ourselves a harder question: Are we truly making a positive difference?

Leading a community is not easy. It involves decisions that are not always popular, conversations that are sometimes uncomfortable, and the constant balancing of urgency, empathy, and responsibility. Yet there are few things more gratifying than what follows a powerful event, a successful campaign, or a meaningful community celebration when you see connection, pride, and shared purpose come to life.

Equally important, though sometimes more difficult, is learning from criticism. Honest and respectful feedback (when offered without selfishness) can be profoundly educational. It sharpens judgment, deepens listening, and strengthens leadership. Growth rarely comes without discomfort, and I am grateful for those who challenged me as much as those who encouraged me.

The messages I received after Feb. 23 answered many of my own questions. They helped me better understand the importance of a strong and united community, not only in moments of crisis, but also in times of transition and joy. They affirmed that what we have built together matters, and that leadership is never about one individual, but about trust, shared responsibility, and collective care.

To everyone who took the time to reach out: thank you. Truly. Your words carried weight, meaning, and generosity. They offered clarity, reassurance, and a deeper sense of connection. Many of the questions I quietly carried with me were answered through your kindness, encouragement, and honesty.

And because community also means perspective — and sometimes humour — I cannot resist sharing one small moment that still makes me smile.

Among the many thoughtful responses, one message stood out for its brevity and emotional honesty. The entire written response to my farewell message was simply:

"SHIT!"

It was, of course, followed by a heartfelt phone call. But that first reaction said everything it needed to say.

If nothing else, it reminded me that when people care deeply, they feel deeply — and they speak from the heart.

Thank you for walking this journey with me.

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

Projecting letters of light



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Light and shadow intersect to form Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin letters in the underground chamber of the “Letters of Light” sculpture garden at the new National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. The two-level installation by Israeli artist Micha Ullman features a circle of human-height stone blocks quarried from the Ramon Crater, symbolizing the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the wholeness of the world they shape.

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“From the museum’s light filled spacious lobby, the visitor descends a flight of stairs into a virtual forest evoking a rabbinic legend about the first Jews to arrive in Poland hearing the Hebrew words “Po Lin” — “Rest Here””

A thousand years

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

THE POLIN MUSEUM, 20 years in the making, is an extraordinary public-private partnership between the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, the City of Warsaw, and Poland’s Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Its striking contemporary building stands on what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has called a “site of conscience”: the rubble of the former Warsaw Ghetto.

Yet POLIN is not a museum of the Holocaust. Its mandate is broader and more ambitious — to tell the story of a thousand years of continuous Jewish presence in a land to which most Ashkenazi Jews today can trace their roots. Across eight thematically organized galleries, POLIN charts both the peaks and valleys of a place that was once home to the world’s largest Jewish community.

As a North American diaspora Jew navigating the post-Oct. 7 world, the story told here struck me with particular force. It reflects the sweeping arc of Jewish history—flourishing communities, devastating loss, and the remarkable resilience that allows Jewish life to begin again. That is why I believe a visit to the POLIN Museum is essential for Jews everywhere.

From the museum’s light filled spacious lobby, the visitor descends a flight of stairs into a virtual forest evoking a rabbinic legend about the first Jews to arrive in Poland hearing the Hebrew words “Po Lin”—“Rest Here”—a mystical promise of refuge from persecution and future prosperity. The path then leads into the medieval gallery, which traces six centuries of history, from 965—the earliest recorded account by a Jewish traveler from Córdoba—to 1507, when Poland had become the heart of the Ashkenazi world.

The next gallery, aptly titled



PHOTOS: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

The Gwozdziec Synagogue’s reconstructed painted ceiling at the POLIN Museum—its most photographed element—was recreated by a multinational team of artisans and historians, preserving centuries of Jewish artistic and spiritual heritage.

Paradisus Iudaeorum—“Jewish paradise”—chronicles a golden age for both Jews and Poles that spanned roughly 226 years, from the mid-seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, then Europe’s largest country, stretched across what is today Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and parts of the Baltic region. Under the protection of the Polish nobility, Jews prospered economically, flourished culturally, and enjoyed an unprecedented degree of communal autonomy.

The centrepiece of this gallery—and the museum’s most photographed feature—is the breathtaking reconstruction of the painted ceiling of the Gwozdziec synagogue, one of hundreds of wooden synagogues destroyed by the Nazis. Its

recreation took a decade of work by historians, craftspeople, and volunteers.

Yet this golden age carried a darker undercurrent, powerfully evoked in the exhibit’s “Corridor of Fire.” Protected by the ruling elite but resented by the peasantry, Jews occupied a precarious social position. That tension erupted in the 1648 Chmielnicki Uprising, a Cossack-led revolt fueled by peasant rage that unleashed devastating violence. Entire Jewish communities across what is now Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine were destroyed, marking one of the defining traumas of modern Jewish history.

Jewish and Polish histories converge again in the next gallery, which opens with the late-eighteenth-century dissolution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its territories were

partitioned among Russia, Prussia, and Austria, erasing Poland—and with it, Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania—from the political map of Europe for more than a century. Jews suddenly found themselves largely confined to two regions: the Russian-controlled Pale of Settlement and Austrian Galicia. The exhibition traces how this upheaval gave rise to new political and social movements as Jews grappled with modernity. The Jewish Enlightenment movement promoted secular education and cultural integration, while Hasidism emerged as a mystical, populist movement that challenged rabbinic authority and offered spiritual solace amid recurring waves of anti-Jewish violence.

Poland regained its independence in 1918, following the end of the First World War, only to face

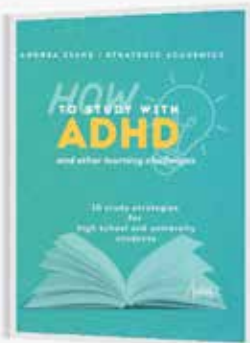
renewed catastrophe two decades later, when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union carved up its territory in 1939. The inter-war years are captured in one of POLIN’s most vivid sections, titled “On the Jewish Street,” which evokes a second—if tragically brief—golden age for Polish Jewry.

During this period, Yiddish culture flourished. Literary giants such as I. L. Peretz and Sholem Aleichem were widely read, Yiddish films drew large audiences, and Yiddish tango filled Warsaw’s cabarets. The dynamism of Jewish public life is powerfully conveyed through a display of newspapers published in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish.

It was also an era of intense political debate and activism. Visitors learn about the origins of the

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

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Chag Pesach Sameach!



Sandy Shaw

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The recreated Jewish street at the POLIN Museum offers a window into interwar Poland, illustrating the richness and resilience of Jewish community life.



A display representing the more than 300 Jewish publications in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish during the interwar period (1918-1939), when Poland was a global centre of the Jewish press.

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE
Zionist movement—which I found particularly resonant amid today’s misinformation—as well as the Jewish labour movement, the Bund, and Agudath Israel, an Orthodox political party that sought to unite Hasidic and non-Hasidic Jews in opposition to secularism and Zionism. Together, these movements reveal a community grappling with modernity, identity, and the pressures of persistent antisemitism.

A photograph of American embassy staff in Warsaw looking up as Nazi bombs fall over Warsaw on Sept. 1, 1939 stands at the entrance to the museum’s Holocaust section, which is presented through the perspectives of two individuals central to the Warsaw Ghetto. On the left, we find the story of the Polish Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum,

creator of the clandestine archive Oyneg Shabes that documents everyday life under Nazi rule. On the opposite wall, a parallel narrative traces the tragic experience of Adam Czerniaków, head of the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat, whose futile efforts to negotiate with the Nazis ended with his suicide in July 1942. The section also confronts the complexity of Polish-Jewish relations during the war, juxtaposing stories of betrayal with accounts of those who tried to rescue Jews—and who, in some cases, shared their fate.

The Holocaust wiped out 90 percent of Poland’s 3.3 million Jews, a tragic, irrevocable rupture many believed marked the final chapter of Polish Jewish history. Yet POLIN’s postwar gallery reveals a lesser-known story that testifies to the power of memory, survival, and the resilience of the

Getting there

WHAT: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, in Warsaw, Poland, is dedicated to preserving and recalling the memory of the history of Jews in Poland.

TOURS The museum offers extensive self-guided, audio-guided, and guided tours. Visitors can explore the core exhibition independently in 1.5–2 hours or use a multilingual audio guide.

FIND OUT MORE Visit the museum’s website:

polin.pl/en

Jewish people.

The story begins with survivors of concentration camps and Soviet gulags returning to their hometowns, only to face violent pogroms stoked by blood

libel rumours and disputes over stolen property. In the aftermath, more than half of Poland’s roughly 350,000 pre-war Jews left the country. A significant number of those who remained rose to prominence in the communist regime—until the Soviet-orchestrated anti-Zionist and antisemitic purge of March 1968 forced another 13,000 to leave.

With the fall of communism in 1989, Jewish life in Poland began an unexpected revival, symbolized by the founding of POLIN. The museum’s narrative concludes with a video installation featuring interviews with 20 Jews living in Poland today, whose reflections on identity, belonging, and the possibility of a Jewish future in the country offer a hopeful conclusion.

The average visitor spends about two hours in POLIN’s core

exhibition; I spent four—and could easily have spent another day. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett highlights its high rate of return visits, popularity with schoolchildren, and the many visitors who say it conveys not just Jewish, but Polish history.

POLIN has weathered political storms—under the previous government, then-director Dariusz Stola was accused of “politicizing” the museum—but today it enjoys broader support. At its core, the museum challenges Polish visitors to consider whether their history is a story of heroism and victimhood, or one that also acknowledges moral gray zones and complicity. By embracing complexity, POLIN is more than a museum: it is a place where history is not only learned, but felt, wrestled with, and returned to again and again.



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IN THEIR WORDS

Honouring Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg's legacy

Federation staff recount their best moments with the departing CEO, Gustavo Rymberg who charted the organization's course through some of our community's most difficult moments

The values he insists on at home: Honesty, loyalty, accountability, courage, are the ones he brings into every decision. He has never led from the sidelines, but always steps into the arena for his family and his community, and that is the legacy he will be leaving here in Hamilton.

JAZMIN RYMBERG
Director of Communications

Working under Gustavo's leadership has been a remarkable experience. I would describe him as passionate, rooted in Jewish values, pushing boundaries, warm, firm but considerate, magnanimous.

MAGGIE NORRIS
Program Director

What I admire most is Gustavo's creative spirit. His vision of JHamilton as a space for the wider community to learn about the Holocaust was transformative.

JACKIE STIRLING
Office Administrator

The past nine years working alongside Gustavo have been a true highlight of my career. His bold vision transformed our small community into one that feels expansive, vibrant, and deeply connected.

ELAINE LEVINE
Campaign Director



PHOTO: DONNA WAXMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

During the COVID pandemic, he initiated community check-ins and even shopped and delivered groceries to a senior community member. It's the many small gestures no one sees that truly define who he is.

CHRISTINE NUSCA
Campaign Administrator

As a non-Jew working for Federation, I am so impressed with his knowledge of Jewish and other cultures. He's a great caring, knowledgeable, and approachable boss. He will be

greatly missed by the team.

DAVID RUMPH
Financial Administrator

His impact on me has been profound. His leadership comes from integrity and genuine care for his people. His guidance helped me grow professionally and strengthened our entire team.

GLENN MANNELLA
Regional Security Advisor

In the short time I have known him, I have seen a noble and

Hamilton Jewish Federation staff pose for a photograph with CEO Gustavo Rymberg. Pictured above l to r (top row) are Glenn Mannella, Jazmin Rymberg, Jackie Stirling, Maggie Norris, David Rumph, Nataly Minster and Wendy Schneider. Front row, l to r, are Elaine Levine, Gustavo Rymberg and Christine Nusca.

caring leader. I will never forget the phone call that echoed through the office when he defended Israel and responded with strength and conviction.

NATALY MINSTER
Executive and Program Assistant

Gustavo's consistent and heartfelt expressions of appreciation made working under his leadership not only productive, but deeply fulfilling for everyone on his team.

WENDY SCHNEIDER
Editor, Hamilton Jewish News

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Hamilton Jewish News editor receives Order of Hamilton

Wendy Schneider honoured for preserving the city's Jewish stories in a community newspaper and in oral histories

BY JAZMIN RYMBERG
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

THERE ARE PEOPLE in every city who quietly decide that memory matters. In Hamilton, Wendy Schneider has spent more than three decades acting on that belief. This year, she is being recognized with the Order of Hamilton for her contributions to Jewish life in Hamilton.

Since 1993, Schneider has been the editor of the Hamilton Jewish News, documenting the community's stories, history, and voices. Issue after issue, she has highlighted community members, captured leadership transitions, and shared the human stories that define communal life. Over time, those pages have become an archive. Future generations will understand who we were because Schneider made sure it was documented.

When asked about the honour, Schneider described her role as editor of the Hamilton Jewish News as an extraordinary privilege. "It has given me the chance to mirror the vibrancy, richness, and diversity of this community back to itself," she said, "and it has truly been a labour of love."

Editing a community newspaper requires more than technical skill. It demands an instinct for what deserves to be preserved. Schneider has long understood that small stories often carry lasting weight: a profile of a volunteer, a synagogue anniversary, a student award. Individually, these may seem modest. Together, they create a portrait of a community whose influence extends far beyond its size.

Her work extends beyond the



PHOTO: DONNA WAXMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Wendy Schneider, pictured here with veteran journalist, Ron Csillag, at a 2022 Federation event celebrating her contributions to the Hamilton Jewish News.

curiosity, she made it her mission to protect and document our story."

In my four years as the Federation's director of communications, marketing, and public relations, I have had the privilege of collaborating with Schneider on articles for the Hamilton Jewish News. What stands out most is the seriousness with which she approaches each submission. She understands that when someone shares a story, they are placing trust in the record. Working with her has deepened my appreciation for how rare and meaningful this work is. Contributing to the paper means participating in the preservation of a community's identity, and Schneider has shown me how powerful that responsibility can be.

Schneider's leadership continues the Goldblatt family's longstanding commitment to Hamilton's Jewish institutions, but her impact is distinctly her own. Through consistency and conviction, she has strengthened the city's cultural memory and ensured that Jewish life in Hamilton remains visible and accessible to future generations.

The Order of Hamilton is one of the city's highest civic honours, recognizing people whose volunteer service has made a real and lasting difference.

In honouring Wendy Schneider, the City of Hamilton is recognizing decades of quiet, steady work that has shaped how a community understands itself. It is a recognition of time given, care shown, and history protected; work that often happens behind the scenes, but leaves a lasting impact.

printed page. In the mid-2000s Schneider collaborated with now retired McMaster University Professor Bill Shaffir, on the Jewish Hamilton Project, a landmark oral history initiative that captured the voices and lived experiences of long-time community members, preserving personal stories that might otherwise have been lost and creating a lasting archive of Hamilton's Jewish life for future generations.

That same commitment to safeguarding local history led her to spearhead the creation of the Rose and Phil Rosenshein Museum at Beth Jacob Synagogue. Collaborating with local curators, she helped design exhibitions that brought the synagogue's history to life, highlighting its notable members and exploring themes central to Hamilton's Jewish community. As part of the project,

Schneider tracked down an historic stained-glass window commissioned by her great-grandfather for the synagogue's original Hunter Street building and arranged for it to become the museum's centrepiece.

Schneider's longstanding engagement with Jewish and Israeli culture have found another outlet in recent years, in her role as coordinator of the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival. Over the last eight years, she has helped build the festival into a respected cultural event that has created space for Jewish stories within Hamilton's broader cultural landscape.

Gustavo Rymberg, CEO of the Hamilton Jewish Federation, summed up her impact succinctly: "Wendy does this work from her heart. No one assigned her the responsibility of preserving Hamilton's Jewish history. She chose it. Out of genuine care and

"Wendy does this work from her heart ... out of genuine care and curiosity."

GUSTAVO RYMBERG
CEO, Hamilton Jewish Federation

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Chag Pesach Sameach!

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Yom HaShoah event will feature a moving musical performance



PHOTO: COURTESY PAYADORA TANGO ENSEMBLE

BY **MAGGIE NORRIS**
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

THIS YEAR'S community commemoration of Yom HaShoah Holocaust Remembrance Day promises to be especially meaningful with a special musical performance by Toronto's award-winning Payadora Tango Ensemble, presenting selections from their acclaimed production, "Silent Tears: The Last Yiddish Tango." Composed by Rebekah Wolkstein and arranged by Drew Jurecka, the work draws on poems, testimonies, and writings by women who endured torture during the Holocaust. Through haunting melodies and powerful storytelling, the ensemble evokes a world nearly extinguished, yet one that continues to resonate with resilience and life.

A highlight of the evening will be the presentation of the second annual Tom Weisz Holocaust Education and

Jewish Advocacy Award to Michael Levitt, president and CEO of Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre. Through his leadership in Holocaust education and the fight against antisemitism, Levitt has been a powerful voice for truth and Jewish pride across Canada and beyond.

As in years past, the evening will feature a moving candle-lighting ceremony. We are honored to welcome special guests: Consul General Marek Ciesielczuk of the Republic of Poland ==, Consul General Anne Wagner-Mitchell of the Federal Republic of Germany, and Hamilton Mayor Andrea Horwath, who will each share remarks.

At a time when antisemitism is increasing worldwide, coming together as a community is more vital than ever. We hope to see you on April 14 at 7 p.m., with the location TBA. For more information, please contact mnorris@jewishhamilton.org.

Payadora Tango Ensemble will perform selections from their acclaimed production, "Silent Tears: the Last Yiddish Tango."

Suspense novelist headlines Na'amat's author event

Joy Fielding is known for her psychological thrillers

BY **PHYLLIS SHRAGGE**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

NA'AMAT HAMILTON'S 40th annual celebrity author event will feature New York Times bestselling author Joy Fielding as guest speaker. This year's event will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, May 11. The location will be provided upon registration. Following Fielding's presentation, there will be a question-and-answer period and an elegant dessert evening.

A suspense novelist of more than 28 books, Joy Fielding will speak on her latest novel, Jenny Cooper has a Secret, a psychological thriller about a woman who must decide whether she can believe a dementia patient who claims to have a dark secret: She kills people!

The protagonist, 76-year-old Linda Davidson, meets Jenny Cooper, a 92-year-old dementia patient, in a memory-care facility. Initially, Linda dismisses Jenny's so-called secret as the confusion of an ailing mind, but Jenny seems strangely lucid over the course of their visits. She tells Linda about her many victims, mostly men who hurt her. Then a fellow patient at the facility dies. Everyone sees this as a natural death, but Linda can't help wondering: Is there any chance Jenny is telling the truth?

Fielding lives in Toronto and has a home in Palm Beach, Florida. She began her writing career at the age of eight. She continued to write through her teen years and beyond. Writing



MARK RAYNES ROBERTS

Canadian novelist Joy Fielding

was her focus until she began university when she decided her future lay in acting. At the University of Toronto, she acted in about 20 campus productions. After graduating in 1966, she moved to Los Angeles where she acted full time.

Eventually, she returned to Toronto and went back to writing. Fielding says: "I love writing because it's the only time in my life when I feel I have complete control. Nobody does or says anything I don't tell them to—although even this amount of control is illusory because there comes a point where the characters ... tell you what they think they should say and do."

When asked where she gets her ideas, Fielding replies: "A writer borrows a bit from here, there and everywhere, and adapts it to her own purpose. I find that the more of me I include, the more readers can identify with."

Na'amat's mission is to safeguard women, children and families in Israel and Canada. Tickets are \$30, available at weblink.donorperfect.com/Hamilton_40th_AnnualCelebrityAuthorEvent.



Michael Levitt, CEO of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre, will receive the Tom Weisz Holocaust Education and Jewish Advocacy Award.

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BETH JACOB
SYNAGOGUE

Negev Dinner honours Rabbi Daniel and Tova Green

Funds raised will be directed towards new synagogue and cultural complex in Moshav Shlomit on the Gaza border

BY ORNA RICHTER
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

RABBI Daniel Green and Tova Green will be honoured by JNF at this year's Negev Dinner for their extraordinary leadership, devotion to community, and lifelong commitment to Jewish life and Israel.

For decades, Rabbi Green and Tova have helped build a community of people. Through learning, inspiring programs, personal outreach, hospitality, and a deep sense of responsibility to others, they have strengthened Jewish identity for countless families in Hamilton. Their love for Israel has been central to their vision, and their connection to Friends of JNF Canada reflects that enduring commitment.

In a gesture that reflects their values, Rabbi Green and Tova have chosen that the funds raised in their honour will support the creation of the learning centre within a new synagogue cultural centre being built in Moshav Shlomit, a small community along Israel's southern frontier.

Established in 2011, Shlomit sits just kilometres from Gaza and near

the Egyptian border. The moshav was founded as part of Israel's broader effort to strengthen and secure its southern region. It is home to young, idealistic families who have chosen to live with purpose — embracing both the beauty and the challenges of life in this sensitive region.

The events of Oct. 7, 2023, brought unimaginable horror particularly to the southern border communities, and Shlomit was no exception. When violence erupted, members of Shlomit's volunteer security team rushed to defend a neighbouring moshav under attack. In a fierce two-hour battle, four brave men — Aviad, Reuven, Bechor, and Oriel — were killed while saving the lives of all residents. Their sacrifice left behind four widows and fifteen children who lost their fathers. Their heroism has become part of the collective memory of the community and the Jewish people.

Today, Shlomit is rebuilding with resilience, faith, and determination. At the heart of that renewal is the construction of a new synagogue and cultural complex built in memory of



Rabbi Daniel and Tova Green

PHOTO: PURPLE TREE PHOTOGRAPHY

these four heroes. This new complex rises as a beacon of hope in the Negev landscape. Visible for kilometres in every direction, it will stand as an enduring symbol of resilience, faith, and courage, a place where a growing community of young families and pioneers living on the border gather to celebrate Shabbat, Jewish holidays, and life's milestones while drawing strength from one another.

The Learning Centre will serve as a vibrant hub of study, connection, and community life. Rooted in the enduring Jewish commitment to lifelong learning, it will be a place where ideas are explored and meaningful dialogue flourishes. Above all, it will stand as a living tribute to those who gave their lives protecting others, ensuring that their sacrifice is honoured through the continued vitality of Jewish communal life.

The historical significance of this project, and its story of heroism,

hope, and resilience, deeply moved Rabbi Green and Tova. Their goal is to weave these values into the fabric of our own community, strengthening the bond between Hamilton and Shlomit. They envision a partnership in which the light of Shlomit and the spirit of Hamilton illuminate one another; A place where Hamiltonians will visit united by a sense of connection and shared purpose.

This year's Negev Gala Dinner is about more than honouring two remarkable individuals. It is about affirming a shared responsibility to build, to remember, and to shape a stronger future together. As the community gathers at the Negev Gala Dinner on June 22, the evening will stand as a testament to the generational legacy of Rabbi Green and Tova in our community. Through their support of the Learning Centre in Moshav Shlomit, they have helped forge a living bridge between communities separated by distance yet bound together by faith, purpose, and hope for generations to come.

The Hamilton Negev Dinner will take place on June 22. To purchase tickets, please refer to the Negev Dinner ad on page 19, which includes a QR code and website details, or visit Hamiltonnegev.ca.

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FINDING THEIR PEOPLE

How unaffiliated young families are finding their way back to community



Jen Gilbert, a Hamilton native living in Kitchener, brings her voice to Hamilton Jewish News in a series that profiles unaffiliated young families as they reconnect with their roots and Jewish life

BY **JEN GILBERT**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

“My local Jewish community has expanded. I’ve been welcomed with open arms and feel like I belong.”

JEN GILBERT
jgilbert@jewishhamilton.org

FOUR YEARS ago, I moved to Kitchener and quickly built a life that was perfect for me. I made new friends and had no need for anything beyond the arts, culture, and education I sought. (I moved to attend Conestoga College to study graphic design.)

Reaching out to the local Jewish community through the Waterloo Region Jewish Community Council (WRJCC) was nowhere on my list of things to do. I had tried making Jewish friends in the past, but never felt like I fit in. At that point, in Kitchener, I was an unaffiliated Jewish person — I identified as Jewish, had no local Jewish friends, didn’t belong to a synagogue, and had no interest in joining the WRJCC. That is, until Oct. 7, 2023. Then everything changed.

My story isn’t uncommon. There are unaffiliated Jews everywhere. Defining the unaffiliated has no set rules; each person has their own interpretation and identification.

The unaffiliated in Hamilton could be someone who moved here from Toronto and goes back most weekends; it could be someone who grew up affiliated, drifted away as a young adult, and came back after having kids; it could be someone who only attends shul once a year on the high holidays; or, someone who has Jewish friends, yet doesn’t participate in anything community or synagogue related.

I’ll never forget the moment I learned of the terror attacks on our people Oct. 7.

I felt my world tilt, and in the days that followed, I went through the motions of life in a rattled daze, my mind not fully able to focus. I spent countless hours on the phone with my parents, trying to process everything. My closest girlfriend in Kitchener, a friend who dropped everything in times of need, was no longer there for me, sharing anti-Zionism resources and

antisemitic propaganda on her social media. I had to say goodbye to our friendship.

I felt alone and unsettled. And I was scared.

There were antisemitic incidents in my classroom, and as the weeks went by, my relentless fear and feeling of isolation grew. Deep down,

I knew I needed Jewish connections — the pull to that community was immense. I needed people in my life to whom I didn’t have to explain or defend my right to exist — people who just “got it.” My journey to affiliation was about to begin.

One day, I decided to go to a rally for hostages at Kitchener City Hall. The WRJCC’s leader, whom I had never met before, approached me and gave me a hug. She introduced me to a Jewish girl who was also new to the region.

We instantly hit it off; it was *bashert*. We could be real with each other — there was no sugarcoating anything. To this day, when we’re overwhelmed or see acts of antisemitism, we immediately connect.

My local Jewish community has expanded. I’ve been welcomed with open arms, and feel like I belong. I consider myself lucky that I met the right person who showed me that safe community exists, but I also recognize my role in being brave and showing up, an intimidating and challenging task in a community where people have known each other for years. I’ve met others in my position, looking for community too.

I can express gratitude to be affiliated in my local Jewish community, an act I never thought I’d express three years ago. And now, I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Can you relate to the stories on these pages? Do you feel Oct. 7 made you more driven to seek Jewish connections? I want to hear your story and continue this conversation next issue. Connect with me at: jgilbert@jewishhamilton.org

THE TIES THAT BIND

Why young Jews are seeking to reconnect with their roots

BY **JEN GILBERT**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

HAMILTON has a pretty stellar Jewish community. At least, that’s the impression I got from interviewing Sara Egier and Ali Kellner for this series. It’s a sisterhood you fall for the moment you join — and having left Hamilton, I can’t help but feel a little jealous. Feeling a little FOMO, to be honest. But I’m also feeling incredibly excited: excited for all the unaffiliated Jews living in Hamilton — new and homegrown — wanting to find their people, and knowing what a comfort it will be for them when found.

Egier and Kellner both experienced affiliated Jewish upbringings, drifted away from the community between high school and having kids, and found their way back, each in their own way. Did their return to affiliation have anything to do with a need to seek Jewish connections post-Oct. 7? In some ways, yes. But their journeys back had already begun the year before.

I thought this would be an easy story to write — that there was a clear path young unaffiliated Jews were taking back to community after Oct. 7, that they were reconnecting simply because they needed support. How narrow-minded of me. Of course, there are infinite reasons to seek Jewish community, no matter what’s going on in the world. But what I’ve noticed is that no matter our affiliation “status,” those who grew up affiliated feel a deep connection to their Jewish identity. And it’s this identity (religious, cultural, or both) that’s always simmering below the surface. As Sara Egier said, “I think at our core, we know that it’s an important part of who we are as individuals and carries important values with it.” Is our strong sense of Jewish identity tied to having grandparents who survived the Holocaust, as Sara, Ali, and I do — and is that what has driven us to reconnect and become more affiliated after Oct. 7?

Following our conversations,

I’m left with more questions than answers. Even if we have Jewish affiliation, why do we seek out connections even more after a collective tragedy?

Why do we suddenly need these connections so deeply, yet can exist without them in the absence of tragedy? And how is it so easy to form a Jewish sisterhood — that instant connection, like you’ve known someone forever — even after you’ve just met? For now, all I can say is we’re all grateful that our affiliation makes life that much more bearable, tolerable, and the load less heavy, throughout the hard times.

Jews get it. Each generation carries the weight of our ancestors’ persecution and survival throughout thousands of years. No matter our cultures and experiences, Jewish people from around the globe, on some innate level, seem to understand one another. “You can’t explain it to anyone who’s not Jewish. They don’t know,” said Ali in reference to being able to vent, talk about Oct. 7, and to feel seen and heard. I couldn’t agree more.

Need to Know

FAMILY PROGRAMS

- Hamilton Jewish Federation’s PJ Library program. To enroll in the program, email [mnorris@jewishhamilton.org](mailto:morris@jewishhamilton.org).
- Temple Anshe Sholom’s Tot Shabbat weekly program for ages one to 4.
- Adas Israel supervised Shabbat programs from ages 2 to 12.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Temple Anshe Sholom Jewish Learning Program anshesholom.ca/learning
- Hamilton Hebrew Academy Early Learning Centre and Kindergarten hha.ca/preschool
- Kehila Heschel School JK to Grade 5 kehilaheschel.ca/why-kehila-heschel.

Sara Egier's journey from her Jewish cultural roots to building meaningful connections



Lost until she was found ... Newcomer Ali Kellner's story of reconnection and belonging



STORIES BY JEN GILBERT, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

“What I really love about the community here is learning from people from all different walks of life who have different connections to Judaism.”

SARA EGIER
A Hamilton native

Sara Egier has always felt a deep responsibility to stay connected to her Jewish identity and to pass her heritage on to her children, honouring the family her grandmother lost in the Holocaust. It wasn't until after Oct. 7 that she realized how essential being part of a community was to truly fulfill that responsibility.

Jewish upbringing

Egier grew up in Hamilton in an interfaith family, and experienced traditions and culture from both her parents. However, she was raised culturally Jewish: she attended synagogue on the high holidays, went to Sunday school at Temple Anshe Sholom, spent Jewish holidays with her extended family, and had a couple of Jewish friends.

She participated in community events (you may remember the Pytka-Jones sisters singing during Yom HaShoah commemorations), and was, by my definition, affiliated in the Jewish community.

Unaffiliated as a young adult

Egier kept an arm's length from the synagogue after high school. Her family gatherings on the holidays continued, but she wasn't engaged in the Jewish community. Journey to Affiliation

Egier met Dave—also Jewish—which, although finding a Jewish partner wasn't a priority, turned out to be really nice for them. They have a four-year-old son, and their plan was always to raise him Jewish. Although Oct. 7 didn't play a role in that decision,

it did become the catalyst for other more intentional decisions, like sending their son to Jewish school for kindergarten, creating relationships within the Jewish community, seeking out community events, and incorporating traditions like Shabbat dinner at home. As Egier's network expanded, her contribution to the community has too.

She now gives back as a board member at Kehila Heschel School, where she feels her Jewish connection has taken on deeper meaning and greater impact.

About community

“What I really love about the community in Hamilton is learning from people from all different walks of life who have had changes in [their] connection to Judaism,” says Egier.

A lot of the people she's met in the community have had similar experiences and feelings about what's going on in the world, and for Egier, it's been therapeutic and comforting being able to make Jewish connections. She sees Jewish identity as the foundation for connection from which deeper relationships can grow. “I bet there are a lot of other people out there that are wanting to make those connections as well. And it's a nice community to do it in.”

Egier also recognizes that connections outside of the Jewish community are crucial too, and says we need to focus on making those relationships strong as well, to support one another.

“Finding the Jewish community was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

ALI KELLNER
A newcomer to Hamilton

When she first moved to Hamilton, Montreal native Ali Kellner wasn't particularly interested in connecting with the city's Jewish community, and didn't realize how much she needed it. “Finding the Jewish community in Hamilton was the best thing that ever happened to me,” she said. “It's the reason we're still here and happy, and had another kid.”

Jewish upbringing

Kellner was raised in a big Jewish suburb, surrounded by Jewish people. Her family got together on the High Holidays, but they didn't belong to a synagogue until the time of her brother's Bar Mitzvah, and they left shortly after. She attended Jewish summer camp and was in a youth string orchestra that played Jewish Klezmer music.

She considered herself affiliated in a spiritual and community way, and it wasn't until being in Israel on Birthright where the innate Judaism within her was solidified.

Unaffiliated as a young adult

Kellner was one of two Jews in her post-secondary program, and that was a culture shock. Judaism wasn't part of her life then. After graduation, she lived in Toronto, and her community was her high school friends who had also moved there, and her boyfriend—now husband—Noam. She didn't feel a need to seek Jewish community, and never gave much thought to her Jewish identity. That was, until she moved to Hamilton.

Journey to affiliation

Ali and Noam's son was born in 2022. They had been in Hamilton for a year and half, feeling a bit lost and depressed, not knowing anybody. Instinctively, Kellner looked into a Jewish day care facility in Hamilton, and that's when everything changed. She met so many Jewish moms, and now it's the only reason she's genuinely feeling secure and happy—like she's supposed to be here.

“As soon as I met these women, these moms who are just Jewish moms, it felt so natural and easy. It was like we had known each other forever. That's the way I felt—like sisters.” Now, they've only gotten closer. And going to synagogue every Saturday for their kids' Shabbat programming is Kellner's favourite part of the week.

Oct. 7 only fueled her need for more Jewish connections, and she went all in on her Jewish friends. She didn't stop talking to her non-Jewish friends, but she wouldn't talk about Oct. 7 with them.

About community

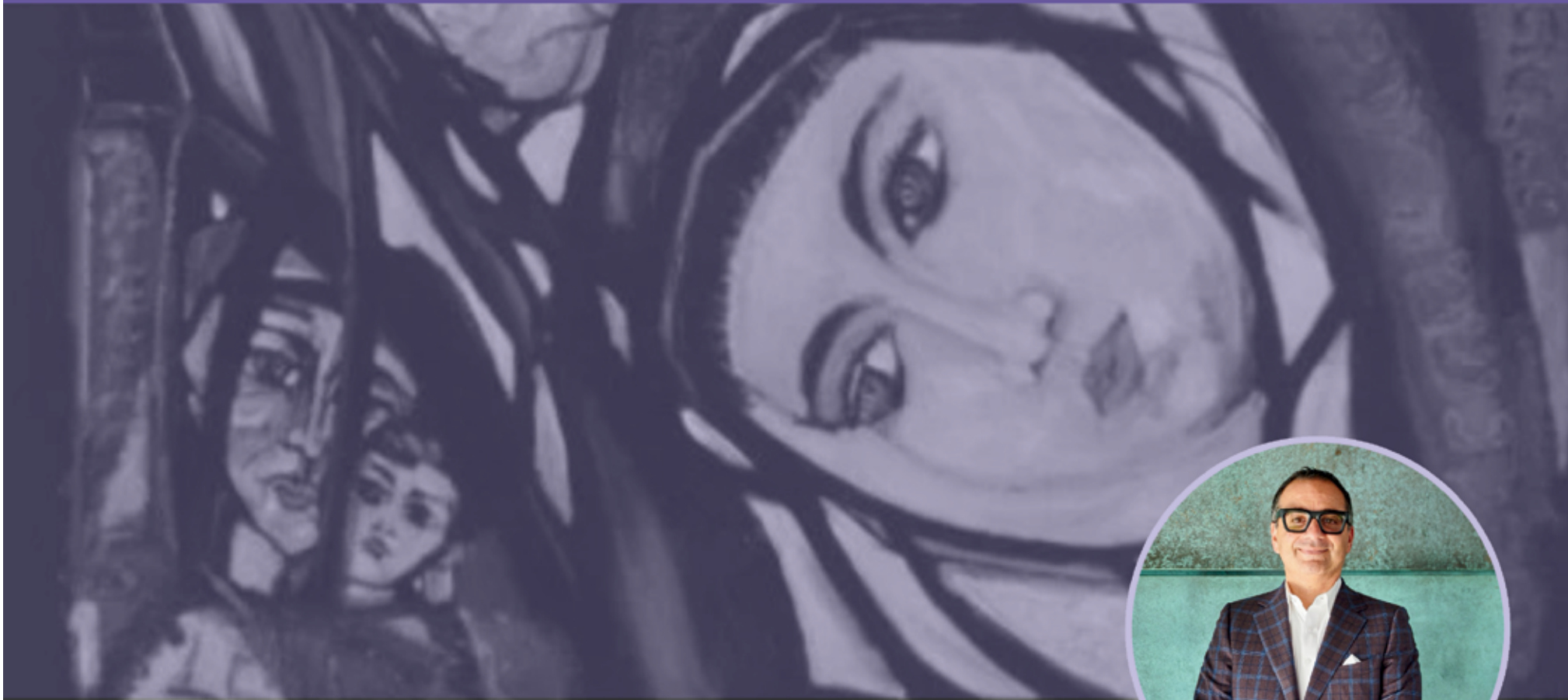
For the most part, Ali's Jewish friends are also newcomers to Hamilton. And now she wants to pay it forward by bringing even more people together.

PHOTOS: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Hamilton Jewish Federation
Margaret's Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre Present

YOM HASHOAH

Community-Wide Commemoration



Tuesday, April 14 | 7pm

Candle lighting ceremony with Hamilton's Holocaust Survivors & their descendants.

A selection of songs performed by **Payadora from Silent Tears: The Last Yiddish Tango.**

The music of Silent Tears was composed by Rebekah Wolkstein, arranged by Drew Jurecka, and performed by the Payadora Tango Ensemble. **The work is based on poems, testimonies, and writings by women who were victims of torture during the Holocaust.**

For more information contact Maggie
mnorris@jewishhamilton.org

The Tom Weisz z"l Award for Holocaust Education and Jewish Advocacy presented to **Michael Levitt**, President and CEO of Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

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by APR 17

Trading sirens for snow

As a newcomer from Israel, I've found a sense of belonging



Nadav Greenhut

A FEW DAYS ago I was sitting with friends from Israel who, like me, had emigrated to Hamilton after the events of Oct. 7.

"Every siren here makes me jump," my host said, as her partner nodded quietly in agreement.

"I can tell you it takes time," I told her. "There was a time when every airplane noise would make me jump, but the nervous system eventually calms down."

Our conversation took me back to the early weeks of the war, when my wife and I would huddle with our children in the hallway, aware that a direct hit could bring the house down. I remembered, too, the night in April 2024 when Iran launched a swarm of drones and missiles toward Israel — the non-stop doom-scrolling, the whine of missiles overhead, the explosions when they finally reached their targets, and the exhausted eyes of everyone the next morning.

When we came to Hamilton in May 2024, we were welcomed with lots of help and the goodwill of almost everyone we met, especially from the Jewish community. At first, we rented an Airbnb. The homeowners, members of Hamilton's Dutch community, went out of their way to help us in every way they could. When we started searching for a house, we quickly realized how challenging renting here could be. Even with the necessary funds, we had no Canadian credit history, no local employment, and no rental references — making landlords hesitant to rent to us. Thankfully, our hosts generously offered to extend our stay, which was a tremendous help during that difficult time.

The hardest moment came when we finally found a place and were about to sign the lease — only to discover that the landlord simply backed out. Suddenly, we found ourselves just days away from living on the street. Only thanks to my wife's resourcefulness and the support of the Jewish community did we manage to get through this crisis.

The second major challenge we faced

here was finding work. We submitted resumes to dozens of workplaces, and received rejection emails from all of them. It took my wife and me almost a year to secure employment. In hindsight, I now realize that job opportunities in Canada are scarce for almost everyone right now.

I owe my first opportunities here to many in the Jewish community. One remarkable woman with a grand piano let me practice nearly every day and shared conversations about music and philosophy that made me feel less alone.

Life's surprises kept coming. My wife joined the neighbourhood "Buy Nothing" group, and on errands to pick up items, I met a couple who became like a second set of grandparents. The woman, who discovered late in life that she was Jewish, was tracing her family tree—and found relatives from the same regions of Europe as my grandparents. Even more astonishing: her family included several Greenhuts, making us likely distant relatives.

Eventually, the Hamilton Jewish Federation invited me to perform at the Jewish Film Festival and on Holocaust Remembrance Day—opportunities that continue to arise.

My family and I have been living in Hamilton for nearly two years now. I eventually found my first official job as a piano teacher at Long & McQuade in Brantford, and over time my name has become known in the community. Today, I'm fortunate to have a growing number of private students.

As new immigrants to Canada, we've faced our share of challenges, but we've also discovered unexpected opportunities. Most people we meet are kind and courteous, and there's a level of politeness that, for better or worse, feels somewhat foreign compared to back home.

Life in Hamilton is a striking contrast to what I knew in Israel. The constant threat of missiles has been replaced by a bitter winter, with temperatures that make my friends and family members in Israel whistle in disbelief.

And the nervous system? It turns out that minus 30 degrees is far better than a missile attack. Indeed, we are cold but we are also blessedly calm.

Reading books in an age of slop

From my father's shelves to my children's bedside



Ben Shragge

THE MERRIAM-Webster dictionary's 2025 word of the year was "slop." It defines slop as "digital content of low quality that is produced usually in quantity by means of artificial intelligence." You've probably already seen plenty of slop on your social media feed. Notable fans include the President of the United States, who has shared slop portraying Barack and Michelle Obama as monkeys and showing himself in a fighter jet dropping feces onto "No Kings" protesters.

But though AI is a slop accelerant, I'd argue that the phenomenon precedes and extends well beyond it. Much of the human-generated content on the internet is also low-effort, low-quality slop designed to feed your attention without providing nutritional value. By nutritional value, I mean educating, inspiring, challenging, and otherwise engaging you as a human being, instead of as a farm animal to be milked for views and likes. Certain evidence-free, emotion-baiting modes of discourse also inherently reek of slop, including conspiracy theories, pseudo-science, and partisan propaganda.

Hopefully, slop is only the word of the year for 2025, not the defining feature of the 21st century. Regardless, on a personal and familial level, one small but meaningful way to combat slop is to read books instead of watching screens. The quality of the books matters, of course. Books, too, can be slop (and some are now written by AI). But the very medium of the long-form written word runs counter to the slop ethos. Reading books requires sustained attention to a narrative or argument, not short-term enthrallment. At their best, books deliver enlightenment about the world, yourself, and other people. Slop simply distracts from reality or cruelly distorts it.

When I think of books, I think of my dad, whose personal library seemed to stretch into every room in our house: kitchen, bathrooms, and kids' bedrooms excepted. He hadn't actually read all of his books, but that was the point: you

bought books to read in the future, and by the time you finished the ones you'd bought, you'd already accumulated even more. I remember him buying books when he was terminally ill, and I wondered why he bothered when he'd never have time to read them. His favourite holiday was Passover, so it seems fitting that I connect this with a story that we read from the Seder each year. Pharaoh orders the Israelites to drown their newborn boys. Yet despite this genocidal decree, the Israelites continue to bear children and circumcise their sons. They never surrendered to despair, or assumed that death was the end of the story, and neither did my father.

When my dad died in 2012, the sheer volume of his collection meant that we had to sell or give away many of his books. But I also chose a large number to inherit, even though most were lodged at my mom's townhouse while I lived in an apartment here in the US. In 2020, my wife and I bought a house, and my mom then took the opportunity to ship 15 boxes of books to our new address. Now they line our shelves, mixed in with my own acquisitions. I'm not always sure which books my dad actually read, but I like to think that I'm finishing the ones he never got the chance to start. Because we share the same initials, I've taken to signing "BS" on the first page when I complete them. It's our collection now. The story continues.

These days, as the father of two young children, my house is filled with kids' books as well. Some were gifts, some were inherited, some were bought, and some arrive each month courtesy of PJ Library. My four-year-old daughter used to ask us to read her a seemingly infinite number of stories before bed, but we've cut her down to four. She also sleeps with a pile of books, because they're much more fun — and, apparently, comforting — than dolls. My two-year-old son is less interested in stories than in pointing at their illustrations, particularly cars and anything with wheels. He's not much of a talker yet, but he knows what things are called and loves to hear their names. I know that, eventually, my kids will have their own phones and be exposed to the world wide web of slop. But, in the meantime, we're teaching them to love books: from generation to generation.

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Helaine Ortmann

FOR THE past year or so, season notwithstanding, I've been having trouble sleeping. Given the state of current affairs in the world and, closer to home, health issues in our own family to worry about, is it any wonder?

"Sleep problems" is how the healthcare professionals titled the information handout I picked up on my first visit to the supportive care department based at Juravinski Cancer Centre. They had me at hello: I have insomnia.

That's when you have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, waking up too early, or when your sleep does not rest or restore you. It occurs at least three nights a week for more than three months running, and it causes you distress.

An image pops into my head. It's a photo I took in 2017 of my mother at Shalom Village, then in her nineties, modelling a royal blue V-necked night shirt that read: "Due to unfortunate circumstances, I am awake."

That could be me, now. The "unfortunate circumstances" are diverse: a recent diagnosis of breast cancer followed by surgical and radiation treatment, a hormone suppressing medication for the next five years, a meniscus tear leading to a knee replacement for my husband, growing older ... need I go on?

Nu, what to do?

A life-long learner at heart, I agreed to try cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBT-I). A highfalutin term (I can hear my mother's voice) for a way to understand more about sleep, change my sleep habits and behaviours, and use tools that can help manage thoughts, emotions or body sensations that get in the way of sleep.

One of the first things I was asked to do was keep a "sleep diary" for two weeks to track patterns and gather information about my sleep drive and sleep efficiency (or in my case, inefficiency).

Wearable electronic devices and online apps aside, I went old school (pen and paper) and completed a short

questionnaire every morning.

While I continued to exercise, walk in my neighbourhood, cook, bake, and garden; follow up and conversation with my doctor led me to making some practical changes in my everyday habits.

Key among them, I gave up afternoon naps (even though I felt I deserved them). Then I added restful activities to my evening routine to keep myself awake until bedtime — wordsearch, crosswords, writing, streaming romcoms, listening to favourite podcasts and music.

And finally, I re-set my biological clock by going to bed one hour later and waking up one hour earlier; this strategy suggested by the data recorded in my sleep diary.

At night, I soaked in a tub scattered with a generous serving of Epsom salts, sometimes lavender or eucalyptus scented. I massaged my feet with magnesium body cream and wore cotton socks to bed; willing the minerals to soothe my feet and the socks to keep them warm through the night, as well as boost circulation.

Lest any of this sounds too good to be true, let me be clear. It is rare, perhaps only once a week or every two, that I sleep through the night; uninterrupted. Yet, I have noticed a small shift to the positive. More often than not, I am able to fall back to sleep reasonably quickly once I awaken; and, I feel less distressed and alone.

More accepting. Sleep issues are shared by a great many others, and I now know they are common during and after cancer treatment.

Full disclosure: as I write this, it's 5:56 a.m. and I've been bolt awake since 3:15. Was it the caffeine in the Zero Coke I had at supper time, with the lemon curd cake chaser?

Was it staying up until midnight to watch the Raptors lose to the Los Angeles Lakers on their first of a five-day road trip? Did I not commit seriously enough to the body scan I attempted while waiting for the sun to rise? Was the polar vortex of a temperature I had set in my bedroom not cold enough for a good night's sleep?

Meshuga, my mother would say. There's nothing *highfalutin* about that.

Living one day at a time

Old age may be around the corner, but I'm not there yet



Phyllis Shragge

THE TERM "active senior" puzzles me. What does it even mean? Does it refer to someone in superb physical shape like a particular friend of mine? This friend works out at a gym four days a week. She's in her 70s and her body is as hard as a rock. Even her arms are firm and solid. No batwings. No flabby underarms that wave with minimal movement.

Then there's the rest of us in the so-called active senior category. I'm in okay physical shape. I walk. I do a bit of exercise. I try to eat well. But admittedly, if sometime soon I find myself chased through a dark alleyway by a threatening stranger, I won't be able to hold my own. I'd be out of breath in minutes and barely able to walk, much less run.

But regardless of our degree of physical fitness, my subset of elderly people—the active senior division—have something in common. We all acknowledge with certainty that it's downhill from here.

I realize this is a negative attitude that seems more than a bit disheartening, but active seniors are complicated. On the one hand, we consider our chronological age to be a lie. There's no way, we tell ourselves, that we can really be in our late 60s or 70s, and certainly not in our 80s. For heaven's sake, we look younger, or at least we try to appear younger, than our parents did at our age. And we do everything we can to keep our minds intact. We try to stay on top of current events. We understand the intricacies of the iPhone, at least somewhat. Our memories, of course, could be better (What was the word for that thing-amajig?), but all in all, we are young for our age. We are shocked when we realize we're in a higher-risk medical category when it comes to vaccination eligibility. And we can't fathom that a radio announcer just described someone in our age bracket as elderly.

And yet, with all this self-deception,

we are pessimistic (or realistic?) when it comes to the future. If we live in a house or a townhouse, we consider moving to a condo because we're sure that at some point our knees won't be able to handle going up and down the stairs. When we picture ourselves down the road, we imagine being hit with a devastating illness, being physically frail or ravaged by dementia. We see our adult children taking over our responsibilities. We see lost independence and quality of life. We wonder if it would be better to die suddenly rather than getting old.

Most of us of a certain age catastrophize about the future. If we are healthy, we know our good fortune may not last for long. If we, or our loved ones, are ill, the days ahead look bleak.

We know we should enjoy each day and not worry about what lies ahead, but it's

“Most of us of a certain age catastrophize about the future ... We know we should enjoy each day and not worry about what lies ahead, but it's easier said than done.”

easier said than done. Perhaps, we should be busier so we can subdue those intrusive thoughts and limit their power over us. But how busy is busy enough? Most of us have full days, with various activities, but do we need to stretch ourselves? Since it's quite apparent that we are not our chronological ages, maybe we underestimate our capabilities. Should we try hang gliding or skydiving?

Well, maybe not, but perhaps we should explore other possibilities, like learning Italian or taking violin lessons. They do say that learning a new skill *Might* ward off dementia. (I say *Might* with a capital M because I'd like to see the proof.)

What's the point of looking ahead? Maybe we should live one day at a time. Perhaps the answer to all of this is to enjoy that extra piece of chocolate cake or a second glass of wine.

Because even though old age may be around the corner for active seniors, we're not there yet. And frankly, we have learned a lot over the years. Let's appreciate the wisdom we've acquired through our good and not-so-good choices. We are strong. We are capable. And as Betty Friedan once said, "Aging is not 'lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength."

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Holocaust distortion is a new front in the war on memory

Historian Jan Grabowski warns that it is Holocaust distortion, not outright denial, is the newest threat to Jewish memory

BY **JEN GILBERT**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS



“Holocaust distortion is so dangerous because it is anchored partially in truth.”

JAN GRABOWSKI
Professor of History,
University of Ottawa

AS HISTORY is increasingly weaponized for political ends, the memory of the Holocaust faces a new threat. Polish Canadian historian Jan Grabowski, who was the keynote speaker at the community’s Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration on Jan. 27, explains why distortion has eclipsed denial as the primary threat to historical truth.

Q Can you tell us about the rising threat of Holocaust distortion?

A Until the last decade, the main threat to the memory of the Holocaust was Holocaust denial, the assertion that the Holocaust never happened. Over the last 25 to 30 years, Holocaust distortion has become the new Holocaust denial. Distortionists don’t deny the factuality of Jewish tragedy. The problem is they say their own national group had nothing to do with it — it was the Germans and Germans alone, and the other hundreds of millions of Europeans were entirely innocent.

Holocaust denial was fueled by strange individuals; Holocaust distortion is financed and run by the states, and this makes it very different.

How does this play out in Poland?

The Polish state finances distortion, and this Polish history policy has become a cornerstone of teaching in schools. What’s taught is that their society, during the difficult period of

occupation, held high moral ground. For the most part, everybody tried to help their Jewish neighbours at their time of need. It’s also official policy in Poland to claim there were hundreds of thousands of Poles considered Righteous Among the Nations, which is nonsense. A few thousand have been recognized.

Holocaust distortion is so dangerous because it’s anchored partially in truth: there were some gentiles who saved Jews. The problem is the Holocaust distortionists will tell you the entire nation tried to save the Jews. They didn’t.

These things acquire currency because nowadays there is a political problem linked to the Middle East. Teaching the Holocaust is seen by many as an attempt to legitimize the policies of Israel today, which it is not. This attack on the memory of the Holocaust comes from various political angles, making it so dangerous. We’re talking about six million innocent civilians. If you try to somehow obfuscate or push away this history, you are basically killing these people the second time.

You’ve mentioned that Holocaust scholars don’t choose to study the Holocaust; the study chooses them. How did you get chosen?

I’m from Poland. My father was a Holocaust survivor from Poland. Given my family history, it was natural for me to navigate to this. I was bothered by questions of perpetual importance: What makes us do things or act the way we act? Why would you save a person that you don’t know, who you don’t even like? Who is a perpetrator? How do you avoid becoming a victim? These are the lessons that Holocaust

historians bring to the fore.

There’s a special responsibility to talk about these millions of innocent people who were removed from the face of the earth for no good reason. My students look at photographs, memorize names. In my books and articles, I try to insert names in the footnotes. If I find something in the archives and I’m probably the only person who will see these names, I want to bring them forward.

You have faced backlash throughout your career. How do you continue to find the courage to speak publicly about your work?

I’m a tenured senior professor in a Canadian institution, so my courage comes cheap, but it doesn’t mean it comes with no cost. I was never trained in my graduate program that you have to take it upon yourself to become a fighting public historian to maintain your integrity. Perhaps historians of the Holocaust should be taught how to deal with civil law.

Can you speak to what you have called Wikipedia’s intentional distortion of the Holocaust?

Some of my students started to ask me strange questions. I found out there was a world of distortion on Wikipedia, one of the most heavily read websites in the world. It’s supposed to be a self-regulating medium, where people add their bits and somehow restore balance to a biased narrative.

In the area of Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust, Wikipedia reads as if it were written by Polish nationalists, without any kind of control or supervision. I was truly shocked. How were there problems

with the historical interpretation here?

How was it being done?

People who are committed ideologically with senior admin status can eliminate through intimidation and other techniques, and present their version of history as the true version of history.

With this admin status, people could edit areas with special protected status, which encompasses three areas: Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Pakistani-Indian conflict, and Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. These are a fertile field for conflict, and Wikipedia’s protections don’t work here.

We have to be extraordinarily cautious. It’s not a source of credible information.

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders in Canada?

Try to be faithful to your own convictions and never ever try to run with the crowd.

The power of conformism is huge; we want to be liked, to be members of a group. We shouldn’t. Sometimes the price we have to pay for conformity is horrendous. It’s important to be able to stand up in the morning, look in the mirror, and like what you see. Perhaps you’ll lose material gratification, but you’ll be happy you did the right thing.

Can you leave our readers with some hope and inspiration?

The most wonderful thing is we can follow our good instincts. If you can, choose work which fulfills you. If you can find joy and satisfaction in your work, your life will be wonderfully changed.



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Barry Yellin

Remembering Matti Caspi — harmony and humanity

An appreciation of the composer whose collaborations and harmonic daring helped define modern Hebrew music

BY **NADAV GREENHUT**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

IN MY TEENAGE years, when I began to take a serious interest in playing the piano, I experimented, among other things, with playing popular Israeli music. My playing consisted of simple chords I found online and memorized, a process that became my informal training in performing non-classical music.

One day, by chance, a sheet music booklet by the well-known composer and creator Matti Caspi came into my hands. When I looked at the list of songs, I was astonished. There were masterpieces there — many of which I already knew. But more importantly, I discovered how little I knew about harmony and chords; almost every chord in the book contained markings and numbers I did not recognize.

I worked to decipher those chords for many months. The challenge was great, but when I succeeded, I felt that a new musical and creative window had opened before me.

My deepening familiarity with Matti Caspi's work greatly enriched my musical understanding. I was therefore deeply saddened to learn of his passing in early February, following a cancer diagnosis he had received only a few months earlier.

Public reactions to his death were immense, with thousands accompanying his coffin at Tel Aviv's Habima Theatre, while radio stations played his songs throughout the day.

Caspi composed some of the most important songs in Hebrew and was

one of Israel's most prolific creators, with more than a thousand works to his name. He produced landmark albums, played on most of them, and integrated global musical influences that shaped generations of musicians, myself included.

Caspi was regarded by many as a "musician's musician," yet his melodies are deeply personal and appeal to the general public. On a compositional level, his works are complex—both harmonically and melodically. But surprisingly, they are also highly accessible: it is very easy to hum them and connect with them.

Throughout his extensive career, Caspi collaborated with Israel's greatest creators. One of the most notable collaborations was with the composer Sasha Argov. Argov, from an older generation of Israeli composers, was known for melodies that were not easy to sing. This collaboration was particularly remarkable, in its being a meeting point between two cultural geniuses from different periods in Israel history. Caspi wisely chose not to alter the harmonic structures of the songs and instead focused on their orchestration and on making them accessible to younger audiences by adding groove and, at times, elements from different styles.

Without a doubt, however, Caspi's most important and fruitful collaboration was with the gifted lyricist Ehud Manor, who often referred to Caspi as his soulmate. Manor brought great humanity and sensitivity through his texts, managing to express complex emotional states with

simplicity and catchy rhythm. Caspi contributed harmonic richness, sophistication, and musical innovation. Together, they produced some of the greatest classics of Israeli music of all time.

One revealing story involves the song "Brit Olam" ("Eternal Covenant"). Ehud Manor wrote the lyrics during his honeymoon, then tucked them away in a drawer for several years. Meanwhile, Matti Caspi had composed a melody for the soundtrack of Celebration at the Snooker, complete in its own right. When Manor eventually brought his long-set-aside text to Caspi, they discovered that the melody and lyrics fit together almost effortlessly — a rare and remarkable union of words and music.

Another important collaboration was with the creator and pianist Shlomo Gronich. Gronich, one of the pioneers of progressive rock and world music in Israel, joined Caspi in creating a joint performance titled "Behind the Sounds," in which they composed some of their greatest hits. The music born from their synergy was experimental, bold, and intellectual. During their collaboration, Gronich heard a melody Caspi had composed for a satirical television program about a polluting power plant. Gronich sensed a striking contrast between the beauty of the melody and the subject matter. He asked Caspi to write lyrics specifically for it. Caspi agreed, and thus the song "Ve'Otach" ("And You") was created—once again, Caspi's melody had summoned its own text.

Like several other major Israeli creators, Caspi also wrote for children. His 1992 album "Bubba Matti"

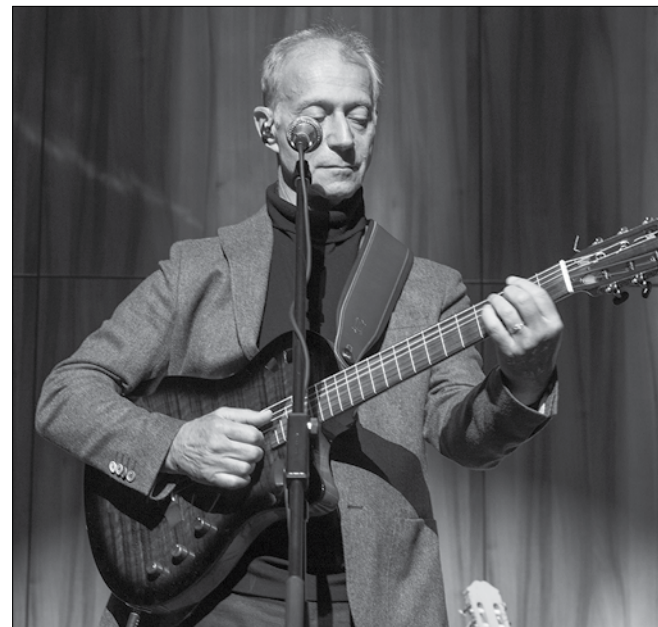


PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

combined high artistic standards, complex rhythms and themes that resonated with both children and adults.

For me, what stands out in Caspi's work as a whole is his consistent commitment to uncompromising quality, authenticity, and musical expression. Even in his children's songs, he remained faithful to the same creative spirit, giving little weight to considerations external to the music itself.

Caspi's death marks the end of a magnificent artistic era that had been an inseparable part of Israeli culture almost since its beginnings. His music continues to be heard and played, and it seems that appreciation for him is only growing—even among younger generations of creators.

I feel deep gratitude for the privilege of knowing and delighting in Matti Caspi's music—a feeling that, it seems to me, is shared by many others.

Matti Caspi at his last Toronto performance in March 2024.

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#HereForGood 

ACADEMIC **ADVICE**

ADHD and the medication question



BY **ANDREA ZIANS**
ADVICE COLUMNIST

My 14-year-old son was diagnosed with ADHD in Grade 5. At that time our doctor recommended medication. We chose not to go that route and tried other strategies, but since last year, he has really been struggling. The transition to high school has been rough for him. Recently, the school and our doctor have been encouraging us to reconsider medication. I am skeptical and worried about the effects of these medications.
WORRIED MOM

IT IS COMMON for families to revisit this question when high school begins. The academic and executive functioning demands increase significantly. Students are managing multiple teachers, longer assignments, and much greater independence. For many students with ADHD, this is when the strain becomes more visible.

Do you have a physician you trust and can speak openly with? Does this doctor clearly explain the potential benefits, the possible side effects, and how the medication will be monitored over time?

From there, take an honest look at risk and benefit. Many families understandably focus on the perceived risks of ADHD medication. Social media has amplified strong opinions and dramatic stories about medications and it is important to separate stories from evidence and to weigh not only the risks of medication, but also the risks of continued struggle.

Is ADHD affecting your son's academic performance? His classroom behaviour? His relationships with teachers or peers? Carefully assess how significantly it is affecting his daily functioning and his sense of competence.

With that information in mind, consider what medication can and cannot do. Medication is only part of the answer. It does not teach skills on its own. When a student with ADHD takes the correct medication, they often find that learning and development become possible in a new way. They begin to build habits, develop strategies, and learn how to learn because their brain is more receptive. The medication does not do the work for them, but it can make the work achievable.

You also mentioned stigma. In my experience, real stigma often comes from knowing you are smart but finding it painful to execute academically. That can shape how a student sees themselves.

People often worry about the impact of pharmaceuticals but overlook the many other ways a student with ADHD may self-medicate to feel better. This may look like escaping into gaming, social media, or trying substances. Consider whether your son is turning to coping strategies that are not serving him well.

Finally, include your son in this discussion. At 14, he is old enough to reflect on how school feels and whether he is open to trying medication. His perspective matters in a decision of this magnitude. Gather the information. Weigh the full picture. Speak openly with your doctor and with your son. Then make the most informed decision you can.

If you have a question about school success, email andrea@andreazians.com.

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HAMILTON JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES

Sip, Schmooze & Sparkle highlights



PHOTOS: HJFS

The HJFS fundraiser planning committee pose for a photo. Pictured from l to r, are Christine Nusca, Cara Bensimon, Kim Zalter, Michelle Daleo, Stefanie Waxman, Rachel Bernholtz, Erika McMeekin. Missing: Miriam Wajnberg and Allyson Wenzowski.

CARA BENSIMON

HAMILTON JEWISH Family Services' annual wine tasting and virtual auction returned this year under the theme Sip, Schmooze & Sparkle, bringing 135 guests together at JHamilton for an evening of connection, celebration, and purpose. Held at this larger venue for the first time, the setting reflected both the growth of our organization and the strength of our community. We were especially encouraged to welcome many new faces, including members of the next generation stepping forward as emerging leaders and supporters of our collective work.

The planning committee worked tirelessly to create a warm, elegant evening that honoured the spirit of HJFS while advancing our mission. Through the generosity of donors and sponsors, the event raised \$48,000 in critical funds.

As life unfolds, we all encounter

moments when extra support is needed. HJFS exists to ensure that no one in our community faces those moments alone. Today, our team is advancing a refreshed vision, expanding programs and building services that meet the real, changing needs of the Greater Hamilton Jewish community.

Our seniors programming strengthens both social and physical well-being, helping older adults stay connected, active, and independent.

We provide specialized care and programs for Holocaust survivors; newcomer initiatives; a reimagined mental health and well-being platform; the nutritious offerings of Carol's Cupboard Kosher Food Bank; and housing and relief supports that stabilize households through financial assistance.

The success of Sip, Schmooze & Sparkle highlights that it truly takes a community to uplift a community.



Arnie Strub enjoyed sampling Kosher for Passover wine at Hamilton Jewish Family Services's Sip, Schmooze & Sparkle evening at JHamilton.



Community members of all generations came out in large numbers to enjoy the event.

Compassion fills our cupboards

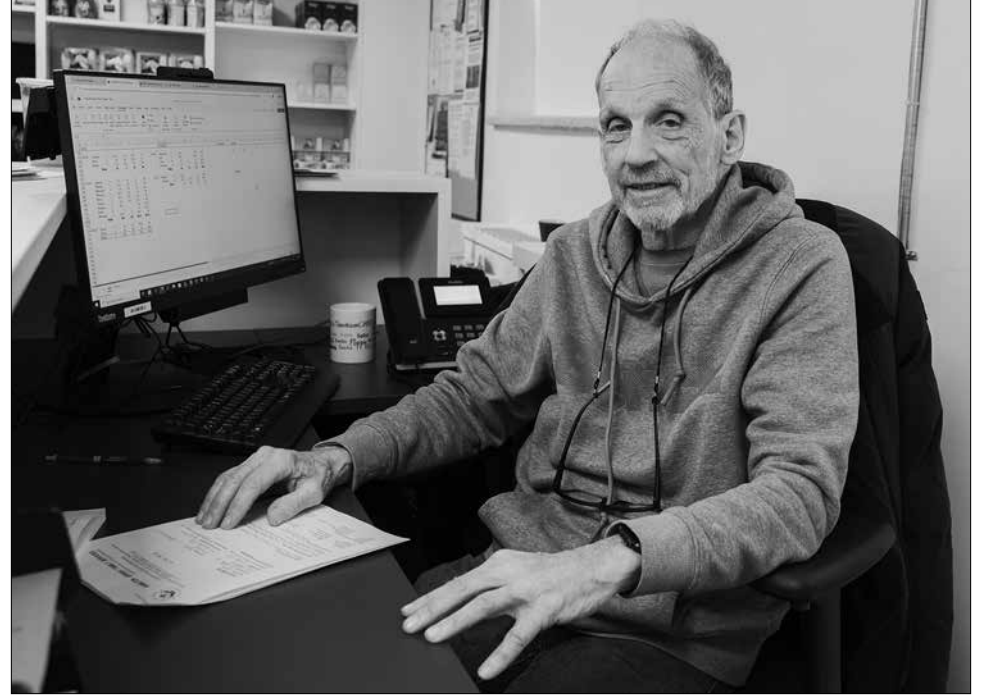


PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER MAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

At HJFS, Lloyd Orson offers more than food, providing empathy and dignity to every person who walks through the door.

MICHELLE DALEO

WHEN LLOYD Orson talks about his work at Hamilton Jewish Family Services' food bank, he doesn't begin with logistics or numbers. He begins with people.

"Most of them want to vent," he says. "They don't want to hold everything in. And I listen."

At first glance, Lloyd's job might seem straightforward: arrange appointments, coordinate deliveries, keep shelves stocked, make sure food gets where it needs to go. He has been doing this work for just over four years, after many years of volunteering with deliveries and community garden work. But spend time with him, and it becomes clear that what he really delivers is something else entirely.

Connection.

Lloyd arrived in Hamilton from Toronto 57 years ago, building his life within the Jewish community. That long history here shapes how he sees his work today. The food bank, for him, is not simply a service. It is an extension of community, of responsibility for one another.

"Most of these people are like friends and family now," he says.

His days are filled with conversations as much as coordination. Clients share stories of job loss, rising bills, illness, separation, loneliness. Some are seniors on fixed incomes. Increasingly, many are young families. Quite a few are working two or three jobs and still falling short.

"It's becoming worse," Lloyd says quietly. "People are really trying."

The stereotype of who needs a food bank no longer fits. The people Lloyd sees are often employed, often educated, often doing everything they can to stay afloat in an economy that feels unforgiving.

At the same time, the food bank faces its own pressures. Maintaining sufficient quantity has become more challenging as prices climb. Some initiatives have had to be scaled back, underscoring how essential community donations remain.

"Canned goods, cereals, kosher staples, those make a big difference," Lloyd says. "Programs like school and shul food drives are incredibly helpful."

And while food insecurity is the visible need, Lloyd understands that hunger is rarely just about food.

"Food is one part," he explains. "If someone needs more help, we connect them."

Through Jewish Family Services, individuals can access counseling, social services, and additional resources, ensuring that food insecurity is addressed alongside the complex challenges that often accompany it.

Still, it is not systems that define his work. It is moments. He recalls a man who had recently arrived in Canada and was separated from his wife due to circumstances beyond his control. The man was struggling, financially and emotionally. After helping him with groceries, Lloyd later returned with something unexpected: a menorah and Hanukkah candles.

"He started to cry," Lloyd says. "He told me no one had ever done something like that for him."

For Lloyd, it was a small gesture. For the client, it was a reminder that he was seen, not just as someone in need, but as a person with identity and dignity.

There are hard days too. Long-time clients facing illness. People overwhelmed by life's sudden turns. Moments when Lloyd wishes he could fix more than he can.

"Sometimes you feel like you want to do more," he admits.

But he shows up the next day anyway.

In Jewish tradition, caring for others is a responsibility. Lloyd does not speak in grand terms about values or philosophy. He simply lives them. Quietly. Consistently. He organizes shelves. He maps delivery routes. He answers calls.

And he listens.

"This experience has opened my mind," he says thoughtfully. "I'm just thankful."

In a world that often feels rushed and impersonal, Lloyd's approach is disarmingly simple. He treats people like family. He makes space for their stories. He remembers the small details that matter.

The food he helps distribute fills cupboards. The conversations he offers fill something else. And for many in Hamilton's Jewish community, that may be the most important nourishment of all.

Michelle Daleo is a member of the HJFS board of directors, as well as the committee chair for the organization's Kosher Food Bank.

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HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION Inspired at Fed Pro

MAGGIE NORRIS

EACH YEAR, the Jewish Federations of North America brings together nearly 1,000 professionals from Federations across the United States and Canada. Aptly titled “FedPro,” the conference — held this year in Phoenix in early February — left my colleague Nataly Minster and me energized, challenged, and deeply inspired.

Among the many compelling sessions and speakers, one voice rose above the rest: Nuseir Yassin, known to millions worldwide as the founder of the digital media powerhouse Nas Daily—“Nas” meaning “people” in Arabic.

Yassin, an Israeli-Palestinian living in Dubai, shared his remarkable journey from being a software developer to international influencer. He spoke about his decision to post a one-minute video every single day for 1,000 days — and about pushing through 271 consecutive days with little to no traction until his video, “How Cheap is Thailand?” went viral in 2017 with more than 30 million views.

Yassin’s message was clear: consistency beats talent, and that creating relatable stories that resonate with real people can bridge different cultures and backgrounds. Rather than chasing virality, he focused on authenticity and discipline. That mindset is what ultimately helped him rise to the top of the digital storytelling world.

Since Oct. 7, his work has increasingly centered on the Israel-Gaza conflict, his personal identity, his pro-Israel perspective, and his criticism of Hamas — topics that have frequently sparked backlash and protests at his events. As a Palestinian who has lost several family members in the ongoing conflict, his perspective carries undeniable weight, yet instead of



PHOTO: COURTESY MAGGIE NORRIS

Nataly Minster and Maggie Norris.

speaking from a place of anger, he challenges narratives of victimhood and encourages accountability and forward-thinking leadership. In a June 2025 AI-driven video imagining a peaceful Israel and Palestine in 2048, Nassin shared bold perspectives on Israel that challenge common assumptions, reflecting his deep belief in the possibility of cooperation and progress.

At a time when discourse around Israel is often polarized and emotionally charged, hearing a nuanced voice advocating for constructive engagement felt both courageous and hopeful.

We left the conference with a renewed sense of what’s possible here in Hamilton. Yassin’s session reminded us that success rarely happens overnight, consistency is key, and that one voice, grounded in conviction and clarity, can cut through division to build bridges where others see only barriers. Our work, like Yassin’s, requires stamina. Progress isn’t always immediate, but consistency, clarity of purpose, and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations are what move communities forward. At a time of complexity, that message felt particularly relevant. FedPro challenged us to think bigger, work smarter, and lead the community we serve with intention.

KEHILA HESCHEL

Building bridges is what we do



PHOTO: KEHILA HESCHEL

A Kehila Heschel grandparent leading our JK and SK students in song.

LISHAI PEEL

IN A SMALL but vibrant Jewish community like Hamilton, strength comes from relationship and a shared commitment to Jewish continuity. That is the spirit in which we at Kehila understand our collective responsibility to Jewish education.

Hamilton is blessed to have longstanding institutions such as the Hamilton Hebrew Academy, which has anchored Jewish learning here for generations. Kehila does not position itself as an alternative in opposition, but as another meaningful option within a Jewish educational landscape. A healthy community makes room for that diversity while remaining united in purpose.

This spirit of collaboration was beautifully evident recently when HHA generously opened its doors to welcome our students to celebrate Shabbat together. It modeled for our children what Jewish peoplehood looks like in action: joy shared across classrooms, schools, and

affiliations. Our students ate together, played together, and celebrated together as one community.

We are equally committed to building bridges across denominational lines. Our partnership with Temple Anshe Sholom includes shared learning opportunities, programs, and events that bring families together. We recognize, too, the steady leadership of Beth Jacob Synagogue, and we value the ways our institutions can support one another. When Jewish institutions work together, the entire ecosystem benefits and children experience a Judaism that is confident, pluralistic, and reinforced through shared belonging. Kehila Heschel’s mission is rooted in rigorous academics, trilingual learning, and values-based education. We believe Hamilton’s Jewish future depends on strong partnerships, mutual respect, and an understanding that there is room for more than one path. A vibrant Jewish community lies in stronger partnerships and deeper connections.

Chag Pesach Sameach

Wishing you seders filled with cherished traditions, warmth, and special moments shared with loved ones.




Hamilton

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TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

We are more than just a school



Making pitas is always a fun activity at our cooking elective.

PHOTO: TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM

DORA-ANN COHEN ELLISON

MORE THAN just a school, Temple Anshe Sholom's Jewish Learning Program is a gathering place for families, parents and children to make lasting Jewish connections! With 76 students and growing, our program continues to nurture bonds among participants and deepen their ties to Jewish life.

This winter, our students explored the value of *achrayut* (responsibility) and *tzedakah* as we learned about planned giving, HJFS, Hamilton Jewish Federation and JNF. Our teens joined BBYO and other organizations to participate in a successful Tu B'Shevat telethon, raising funds for Friends of JNF projects in Israel.

Students also explored the value of *hakarat hatov* (gratitude), in connection to the mitzvot of Purim, and created *matanot la-eyyonim* (gifts for people in need). When we reflect on all we are grateful for, we also take time to notice how we can help others with the blessings we are given.

This spring, our students will continue

discovering the power of giving back when, on May 3, our junior and senior youth groups join BBYO for JServe — a day dedicated to volunteering and making a meaningful impact in the community.

This winter, we gathered for a family Shabbat skate on the Churchill rink. We are planning a full-day Shabbaton on Saturday May 2, with special visitors, family challenges, study and fun! Please watch our Instagram page for registration information in late March. Tot-Shabbat, for ages one through four and a caregiver, continues to gather weekly on Saturday from 11 a.m. to noon.

The last day of our school and Shabbat programming is Saturday, May 30 and we wrap up our year with bowling on Wednesday, June 3. Our family programs for children from JK through Grade 10 are open to all in our Jewish community!

Our Jewish Learning Program takes place Wednesdays at 4:30 p.m. and Saturday at 9:15 a.m. September 2026 student pre-registration is being accepted now. Please email dacellison@anshesholom.ca for more information.

BETH JACOB

A season of gratitude and renewal

RABBI BENI WAJNBERG

THIS SPRING, Beth Jacob Synagogue invites the community to gather for two celebratory moments that speak to both our future and our past.

On Sunday, April 6 at 3 p.m., Beth Jacob will host its third annual intergenerational Chocolate Seder. This beloved, chocolicious experience invites participants of all ages to gather for a playful and meaningful retelling of the Passover story — complete with four cups of chocolate milk and many more treats. Free and open to the entire community, the Chocolate Seder offers a creative and accessible way to blend learning, laughter, and sweetness in equal measure. It is a beautiful reminder that our traditions are brought to life through shared experience—especially when generations come together. Bring your children and grandchildren!

On Wednesday, May 6, join us at Marquis Gardens (1365 Sandhill Drive, Ancaster) for a special evening honouring Beth Jacob's past presidents — individuals whose leadership, vision, and quiet dedication have helped shape the synagogue into the vibrant community it is

today. The evening will feature live entertainment, fine wine, and a selection of scrumptious bites, all prepared in accordance with dietary laws. T

his gathering is an opportunity to recognize the generations of leaders who gave their energy and heart to sustain our community.

Held in the season of Passover, these events carry a deeper resonance. Passover is not only a story of liberation, but also of memory and continuity. In many ways, Beth Jacob's past presidents are part of our own communal "Exodus" story—guiding us through challenges, helping us adapt to change, and ensuring that Jewish life continues to flourish.

Together, these two gatherings reflect the full arc of Jewish communal life: honouring those who came before us, while creating joyful, memorable experiences that will carry our traditions forward.

Please mark your calendars and join us for both occasions.

For tickets to the May 6 event, please contact Jo-Anne Brown at Beth Jacob (905-522-1352 Ext. 10) or Ron Richter (905-741-4051).

We look forward to celebrating together.

BBYO

Finding a stronger version of myself



PHOTO: BYO

Mia Stanger, left, at BBYO's Chapter Leadership Training Conference last summer.

MIA STANGER

I WENT TO BBYO's Chapter Leadership Training Conference (CLTC) last summer looking for a good experience, and I found community, confidence, and a stronger version of myself. I have been a member of BBYO since Grade 8, but never really knew all it had to offer, but CLTC showed me that BBYO offers more than I could possibly imagine. Before going, I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness. I wondered if I would fit in or make friends, but I also knew that growth doesn't happen without stepping out of your comfort zone.

CLTC is a BBYO-run 12 day-long intensive leadership seminar for kids in Grades 9 and 10. It was an environment that encouraged honesty, vulnerability, and initiative. I was pushed to think critically, collaborate with new people, and share my ideas even when it felt uncomfortable.

What I took away from CLTC goes beyond leadership skills. Yes, I learned how to communicate more effectively and take initiative, but also how to make new friends and get comfortable with the uncomfortable. The friends I made will stick by my side forever, the lessons I learned will always be in the back of my mind, and those special moments will always make me smile when I look back at them.

This year, at BBYO's International Convention, attended by thousands of teens from all over the world, I reunited with all the people with whom I shared these experiences.

We laughed and cried thinking back at all the fun we had. CLTC turned strangers into best friends, and was an experience that changed me. I can't imagine a life without this wonderful community, and I encourage every Jewish teen to give BBYO and CLTC a chance and see how their lives will change.

McMASTER HILLEL

Uncovering new layers of ourselves

RABBI BEN SHEFTER

LAST PASSOVER, Dara Horn published a graphic novel, *One Little Goat: A Passover Catastrophe*. In it, she explores the Passover Seder through a powerful metaphor: as a *tel*, an ancient, layered mound formed by centuries of human settlement. Each layer tells a story. For Horn, the Seder invites us to excavate the layers of our collective and personal past, the generations who sat at their own tables, asked their own questions, and shaped the Jewish story that we now inherit. Every Passover is different because both we and the world are different. The words of the Haggadah may remain the same, but they resonate each year differently because of who we have become.

At Hillel McMaster, our mission is both to excavate the past and to build the future. Students arrive at McMaster from diverse backgrounds and journeys. Hillel is proud to help make Hamilton a warm and caring place where students can explore their histories, what they want to carry forward, what parts feel distant or hidden, and which areas may need illumination. University is a foundational moment in life. It is a time of questioning, refining, and rebuilding. Being present

to help lay those bricks, brick by brick, strengthens not only individual students but the Jewish future itself.

At Hillel, we strive to empower students to be unapologetically Jewish, proud of who they are, curious about what Judaism can mean across diverse perspectives and practices, and grounded in the power of community through life's ups and downs. We advocate for students to show up fully in all their identities on campus and beyond, and to cultivate a meaningful connection to Israel.

Whether relaxing in the lounge with friends, gathered around our Shabbat tables, or advocating for inclusion and respect in every corner of campus, students are building memories and relationships that will shape them for decades to come.

At the Seder, we ask: *Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?* Perhaps it is different because we are different. Each day, we uncover new layers of ourselves, our community, and the people we aspire to become.

Hillel McMaster has and continues to be a place, a moment, and a home where students and the Hamilton community build those layers together, ensuring that our *tel* rises higher and stronger with each generation.

SHALOM VILLAGE

Jewish life at Shalom Village



PHOTO: SHALOM VILLAGE

Shalom Village residents of all faiths enjoyed a snack in the sukkah last fall.

MARIANNE KLEIN

AS WE APPROACH Passover, we reflect on themes of renewal, freedom, and the enduring power of tradition — values that feel especially meaningful when we look back on the past year at Shalom Village. It has been a year of revitalization for Jewish life on our campus, and we are deeply grateful to everyone who helped make it possible.

Thanks, in part, to the generous support of the Hamilton Jewish Federation, we welcomed Andrea Levy back to Shalom Village as our *balabusta*, helping to reinvigorate Jewish programming across our community. With her leadership, our Shabbat services have been renewed with warmth and energy, bringing residents together each month for prayer, song, and a joyful *kiddush* that feels both familiar and uplifting.

Alongside these services, residents have embraced hands-on and meaningful programming—from challah baking and Jewish singalongs to holiday celebrations and cultural activities that honour the traditions many have cherished for a lifetime. These experiences are more than

programs — they are powerful connections to identity, memory, and belonging. Just as Passover invites us to remember our shared story and pass it from generation to generation, Jewish life at Shalom Village ensures our residents can continue to live and celebrate the traditions that shaped their lives.

At the same time, Passover reminds us of the importance of welcoming others to the table. Shalom Village is home to seniors from many faiths and cultural backgrounds, and Jewish programming often becomes a bridge for learning and friendship. Residents and staff who may never have experienced Jewish traditions before now join Shabbat dinners, taste freshly baked challah, and learn the stories behind our holidays. Through these shared moments, curiosity becomes understanding, and neighbours become friends.

This is the spirit of Passover in action: gathering together, sharing stories, and building community. As we celebrate the season of freedom, we look forward with optimism and gratitude, excited to continue nurturing this vibrant and growing community. Chag Pesach Sameach.

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM

Where memory becomes meaning

PAULA BARUCH

EACH SPRING, as we gather around our Seder tables, we return to the ancient words that tell us we were once strangers unsure of what freedom could look like.

And each year, we are invited to hear that story again — this time through our own lives, our own questions, and our own hopes for a more compassionate world.

At Temple Anshe Sholom, Passover reflects the values that define our congregation: curiosity, kindness, creativity, inclusivity and connection. Our community Seder is offered on the second night of Pesach and we bring the Haggadah to life with music, conversation, and a deep respect for tradition alongside a willingness to re-imagine it.

We encourage every generation — children, teens, parents, grandparents, and chosen family — to find their voice in the telling of the Exodus.

No one is expected to know all the answers. What matters is that we arrive

with questions and together seek answers.

Questions and the exploration of answers have always been a focus at Temple Anshe Sholom especially as we are in the final stretch of selecting a rabbi who will lead us into the future. Welcoming new Jewish clergy to our community is both an honour and an opportunity for us to build new relationships and enjoy new learning. As we prepare to welcome our new rabbi, may we bring forward the very best of who we already are — our kindness, our curiosity, our warmth, and our willingness to grow together. May we offer our new spiritual leader not only our expectations, but our partnership. Not only our hope, but our trust.

As we celebrate Passover this year, we continue to be the place where memory becomes meaning, tradition becomes courage, and the story of liberation inspires us to build a future shaped by justice, compassion, and hope—for all who sit at our tables, and for all who long to be free.

HAMILTON HEBREW ACADEMY

HHA honours community leaders



PHOTO: DONNA WAXMAN PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ADAS ISRAEL

Stanley and Cheryl Katz and Brian and Nancy Somer are preparing to make Aliyah to Israel.

RABBI DANIEL GREEN

This year's Hamilton Hebrew Academy Gala Dinner will be an historic evening for our community to gather in solidarity with the State of Israel as we aspire toward a new dawn of peace and security in the Middle East.

The evening will feature a special candlelight orchestral concert that reflects the passage from Yom HaZikaron, Israel's Memorial Day, to Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. Joining our ceremony will be a member of Kibbutz Kfar Aza who survived the carnage of Oct. 7, bringing a deeply personal voice to the evening and reminding us of the resilience and courage of the Israeli people during this challenging time.

During this meaningful evening, we will honour two extraordinary couples whose lives have helped shape the fabric of Jewish Hamilton: Brian and Nancy Somer, and Stanley and Sheryl Katz. Lifelong Hamiltonians, they grew up in our community, built exceptional families, and raised children and grandchildren who are now helping shape the next chapter of Jewish life in Israel and around the world. In these historic moments for the Jewish people and the State of Israel,

they are preparing to make Aliyah to join their families in Israel, once again leading by example.

Over the years, both families have taken on meaningful leadership roles across many of our communal institutions, including the HHA, United Hebrew Memorial Chapel, and Adas Israel Congregation. Their commitment to Jewish life has strengthened the institutions that sustain Jewish Hamilton and helped secure its future.

During the evening, we will also present the Legacy Educators Award to Mr. Bob Childs, whose remarkable teaching career has spanned more than five decades. Since beginning his career in 1971, Childs has devoted his life to inspiring generations of students. He teaches with deep respect, genuine warmth, and an unwavering belief in the potential of every child. His dedication has left a lasting imprint on his students, on their families and on the entire HHA community.

This year's Gala will be both a moment of remembrance and a moment of celebration, honouring courage, music, education, and community while reaffirming the enduring bond between the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Please RSVP at hha.ca/gala2026.

ADAS ISRAEL

Dor L'dor shared Jewish study

OLIVER BORR

SUNDAY MORNINGS at the Adas Israel have recently taken on a vibrant, new energy. From 10 to 10:45 a.m., the halls are filled with the sounds of parents and children of all ages engaging in shared Jewish study. This is "Dor L'dor"—a dynamic new parent-child learning program designed to bridge generations through the joy of community and Torah.

The premise of Dor L'dor is simple: families carving out 45 minutes of their weekend to sit, connect, and learn with one another. Dor L'dor is designed to cater to every age and interest, offering hands-on *parsha* activities, arts and crafts, and vibrant colouring stations for younger children.

Of course, no Sunday morning program is complete without food, and plenty of healthy snacks are on hand to fuel both growing bodies and curious minds.

Beyond the invaluable family bonding time, there is another reason the room is constantly buzzing with excitement: the legendary weekly raffle. Dor L'dor is quickly becoming famous for its incredible, larger-than-life prizes. Each week, kids eagerly look forward to the chance to win spectacular items like high-flying drones, remote-control boats and helicopters, giant Nerf blasters, and massive Hot Wheels sets. The anticipation of the raffle adds an electric layer of fun to the morning, ensuring that children are just as enthusiastic about attending as their parents.

Dor L'dor is more than just an educational program; it is a celebration of Jewish continuity, community, and family connection. We enthusiastically invite all families in the Hamilton Jewish community to join us every Sunday at 10 a.m. at the Adas Israel to learn, create, and maybe even take home a drone!

An unapologetic Zionist's radical vision of a shared society

Amid the ongoing grief and endless war and hostility, veteran Israeli activist Shuli Dichter dares to imagine a more equitable society

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

SHULI DICHTER can no longer bear to watch the sunrise. Before Oct. 7, 2023, the veteran Israeli civil society activist would rise before dawn and sit on the porch of his home on Kibbutz Ma'anit, quietly witnessing the day begin. But that morning changed everything. In the final minutes before his friend, Canadian-Israeli peace activist Vivian Silver, was murdered, he had been following her updates on a group WhatsApp chat, until she suddenly went silent. Since then, he has abandoned the ritual. The sunrise, once a source of calm, has become a painful reminder.

Dichter, whom I have known for many years, is a prominent voice in Israel's civil society circles. When my daughter and I visited Israel recently — my first trip since the Oct. 7 attacks — we stopped to see him while reconnecting with friends in the country's north. I wanted to understand how the events of that day had shaped him, both personally and politically.

Our conversation began with me telling Dichter how deeply unsettled I was to see prominent left-wing Israeli intellectuals — such as the historian Ilan Pappé, journalist Gideon Levy, and former Knesset member Avraham Burg — aligning with international critics who portray Zionism as inherently racist, a form of settler-colonialism, and the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Did Dichter, I asked, still see himself as a Zionist?

"Yes," he said without hesitation. "But a civic Zionist. Once you declare yourself an anti-Zionist, you absolve yourself of responsibility for improving this society."

Shirking responsibility is not in Dichter's DNA. For more than five



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

decades, he has held senior positions in Israel's leading advocacy NGOs, working to secure full citizenship rights for both Jewish and Arab citizens. In his political memoir, *Sharing the Promised Land* (English translation, 2022), Dichter lays out his vision of "civic Zionism": a democratic Jewish state that fulfills its founders' promise of full social and political equality for Arab citizens.

Dichter's story is deeply personal. He recalls growing up as a first-generation kibbutznik, drawn early on to coexistence projects with Arab neighbours. But over time, he became increasingly aware of the discriminatory nature of state policies that concentrated land, funding, and political power in Jewish hands, leaving Arab citizens underfunded, politically marginalized, and subject to systemic discrimination.

"It did not have to be that way," he told us, pointing to the early Zionist thinker Yitzhak Epstein, who warned that displacing Arab farmers during land acquisitions and pursuing

a Jewish national project without regard for Arab aspirations was both ethically wrong and destined to sow future conflict.

And yet, despite Dichter's harsh critique of Zionism's shortcomings, he remains steadfast in his belief in the Jewish people's right to self-determination in the Land of Israel. "This is our land," he said. "We belong here, but they also belong here. So we will have to share this promised land."

By "sharing the promised land," he does not mean the "one-state solution," which calls for a single bi-national state for Jews and Palestinians. Rather, he envisions a confederation of two distinct nations coexisting in a shared homeland, modeled on arrangements in Northern Ireland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Quebec. Roughly seven million Jews and seven million Palestinians live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, he said. Neither is leaving; neither is disappearing. The challenge, he insists, is not to deny that reality but to restructure it.

Shuli Dichter
at his home on
Kibbutz Ma'anit.

"You can agree or disagree. But if you don't let both into the room, you're doomed."

SHULI DICHTER
In explanation of
the basis for civic
Zionism.

As our conversation shifted from the political realm to the personal, the weight of the past two and a half years became unmistakably clear. His eyes welled briefly when I asked how he was holding up.

"Israel is in deep, deep trouble," he said.

Yet his deeper worry is for diaspora Jews, whom he calls "twice troubled": first by a resurgence of antisemitism, and second by the way Israel has become a wedge issue dividing unconditional supporters, anti-Zionists, and those caught in between.

He experienced that tension personally last year when a synagogue in the United States — where one of his daughters and several grandchildren live — disinvited him after learning of his opposition to Israel's prolonged military campaign in Gaza. His objection, he said, was interpreted as a denial of Israel's right to self-defense.

What unsettled him most was not the cancellation itself, but the narrowing of the room.

"The entire basis for my concept of civic Zionism relies on the diaspora virtue of inclusivity," he told me, invoking the Jewish tradition of sustaining multiple, contradictory, viewpoints. "You can agree or disagree. But if you don't let both into the room, you're doomed."

Dichter lives that principle. His weekly study partner is a rabbi from a West Bank settlement, a testament to his belief in dialogue across divides. Nor have the events of October 7 and their aftermath deterred him from his current project: a multi-volume lexicon, co-edited with Haifa-based legal scholar Dr. Amir Fakhoury, designed to give Jewish and Arab civil society activists the language to turn ideals into action.

At a time when Israel faces growing isolation on the world stage, Dichter's embrace of Zionism's loftiest ideals, combined with his unwavering commitment to a more just and equitable society, strikes me as profoundly courageous. In an era defined by polarization, he has chosen the far harder path: to remain in the conversation, even when it is painful. He may no longer watch the sunrise, but he refuses to surrender to the darkness.

HHA GALA | TUESDAY, APRIL 21ST | YOM HA'ATZMAUT



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