



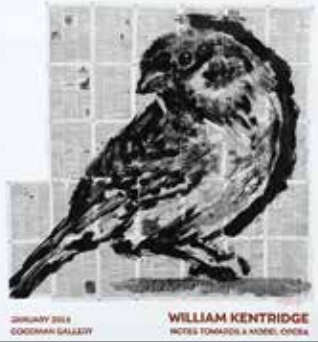
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■ Volume 24 – Number 2 ■ 24 January 2020 ■ 27 Tevet 5780

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Hitler's typewriter released from SA bank vault

JORDAN MOSHE

A heavy wooden crate was delivered and pried open in Forest Town last Friday morning. As the lid came away, all eyes in the room fixed on the object which sat nestled inside: a jet-black typewriter, its complex machinery gleaming as it was lifted out and placed atop a wooden bench.

It wasn't simply its novelty which was gripping, but the thought of its history. For almost 100 years previously, this typewriter had stood on a desk in Braunau, Austria, ready to type at the behest of its first owner: Adolf Hitler.

This historic item is the property of Absa. It was handed over to the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC) in Forest Town on indefinite loan. The idea is to offer visitors a unique opportunity to come face to face with the past to better understand it.

The SA Jewish Report was at this historic occasion with Absa Art and Museum Curator Dr Paul Bayliss and Tali Nates, the founder and director of the JHGC.

Bayliss says that the bank acquired the typewriter under the watch of his predecessor, Dr Piet Snyman, who passed away six months before Bayliss took over. Snyman recorded the transaction, including the name of the person from whom he had purchased it.

According to this record, Joseph Matzner, a colleague of Hitler's, purchased it from him prior to the outbreak of World War II. A confectioner by trade, Matzner was reportedly a friend of Hitler's while both lived in Braunau. The typewriter had been supplied to Hitler in the early 1930s, and was used for private correspondence before

he became chancellor of Germany.

"After buying the typewriter, Matzner then came to South Africa, married a South African woman, and their daughter ended up working for Volkskas Bank, one of the forerunners of Absa," Bayliss says. He added that Snyman bought the typewriter from her husband, a Mr R Mauff, after she passed away, and added it to Absa's collection.

Bayliss says Absa has a few "interesting items" in its vaults.

"When you're dealing a brand like Absa, you're dealing with its forerunners like Volkskas, Trust Bank, and United. United was around when Johannesburg was founded, and with a company as old as that, there will be things in our vaults that have little to do with the bank itself, but are part of a history worth preserving."

Bayliss (who has worked at Absa for 18 years), says the bank maintains a museum that specialises in exhibiting finance-related artefacts. Although this typewriter didn't fit into the finance exhibitions, it found a home among other technological items, and was showcased as an illustration of innovation rather than an item previously owned by Hitler.

Bayliss says its authenticity was never

in question, stressing that Snyman would have made the necessary enquiries before purchasing the typewriter.

"There was no reason not to accept its

as part of the machinery that lead to the systematic murder of millions of people across Europe. It symbolised oppression, persecution, torture, and genocide – the attempt to annihilate people, because of their differences.

"Each time I saw it in the museum, knowing its origin, I felt disquiet. I didn't feel it was appropriate to display it in a money museum as a curiosity among old office equipment, but didn't know what should be done, or even how to approach the situation."

In April last year, Brower visited the JHGC to view the permanent

collection, and a temporary exhibition on Jewish history in Lithuania as a way of connecting to her Litvak ancestry.

While there, she decided the typewriter should be rehomed in the centre, and contacted Bayliss to find out if it was possible.

"I proposed that the typewriter be donated to the centre to be displayed appropriately within the context it was used," says Brower. "He was open to the

Continued on page 16 >>

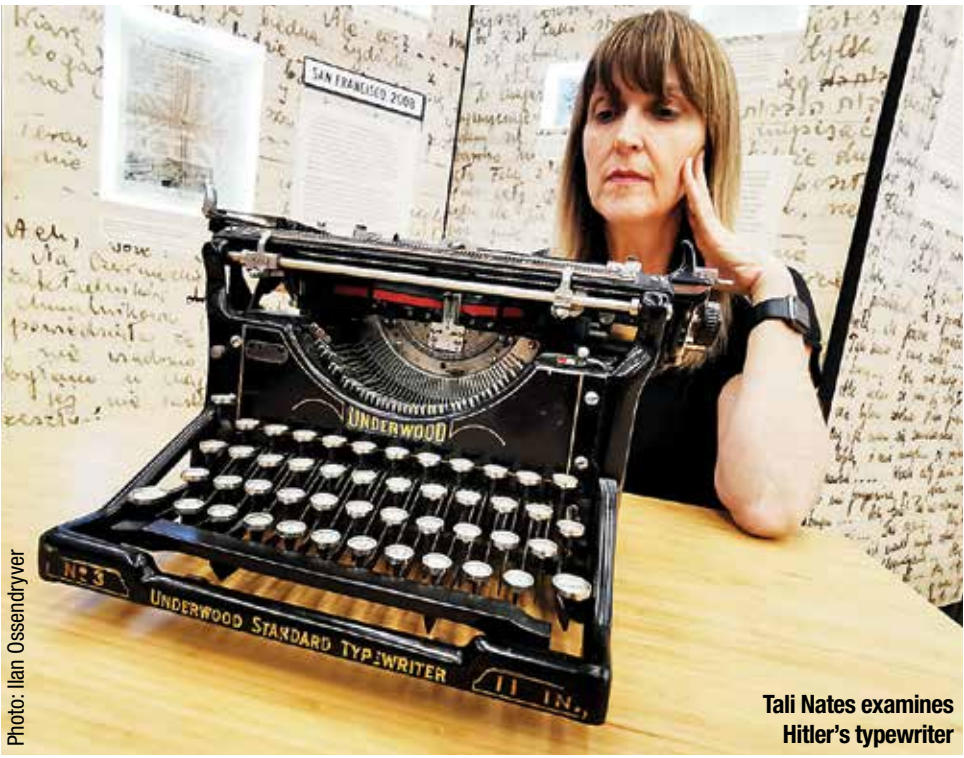


Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Tali Nates examines
Hitler's typewriter

authenticity as fact," he says. "Being the historian that he was, Snyman wouldn't have put it on exhibit without investigating. He was a respected historian, and would have made sure to do his research."

However, while on display at Absa, now former Absa employee Nicole Brower was drawn to this typewriter, and strongly believed it needed to be exhibited elsewhere.

"I was disturbed by it," she told the SA Jewish Report. "This typewriter was used



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AUTO AFRICA

French survey shows prevalence of anti-Semitism

In a survey about anti-Semitism in France, nearly a quarter of 1 027 Jewish respondents said they had experienced a physical anti-Semitic assault.

The results of the survey, carried out this year by the IFOP (Institut français d’opinion publique) for the American Jewish Committee, were published on Tuesday in *Le Parisien*.

In addition to the 23% of respondents who said they had experienced an assault, 64% said they had experienced a non-physical anti-Semitic incident.

In France, home to about 500 000 Jews, authorities documented 541 anti-Semitic incidents in 2018, suggesting a prevalence of one anti-Semitic incident per about 1 000 Jews.

Forty-three percent of respondents younger than 35 said they felt threatened in their daily lives. A third of respondents said they avoided wearing items in public that identified them as Jews, including a kippah. An even larger proportion – 37% – said they avoided installing a mezuzah on their door.

Pope condemns ‘barbaric resurgence’ of anti-Semitism

A week before International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Pope Francis renewed his condemnation of anti-Semitism, decrying its “barbaric resurgence”.

Francis was addressing a delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center at the Vatican on Monday.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day is observed in Italy and throughout the world on 27 January – the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz Nazi death camp in 1945.

“If we lose our memory, we annihilate the future,” the pope said. “May the anniversary of the unspeakable cruelty that humanity learned 75 years ago serve as a summons to pause, to

be silent, and to remember.”

Francis said the world was witnessing a troubling resurgence of factionalism and populism, which provides a breeding ground for hatred.

“We must commit ourselves to tilling the soil in which hatred grows, sowing peace in it,” he said.

The pope also encouraged deeper Christian-Jewish co-operation.

Student claims Anne Frank didn’t die in camp

The progressive *NowThis* news website removed a segment of a video in which a George Washington University student asserted that teenage Holocaust diarist Anne Frank didn’t die in a concentration camp.

The six-minute video about President Donald Trump’s executive order signed last month – that directs “robust” enforcement of existing civil-rights protections for Jews on campus – criticised Trump for “defining what is and what isn’t being Jewish”, and said it was a “veiled way to silence Palestinian voices” against Israel. The order says attackers target Jews since they perceive them to be a race or having a shared national identity.

Becca Lewis, who says she is Jewish, made the false claim while speaking to two Palestinian students at the school in Washington DC.

“What’s going to happen if there’s another Holocaust? Well, we’re seeing what’s happening. We’re seeing people die at the border for lack of medical care. That’s how Anne Frank died. She didn’t die in a concentration camp, she died from typhus,” Lewis says in the now-deleted video segment.

Frank died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in February or March 1945, probably of typhus.

Critics called Lewis a Holocaust denier.

Jewish driver in Berlin points to bullying

A Jewish man working as a driver for the German Chancellery in Berlin has reported being subjected to anti-Semitic harassment.

An unnamed source told the daily *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper that the man, who

comes from Lebanon and worked in the chancellery’s motor pool, reported that several colleagues had insulted and bullied him since early 2019, calling him “Jewish pig” and “Kanakané”, a word referring to migrants from primarily Muslim countries or southern Europe.

The employee has reported the incidents to Felix Klein, the federal government’s anti-Semitism commissioner in the ministry of the interior, according to the newspaper.

While confirming basic details, a government spokesperson told *Bild* that no further comment could be provided in the confidential matter. The employee reportedly now works in a new location, away from his former colleagues.

PA newspaper calls for violent disruption of Holocaust event

The Palestinian Authority’s official newspaper called for violence against Israelis in an effort to disrupt the World Holocaust Forum being held this week in Jerusalem.

A columnist for *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, in an article over the weekend, said that Israel was planning a ceremony to memorialise Jews killed in Europe even as “the Palestinian holocaust by Israel” is ignored.

“One shot will disrupt the ceremony, and one dead body will cancel the ceremony,” Yahya Rabah wrote in an article published on Saturday, according to Palestinian Media Watch.

In a statement, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations condemned the article, saying, “Such a call for violence can never be justified, but it’s especially repugnant for the PA to incite terrorism deliberately aimed at disrupting an occasion as solemn and significant as this.”

Israel’s Channel 13 television reported that the Israeli military said it would launch airstrikes in response to any attacks, even if international dignitaries were in the country.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:37	Johannesburg
19:15	20:34	Cape Town
18:15	19:33	Durban
18:15	19:51	Bloemfontein
18:15	20:05	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:53	East London

Torah Thought

The potential for greatness in everyone

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” Apart from reminding me of my high-school education, Malvolio’s lines in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night are also appropriate for our weekly Torah portion.

Towards the beginning of this week’s portion, we are formally introduced to Moses for the first time. Moses was born in the beginning of the book of Exodus and according to the Midrash, he was “born great” with his parent’s house being filled with a G-dly light at his birth.

Last week’s portion followed Moses as he grew up, fled Egypt, married, and met G-d at the burning bush, when Moses had greatness thrust upon him. In spite of his protests, G-d insisted he was the best person for the job of Jewish leader. Having already learnt so much about Moses, is it necessary for the Torah to formally introduce him again, detailing his lineage and genealogy, starting with

the birth of Reuben, Jacob’s oldest son, then Simon, then Levi, Moses’ great-grandfather? What’s the Torah trying to teach us by tracing the “yichus” – pedigree – of Moses?

“Yichus” is an intangible word often used to evaluate the merit of a potential matrimonial candidate. It can demonstrate “good blood” It also means ancestors with spiritual merit who are looking out “on-high” for their descendants in this physical world.

There has always been controversy about how much significance yichus should bear when we live in a world where some of the most unrefined people have great yichus, and some the most refined people may not have the greatest yichus. After all, even Abraham wasn’t blessed with great yichus. It’s been said that yichus is like a bunch of noughts. If they follow a number, then each nought multiplies the number by ten. If no number precedes

Rabbi Pini Pink, Chabad Greenstone



them, a bunch of noughts add up to one big nought. In other words, yichus doesn’t compensate for one’s deficiencies. Great yichus without one’s own virtues and efforts can be quite empty.

After the mysticism surrounding Moses’ birth and upbringing, it’s not difficult to imagine that rumours about a supernatural birth – as is common in other religions – would have abounded. The Torah lists Moses’ genealogy to teach us that he was a normal person, born to a father and mother, and he “achieved greatness” by using his virtues and abilities to make himself spiritually worthy of his rank. No matter what a persons’ birth or upbringing may be, every Jewish child has the potential to become a Moshe Rabbeinu, a leader of the Jewish people in their generation.

South African Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

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Teenager’s tragic death hits home

NICOLA MILTZ

The U14A King David Linksfield cricket team elected to wear black arm bands at its first high school cricket match this year – against Parktown Boys’ High School. The boys chose to do so in memory of a boy the same age as them who drowned at a school orientation camp last week.

The tragic drowning of Johannesburg teenager Enoch Mpianzi, 13, has rattled the Jewish community to its core, with questions being asked about the safety of our children.

Mpianzi, a Grade 8 pupil at Parktown Boys’ High School, died on 15 January in the Crocodile River during a water activity at the Nyati Bush and River Break Lodge in Brits in the North West.

He was attending an orientation camp organised by the school. Similar trips are offered at Jewish schools each year to new intakes in a bid for pupils to bond and form friendships.

According to reports, Mpianzi was not wearing a life jacket when the makeshift raft he was on overturned. His disappearance went unnoticed for 17 hours, and he was announced missing only after officials did a headcount the following day.

“There are so many unanswered questions, but gross negligence stares you in the face, and all the money in the world will never reunite this little boy with his grieving mother,” said a Johannesburg-based attorney specialising in personal injury work and insurance litigation.

The tragedy is a frightening wake-up call for parents and school officials at Jewish schools, who are having another look at school safety protocols and security measures. Parents, already hyper vigilant when it comes to their children’s safety, are now questioning the complexities of consent and indemnity forms. Mpianzi’s death has raised many

questions about who will be held liable for the tragedy, and to what extent the school can be held accountable for his death.

According to legal experts, most of these indemnities incorporate legal terminology that many people might not fully understand. They usually contain terms that the person in charge of your child acts in loco parentis (“in the place of a parent”) while in their care; that all tours and outings shall be taken at your child’s own risk; and that you indemnify the school, including all staff from

I believe the school/camp in this case acted in a grossly negligent manner. You can never indemnify yourself against gross negligence.

“To the extent that the school or camp was reckless, the indemnity won’t help,” said another attorney who wishes to remain anonymous. “An indemnity isn’t bullet proof, the school or camp still has to act reasonably. Sending a child into a river without a life jacket and a helmet is reckless. You could reasonably anticipate that this could lead to catastrophic circumstances, so it’s unlikely that a



King David Linksfield U14A cricket team have a quiet moment before their game against Parktown Boys’ High School

any and all claims that might arise in connection with damage or loss or injury. Parents are also asked to indemnify and absolve the school against any loss, damage, injury expenses, and costs suffered or incurred by your child in the course of the outing.

“It’s always unsettling to sign these forms, and there are many times we are required to do so,” said one parent who preferred to remain anonymous. “The school is effectively excluded from any and all liability to do with your child when you sign,” she said.

“Parents are caught between a rock and a hard place,” said the attorney, “if you don’t sign the indemnity, the school won’t take your child on the outing or excursion, yet the indemnity protects the school should anything happen during the outing.”

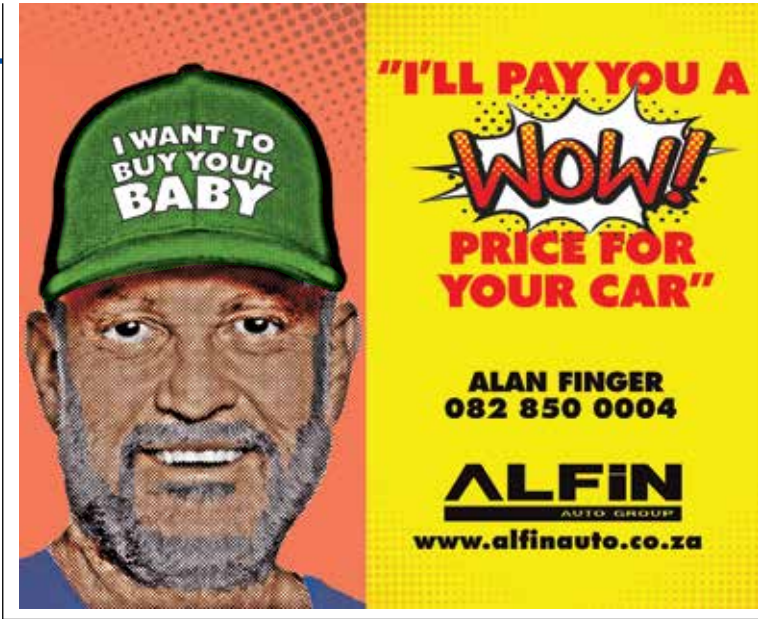
However she said, “One can never contract out of gross negligence, and

court will uphold an indemnity,” he said.

Marc Falconer, the principal of Herzlia High School in Cape Town, told the SA Jewish Report that this was a “terrible tragedy for everyone concerned”.

“No school intends for harm to come to any pupil. Some schools are much better prepared for trips and excursions. I think it’s appropriate to recognise the exceptional work that the Community Security Organisation (CSO) does at Herzlia and at most Jewish institutions. This preparation, infrastructure, and support should make parents feel as secure as one can be in an uncertain world. The CSO’s structures are so superior to every other school I have worked at, here and abroad,” he said.

“Accidents and tragedies can always happen, and sometimes they are entirely unavoidable – crime, road and



travel related, natural disasters. The better the preparation, the more chance that things can be contained and the damage limited. To ensure that there is clear communication is probably the most important of the lot.”

Falconer said it was important to ensure that everyone from the pupils, parents, to all the teachers/supervisors were properly briefed.

“They should know the goals and outcomes, have all the correct and required equipment, and be aware of the dangers. Supervisors are properly briefed about what they are watching for, specifically where the danger ‘hot spots’ are,” he said.

He said parents were “vital partners” with the school to ensure that safety is taken seriously.

“It’s not just the school’s job to ensure that appropriate clothing and equipment has been packed for excursions and trips, and that no alcohol and other contraband is in the luggage. This can’t just be the school’s responsibility.”

“Planning is important too. For example, good ratios of supervisors to those being looked after. [There needs to be] a clear programme of action and a procedure to deal with emergencies.”

Lorraine Srage, the principal of King David High School, Linksfield, said the school takes all necessary precautions both on and off campus to cover all events and outings. “The safety and security policy includes a venue and route assessment by the CSO, with buses checked before departure.

“A full reconnaissance of the camp venue is undertaken before the students arrive to evaluate any potential dangers. All events off campus are accompanied by a trained medic with basic first-aid

equipment and an assessment of the nearest hospital or clinic is taken.”

She said that in the case of overnight camps, parents complete an indemnity form, and provide all relevant personal medical information for their child. “The students are expected to bring their own prescribed medication. All reasonable precautions are taken. The staff and students are made aware of the programme and activities, and any sensitive areas are cordoned off. Students are informed of specific clothing, footwear, or any other equipment required. Senior students and members of staff oversee the activities in small groups. Supervision is provided at all times, and a headcount is done on a regular basis.”

Srage said that when undertaking practical activities, “evaluation of the ground conditions is done and if any dangers are suspected, the programme is modified. For example, river analysis after heavy rainfall.”

Students are never forced to do an activity that they don’t feel comfortable doing, she said.

“On the school campus, we have regular evacuation drills, and more than 40 staff and students who are trained in first aid,” said Srage.

Rob Long, the principal of Yeshiva College, said, “In light of this incident, I’m sure every school is re-evaluating their safety policies and procedures, and making sure that these are being carried out on the ground. We certainly are. Everyone is being hyper-vigilant, re-thinking what they are doing, and making sure that policies are being correctly carried out. Safety comes first. No matter what.”

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The South African at the cutting edge of x-ray vision

TALI FEINBERG

A Johannesburg-born businessman living in Israel is part of a duo that has produced an augmented reality device which allows surgeons to see a patient’s anatomy through skin and tissue as if they have x-ray vision. While it may sound like science fiction, it’s definitely science fact.

The duo is made up of South African Stuart Wolf and Israeli Nissan Elimelech of Augmedics.

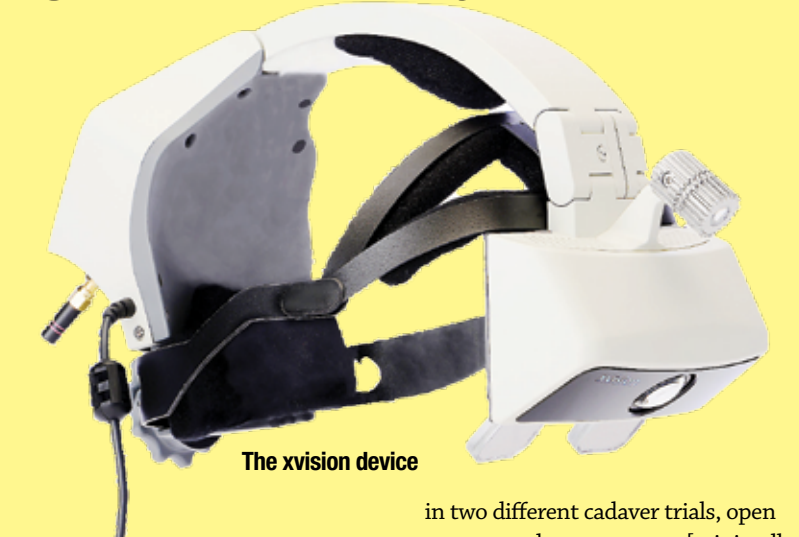
“The xvision is the first augmented reality device approved for surgery. The system provides the surgeon with all the information required, including an x-ray-like view of the patient. Using the xvision, the surgeon is able to navigate instrumentation used in surgery precisely,” says Wolf, who attended King David Victory Park, and went on to study a BSc Electrical Engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand. He made aliyah in 1989, and started graduate studies at the Israel Institute of Technology (Technion) where he graduated with an MSc in Electrical Engineering specialising in signal and image processing.

“With the xvision, we are able to able to navigate the screws into exactly the correct anatomical position with a high level of accuracy without the need for opening the patient,” he says. “The surgeon is able to see a three-dimensional view of the spine through the skin, and plan and then guide the screws to their correct position. All of this is performed while the surgeon is looking directly at the patient, not at x-ray views on a remote monitor. This paves the way for an increased adoption of minimally invasive spine surgery.” The surgeon wears the device as a headset, which is custom fit to each user.

Augmedics was founded by Elimelech, the current chief executive. “I joined him mid-2015. It was his idea, but he originates from the business and marketing side and he needed someone to work with on the technological aspects. We joined forces and began building the company, raising funds and developing the technology. I had worked in different start-ups in the past, but at Augmedics, we pushed the envelope and drove forward quickly,” says Wolf.

“In one and a half years, we had grown from two to five people, running on seed funding and then we raised a further \$8.5 million (R123.2 million) in a round of funding led by the AO Foundation [a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving the care of people with musculoskeletal injuries]. We then grew quickly to about 25 employees and then to our current size of about 40 people both in Israel and in the United States.”

Wolf says that, “Initiating and running a start-up is obviously very intense and most of your time and thoughts are devoted to advancing the company. The initial goal of the company was to develop smart-glasses that provided x-ray-like vision to the surgeon. This would enable performing minimally invasive surgery in unforeseen ways. As development progressed, we realised that we needed to shift slightly and



add further capabilities to the system. This is typical of a start-up, where the goalposts are not as fixed. You need to be agile and be prepared to make quick changes. You also need to be prepared to take risks. Often before development is mature, it needs to be demonstrated and used.”

His ultimate vision – no pun intended – is to continue to grow Augmedics into a world leader for surgical augmented reality applications, and to turn the start-up into a successful large company which “improves the health of as many people as possible and provides employment for as many people as possible”.

The xvision system recently received US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval. This is a big achievement, as all medical products for sale in the US must have FDA approval.

“The process of FDA approval requires proving to the FDA that the device is able to perform what it claims, and that it can do so without harming the patient, Wolf says. “This requires the company to perform extensive device testing including laboratory testing and cadaver testing. The process usually takes between six to 12 months. There are different routes to FDA approval. The route most companies prefer to go is through the 510(k) process, where you can prove that your device is equivalent to another device on the market. This reduces the amount of testing required.

“As we are the first augmented-reality device to be approved for surgery, the FDA was unsure that we met the criteria for 510(k) approval, and we first needed to overcome this hurdle. This included meeting with the FDA and demonstrating the device to it, which is an unusual step. After successfully moving through this stage, the FDA still had many new questions that we needed to answer and prove. The process in our case took nine months, and we were required to prove safety

in two different cadaver trials, open surgery and percutaneous [minimally invasive] spine surgery.”

The next step is to begin sales in the US. “We have a sales and marketing branch headquartered in Chicago with area sales managers spread over the US. As the sales progress, we are also ramping up production, which is another challenge. Following the successful launch of the xvision-spine, we will branch into other medical applications where there is a great need for minimally invasive and guided procedures.”

Wolf says they will focus on launching in Europe next, and thereafter to other markets. South Africa might be one of them.

His advice to young entrepreneurs and start-ups is to “work hard and don’t be afraid to fail. Also know that if you have a good idea that you can show there is a market need for, then you will be able to raise money and you will be able to succeed. Developing technology and then looking for the market for it is usually the wrong path for a start-up.”

He says that although Israel has been branded as the “start-up nation”, the number of people in Israel working in start-ups is relatively small. “It may be large in relation to other countries, but still most of Israeli industry is traditional. Having said that, I would still say that we have a thriving community of scientists, programmers, and engineers in the start-up industry, and we are successful at developing start-up companies. I would prefer to see many more of our great start-ups developing into large companies and not being taken over by multinationals.”



From Gulag to Gauteng: celebrating the life of a Stalin survivor

JORDAN MOSHE

“Stalin tried to kill me, he didn’t succeed; Hitler tried to kill me, he didn’t succeed; the Arabs tried to kill me, they didn’t succeed. But it looks like the cheese blintzes may succeed.”

These words, uttered by the late Mordechai “Mord” Perlov from his bed in intensive care at the end of last year, shows much more than inimitable perspective about what would ultimately lead to his passing. It captures the tenacity of a 93-year-old marvel who not only endured the unspeakable, but whose wit and warmth transcended circumstances until the last.

A survivor of Stalin’s brutal oppression, Perlov passed away on Monday after spending three weeks in hospital in December. His admission was the result of eating a spoiled cheese blintze, causing subsequent food poisoning, kidney failure, and death. He died at home in Melrose Arch this week.

His passing brings to a close a saga of note. Born in 1926 in the shtetl of Rasein in Lithuania, Perlov and his family were part of a community of about 5 000 Jewish residents. His family owned a timber and flour mill, and lacked nothing. All this would change when Stalin occupied Lithuania in 1939. In June 1941, one week before Hitler attacked Russia, about 20 000 so-called “enemies of the state”, were deported and sent to remote locations, facing harsh labour and unspeakably dire living conditions. Perlov, his brother Yaakov, sister Tova, and his parents were among them.

In spite of losing his parents (burying them with his own bare hands), Perlov would survive the ordeal against all odds, and escape Soviet territory. His journey took him through northern Russia, Poland, Ukraine,

Italy, Cyprus, Israel (where he fought in the War of Independence), and eventually to South Africa, where he became a successful businessman, married, and had three children.

Along the way, Perlov touched countless lives, and although he opened up about his ordeal only a few years ago, people knew he was remarkable after first meeting him.

“This was a man who suffered terrible persecution but refused to be a victim,” says financial specialist Michael Kransdorff. “He escaped from a Soviet gulag, got a university degree in spite of not having a formal education, built a successful business, and raised a family. He was my hero, and my friend.”

To those who didn’t know him, Perlov seemed a taciturn man of few words. “When you got to him, he opened up,” says businessman Rob Katz, whose connection with Perlov went back more than 30 years when he befriended Perlov’s son, Roni, at university. “I knew so little of his background that I thought he was Russian.

“When I realised he was Lithuanian and had survived the Gulag, it didn’t really change anything. He was still Mord, but there was more to him.”

Marketing communications specialist Michelle Blumenau recounts a similar experience. “There was this old guy who always sat in the front row at Chabad of Melrose who never spoke,” she says. “I’d heard he’d had an interesting life, but I never engaged with him until his wife, Milly, died and I went to her funeral. We then struck up a friendship.

“Because his three children and grandchildren lived overseas, my parents

and I ‘adopted’ him,” says Blumenau. “Every Monday night, he’d go out to dinner with my parents. He used to come to our Pesach Seder every year. The one year, my dad began the seder by saying that the story of the seder is one of slavery and freedom, and tonight we have amongst us someone who was a slave. Mord looked blank, and didn’t register that my dad was talking about him. He never saw himself as a victim.”

It’s perhaps for this reason that he began sharing his story publicly only in the past decade. When Blumenau suggested that he speak at a Limmud conference, she had no idea that he had never spoken publicly before.

“He gave a presentation to a packed room the following year with Kransdorff,” she recounts. “He got a standing ovation, and it unleashed something in him. He didn’t stop telling his story from then on. He wanted to expose the evils of Stalin and communism.

As soon as he opened up to people, Perlov became a relatable personality who could get along with virtually anyone. “Mord had an amazing ability to transcend intergenerational and cultural barriers,” says Kransdorff.

“Everyone loved him, from the waiters in every restaurant in the Melrose area where he ate almost every meal; to the school children he spoke to about his experience in the war and the horrors of soviet communism; to the numerous gym goers he befriended.”

Although they had met previously, Margaret Hoffmann, a close friend and



Mordechai Perlov

confidante, developed a bond with Perlov after inviting him to participate in the Holocaust Survivor Group (HSG) at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre at which she volunteered.

“Mord had an amazing intellect, clarity of mind, and an ability to socialise and make friends with a diverse group,” she says. “Once at an HSG meeting with Achim L’Chaim, a group of injured Israeli soldiers, Mord shouted, ‘Anyone from my unit?’ Three soldiers pounced on Mord, hugging him and crying. He always joked about being given five bullets to fight in the War of Independence.”

Perlov’s sharpness of mind was paired with astonishing physical resilience until late in

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Lithuania’s Holocaust memory – “reliable” or “unreliable”?

OPINION

GRANT GOCHIN



Many South African Jews are descended from an immigration wave from Lithuania in the 1920s. Our grandparents seldom explained the context; here it is.

During World War I, when the current territory of Lithuania was part of Russia, the Tsarist army conducted a mass ethnic cleansing of Jews. During that period, especially in the Spring of 1915, a number of Lithuanians took an active part in murdering old Jewish men, women, and even children, and plundering Jewish assets. Lithuania claims that the Russians were entirely responsible for the actions of ethnic Lithuanians. Lithuanians retained the stolen Jewish property.

Betrayal after betrayal followed, and Jews began to leave for greener pastures. It was the lesser educated and the unemployed Jews that left Lithuania, the intelligentsia stayed

collaborator and Noreika “completely innocent”. What are the differences?

Cvirka assisted Soviets in deporting Lithuanians to Siberia, where about 28 000 out of 250 000 deportees died of poor living conditions (11.2%). Lithuania defines this as a genocide. Noreika assisted Nazis in deporting Jews, where 96.4% were tortured, raped, and murdered. When Cvirka signed instructions to deport Lithuanians, the government described those as “orders”, but Noreika’s instructions to ghetto and plunder Jews are described as “letters” (a language difference designed to minimise the actions).

Cvirka distributed Soviet propaganda glorifying the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), while Noreika wrote and published articles glorifying Nazi ideology.

Cvirka travelled to the USSR, whereas Noreika travelled to

Esther Barsel, “unreliable” because her testimony contradicted its ideology. Jewish testimony being denied as “unreliable” has a long history in Europe, Jews were never considered “reliable”. Lithuania has identified Noreika’s granddaughter, Silvia Foti*, as “unreliable” for disclaiming its Holocaust distortion of her grandfather’s murders. Also deemed “unreliable” are academics that have studied Noreika’s crimes, and a witness that reported Noreika’s own words to murder Jews.

The United States congress wrote to the Lithuanian prime minister to instruct that it stop misusing congressional documents for Holocaust distortion. Is congress “unreliable”?

A government public-relations consultant wrote a dishonest report claiming that Noreika saved Jews. According to the government, he is “reliable”.

Much has also been written about Lithuania’s intention to build a new convention centre on top of a Jewish cemetery in Vilnius. Since identifying Cvirka as a “collaborator”, Lithuania has reported that his monument is built atop Jewish gravestones. It wants to save these Jewish gravestones as an “act of good faith”, but criticising digging up a Jewish cemetery makes one “unreliable”.

Lithuania’s ruling party is discussing legislation to absolve the nation of Holocaust crimes. After all, it says, it wasn’t the state that did it, but thousands of individuals, and those individuals should be identified and put on trial. Except, Lithuania refuses to identify the individuals, and dead people can’t be placed on trial. Discussing these “minor details” would likely also make one “unreliable”.

Lithuania’s president, Gitanas Nausėda, was scheduled to attend the World Holocaust Forum at Yad Vashem on 23 January to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On 24 January 2020, a demonstration is scheduled to take place in Israel by the “Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel” to protest Lithuanian Holocaust lies. On 27 January, Lithuania will produce its annual “Holocaust regret show” in which it will talk about the devastation caused by Soviets and Nazis. Highly trained, professional writers will construct a message of sorrow and regret, but minimise Lithuanian involvement. Afterwards, Lithuanians will go home and honour heroes such as Jonas Noreika.

Which is “unreliable”, Lithuanian actions, or Lithuanian words? The only appropriate response to Lithuania is disgust, anger, and outrage.

*Silvia Foti’s *Storm in the Fatherland: A Memoir Unmasking a War Criminal* will be published by Harper Collins in Spanish in 2020, and by Regnery History in English in 2021.

• South African-born Grant Gochin is actively involved in Jewish affairs, focusing on historical justice. He has spent the past 20 years documenting and restoring signs of Jewish life in Lithuania. In March 2019, he took the Lithuanian government to court to get it to recognise its active role in the Holocaust.



Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda at a recent press conference

on hoping that life would improve, instead, they were slaughtered.

The world knows of the genocide perpetrated in Lithuania in 1941 in which Jonas Noreika was responsible for the murder of about 14 500 out of the 200 000 murder victims (including my own family). The sharing of Jewish property was widespread, and once again, Lithuanians were enriched with Jewish property.

Upon independence in 1990, we hoped Lithuania would reform and enter the pantheon of civilised nations, tell the truth, and move forward as compatriots. Alas, our generation is as disillusioned as previous generations. A bureaucracy named the Genocide Centre has been established in Lithuania to rewrite the history of the Holocaust and absolve Lithuania of responsibility.

The Holocaust distortion in the case of Jonas Noreika has been noticed by the world, and exposed the governments’ very deliberate deceptions. Lithuanian diplomats who are tasked with attracting Jewish investment into Lithuania participate in this. Lithuania appears to have a strange fascination with Jewish assets. The case of a Lithuanian named Cvirka amply displays the strategy. Cvirka was a bad man, his victims were Lithuanians whereas Noreika’s victims were our own Jewish families. The Lithuanian government examined both, and declared Cvirka a

congratulate his staff on their outstanding work in the slaughter of the Jews.

And so, the comparisons continue, but, according to the government, the persecutor of Lithuanians is a criminal, and the murderer of Jews is a Lithuanian national hero. What might the difference be?

Many South African Jews have applied for restoration of citizenship rights, but few know the history. Lithuania offered Jews restitution of stolen property on condition someone was a Lithuanian citizen. But they made it almost impossible for Jews to reclaim citizenship. I led a legal and media campaign to expose the dual system (similar to Cvirka versus Noreika), and met the identical wall of fraud, deception, and anti-Semitism.

After the restitution period ended, Lithuania “discovered” how obstructionist its citizenship process was for Jews, and rectified it. It was able to claim that restitution had been offered, albeit almost nobody was successful. Now, Lithuania holds out citizenship as an incentive, waiting for Jews to accept it, and then hopefully invest in Lithuania, travel there, and promote the country. (Again with a “rich Jews” fascination.)

In the process of denying Jewish citizenship applications during the restitution process, the Lithuanian government called one of South Africa’s primary national heroes,

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The demolished villa that lives on

MIRAH LANGER

Josef Bergmann was just six years old on the night, in 1938, that the Nazis raided the home of the Heimann family. The family of six lived in the same German town as Bergmann, their differing fate marked only by the fact that they were Jewish, and he wasn't.

"I can remember that one evening. I heard noises and everything appeared so peculiar. The noises reminded me of drunk people, and I listened more and more because certain noises were mixed with voices." So recounts a now elderly Bergmann in a documentary about the history and fate of the Heimann Villa in the town of Steinfurt.

"Suddenly there was a rattling noise that came from the windows being destroyed. I could clearly hear the glass breaking. I saw that items were thrown out of the windows; the Nazis were getting preserved food from the pantry, and throwing it out.

"Then I heard a woman's voice, Mrs Heimann. She asked if it was really necessary to throw these groceries into the street. She said they were too good to be wasted, and asked if instead they could be donated."

Bergmann remembers the Nazi's reply, declaring that they would never accept anything that came from a Jew.

"The woman cried. I heard that."

"The next evening, the synagogue was almost entirely burnt down."

The documentary, *Villa Heimann: A Lost Monument*, was recently screened at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre in Forest Town as part of an event which included an address by the descendants of the original Heimann family, as well as a Skype link-up to city officials and residents of Steinfurt today, including

Bergmann himself.

In the documentary, Bergmann recalled the after-effects of his experience that night.

He said he went to ask his father about what he had seen. His father condemned the action, telling him that the Nazis would come to regret it. He noted that his father, a "common master craftsman", had offered political comment that showed a humanity few others were willing to assert at that time.

"If you wanted to, you knew what was going on," said Bergmann.

He recalled his father's final instruction about the incident, "You have seen it; you have heard it; never forget!"

It's a command that Bergmann has, in the decades that have ensued, never faltered in following, as he has fought to continue the memory of the Heimann family.

The story of this villa and its Jewish ties begins with the purchase of the property by Jewish cattle trader Albert and his wife,



Claude Heimann and Madelaine Fane with a city official during a visit to their ancestral home

Frieda. Along with their four children, Wilhelm, Ottilie, Antonia, and Elsbeth, the family was happily living in the 12 room, two-storey villa, at the time Nazi rule began.

After the pogrom night in 1938, in which Nazis smashed apart the home rendering it inhabitable, the Heimanns were forced to leave.

Albert, under duress and without legal rights, had to adhere to a contract for the sale of the house, issued under the Third Reich, which

The Villa Heimann before its demolition



sold the house for well below its value.

While the children were later able to leave Germany – with Wilhelm coming to settle in South Africa – Frieda and Albert's attempts to immigrate were thwarted. Instead, they were soon deported, and later murdered in Auschwitz.

Over the years, the villa continued to play a key role in the life of the town, serving as an extension of the municipality in various forms.

Chillingly, when the Heimann family sought compensation for the property after the war, the German local government chose to recognise the legitimacy of the previous Nazi contract in determining the compensation claim.

Although the villa had fallen into disrepair by the 21st century, proposals were made to use its exterior wall as part of a new fire station on the site. Yet, in spite of protests and petitions, including from the Heimann descendants, the city elected to tear down the building in 2014.

Nevertheless, Bergmann, as a member of the Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) initiative, has been part of a collective effort by non-Jewish Germans to find ways to commemorate Jewish history

that otherwise would have been largely obliterated.

In 2006, the initiative placed brass plaques at the front of the property to mark the home's previous Jewish inhabitants. These plaques are part of a project that spans 23 countries and has resulted in about 75 000 of these 10cm by 10cm concrete cubes erected at key sites. Each plaque records the name and life dates of a victim of the Nazi regime, and is placed at their last "freely chosen" place of residence or work.

The initiative's members in Steinfurt also placed enlarged photographs of the family in the windows of the villa, and after its demolition, salvaged window frames from it to build a mobile museum. They have also designed a self-guided walking tour of the town's Jewish history, as well as seeking to preserve various artefacts from the Jewish

community including fragments of the Torah that was desecrated during the attack on the synagogue.

Madeleine Fane and Claude Heimann, the grandchildren of the original Heimann patriarch, spoke at the documentary screening. They discussed the warm welcome they received during a trip back to the town in 2017, as well as how deeply touched they have been by the work of the Stolpersteine initiative.

Yet, they also noted that a photograph of their grandparents that forms part of a memorial board erected at the town's railway station has been vandalised three times.

"A Hitler moustache has been painted on the portraits of both my grandparents, and my grandfather had a swastika on his forehead," said Claude.

"After repairing the boards three times only to have them vandalised again, the Stolpersteine folk decided to leave them defaced to show that anti-Semitism is still a serious problem in the region. The swastika has been removed, however," he said.

Claude said he hoped the story of the villa would ultimately highlight the profound work of the Stolpersteine initiative. "They are a remarkable group of people."

"I would like people to contact people in the Stolpersteine initiative from the towns they came from, because they really need our support, they really need to know that we recognise what they do. They are non-Jewish Germans fighting anti-Semitism."

The larger-than-life hero who survived from Gulag to Gauteng

>>Continued from page 5

life. Blumenau recounts how Perlov joined her family annually to break the fast after Yom Kippur. "At the age of 91, I asked him how his day had been," she says. "He told me that he had gone

to gym at Melrose Arch, to shul, and had fasted all day. It's hard to understand that level of resilience."

Perlov was particularly proud of the publication of *Once Were Slaves*, an account of his harrowing journey written by his cousin, Rose Zwi, which he promoted often. He was even involved in producing a documentary about his life, *Because of Stalin*, which was recently released, and is due to be screened in cinemas later this year.

"He gave 250 signed book copies away at Tisha B'Av last year," says Katz. "He never wanted payment for them, but asked instead that a donation be given to Hatzolah, an organisation close to his heart."

"That was the man. He always recognised what others had done for him. It was never about him, but about his message and helping others."

Katz concludes that beyond suffering, Perlov's life teaches us a lesson in endurance and living for what matters most. "Mord survived hell," he says. "What he endured is not, however, the lesson here, but that he did endure and built a better reality. In him, we had a living testament of European Jewry of the 20th century, an embodiment of its highs and lows. Mord represented the triumph of spirit. He endured and built."

Perlov is survived by his sister, Tova; his children, Ari, Roni, and Carmella; and his five grandchildren.

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Futuristic Israeli companies ‘an ideal investment opportunity’

STEVEN GRUZD

Israel presents unprecedented opportunities for South Africans for investment in innovative high-tech companies destined to change the world. So says Shelly Hod Moyal, the founding partner and co-chief executive of iAngels, a female-led venture-capital firm based in Tel Aviv focusing on futuristic Israeli technologies.

Hod Moyal pitched to potential investors in Illovo, Johannesburg, on Monday, in a talk titled “From Tel Aviv to Johannesburg: investing in the companies of the future.” The event was held in partnership with the Trade Mission of the Israeli Embassy.

Hod Moyal, who used to work at Goldman Sachs investment bank, said she started iAngels in 2014 because she “wanted to create a bridge between Israel and the rest of the world, based on technology”. The idea was to showcase what Israel could do, and to make business connections by fostering investment in Israeli hi-tech start-up businesses.

Companies that iAngels has previously funded include WSC Sports, which automatically compiles highlights of sports broadcasts for digital use; Arbe Robotics, which creates software for driverless cars; and Outdoorsy, which developed a market for the short-term use of recreational vehicles.

Hod Moyal dissected the source of Israel’s characterisation as the “Start-up Nation”, a term popularised by Dan Senor and Saul Singer in their 2009 book. She argued that there is a culture of survival in the tiny 71-year-old Middle Eastern state, built on thousands of years of Jews having to face hardship and persecution, surrounded by enemies and lacking natural resources. For example, Israel went from one of the most water-stressed countries in the world to becoming the leader in desalination, filtration, and water-management technology in a generation.



“I want Israel to be perceived as a good place to do business, a place seen as ethical, transparent, and doing good in the world.”

She spoke of how the Israeli army is a pipeline for talent, with top achievers identified in their teens and recruited into elite military units. The Israel Defense Forces teaches skills like flexibility and the ability to make the best decisions under pressure.

Israel has also benefited from a far-sighted government that has put in place policies that have allowed entrepreneurship to blossom and thrive.

And thrive it has. Hod Moyal said Israel has the world’s third largest technology ecosystem after the United States and China. Today, there are 30 companies worth more than \$100 million (R1.4 billion) in Israel, and another 30 worth more than \$1 billion (R14.5 billion). More than 300 multinational companies have a research and development centre in Israel. The country has generations of serial entrepreneurs who have started and sold many successful companies to the tech giants.

“We are now in the next phase of that innovation. The question now is how do we win, how do we prosper? We commercialise technology. It’s about getting from start-up to scale-up,” she said.

iAngels is a venture-capital firm that looks for a competitive edge in the companies in which it invests. They must have the potential to be sold profitably. “We look for companies with big vision,” Hod Moyal said. iAngels likes to invest early in a company’s life cycle, and often supports seasoned entrepreneurs with a track record. Identifying strong teams and ethical leaders is vital. It seeks companies that will make a positive global impact.

As these companies grow, iAngels helps to keep them grounded, offering “tailwinds, support, and wisdom” in a collaborative spirit, said Hod Moyal.

There are opportunities for South African investors to join counterparts from 45



Shelly Hod Moyal

countries to invest with iAngels in the companies of the future in diverse sectors from healthcare, the environment, and sustainable agriculture.

“I want Israel to be perceived as a good place to do business, a place seen as ethical, transparent, and doing good in the world,” Hod Moyal said.

When asked about South Africa’s political hostility to Israel, Hod Moyal said, “I can’t control what other people think. Nothing is black and white. It reminds me of the story of a man with a hole in his roof, who yells at the clouds to rain somewhere else, when he just needs to fix his roof. Focus on cleaning your own room, fixing your own roof.”



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Celebrating a seven-year learning triumph

JORDAN MOSHE

More than 1 200 people gathered in a cavernous marquee at the Wanderers in Illovo last Wednesday evening, but this time to celebrate a victory in Torah learning, not sport.

The lavish banquet dinner and celebration was held at the deck on this hallowed sportsground in honour of South Africans reaching an international landmark.

Known as the Dirshu World Siyum, the dinner celebrated the success of a seven and a half-year long daily commitment to completing the Talmud, an undertaking by 60 South African Jews.

Their commitment was to study one page of the Gemara every single day. This is known as Daf Yomi. Their achievement was celebrated alongside the broader Torah accomplishments of Johannesburg Jewry. Dirshu, an international organisation whose goal is to strengthen and encourage Torah study throughout the diaspora, organised the event.

“Tonight is a small glimpse of the truth,” said Rabbi Ari Taback, the director of Dirshu South Africa. “Take a mental snapshot of what’s around you tonight. We are celebrating a sublime achievement. The next time you see a five-year-old mouthing the words of the *alef bet* (Hebrew alphabet), remember this celebration. This is what matters.”

Extolling the achievements of the community, South African Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein recalled the faith the late Rabbi Yitzchak Kossowsky had in South African Jewry. Kossowsky came from Lithuania to Johannesburg in 1933 to take up the position of head of the Beth Din, in which he served until

he died in 1951.

“In the years of Kossowsky’s tenure, the state of Torah learning in Johannesburg was deteriorating fast. An article was published in 1937 in which Rav Kossowsky was asked whether there was any chance for the survival of Torah in South Africa. At the time, there was very little precedent. Yet amidst pervasive weakening of *mitzvot* (good deeds) and drifting away from Torah, he passionately asserted with no tangible evidence that Torah would ultimately return to South African Jews,” Goldstein told the crowd.

“Think what Rav Kossowsky would say if he were to walk into this hall tonight, with more than 1 200 people present and many more wanting to come. What would he say to the fact that learning of Gemara has been revived? What would he say about his precious community that has been completely transformed and returned to Torah in such unprecedented numbers?

“It doesn’t matter what kind of a Jew you are, we celebrate and learn the same Torah. We grow in this community, and that’s a gift. We must take strength from vibrancy and growth, from passion for Torah. Tonight symbolises all of that. It’s a vision of a vibrant future for our community, one deeply rooted in Torah and *mitzvot*,” the chief rabbi said.

Rabbi Dovid Hofstedter, Dirshu’s founder and director, lauded the community for maintaining its Torah inheritance.

“This community has defied all the odds and come together as one,” he said. “It celebrates Torah. The Torah is our inheritance and legacy, so one would think that it should be received automatically. Pirkei Avot, however, says that it isn’t so, that you have to work to earn it,” said Hofstedter.



Photo: Jason Crouse

The Siyum banquet at The Deck at Wanderers

“Look around the world today. The Torah is being celebrated with honour that is unprecedented in the history of our exile. This is an unprecedented celebration of learning just 75 years after the Holocaust. Torah is the air we breathe, and Jews can’t exist without it. We yearn for the transformative experience it offers, and we become different people because of it,” Hofstedter said.

“This Siyum shows that Torah is what we are yearning for, that it’s our life. We want transformation. We want to elevate ourselves and our nation.”

The evening’s keynote speaker, Rabbi Paysach Krohn, stressed that Torah was relevant to every Jew’s life, and used a remarkable story to illustrate the point.

changed considerably.”

As a result, 2 711 stones were placed, the exact number of pages in the Talmud. Said Krohn, “Every page of Shas is therefore represented in Berlin, and this relates to our lives as well. The Talmud represents our experiences. It is made up of chapters; some longer, some shorter, some more difficult than others. This is mirrored in our daily lives exactly.”

“In 1994, the German government allowed the Jews to build a memorial in downtown Berlin,” recounted this international Torah-related speaker and author. “It gave them four acres of land on which to build a memorial to Europe’s Jews. A total of 200 different artists competed, and the judges selected Peter Eisenman’s design.” Krohn said Eisenman’s design featured 400 slabs of blank stone without any inscriptions whatsoever, collectively representing all kinds of Jews who had perished anonymously.

However, an unexpected issue arose. “Just before construction began, Germany passed a new law, ruling that memorials had to be built with wheelchair access,” said Krohn. “That changed things, because Eisenman had designed the stones to be near one another. Many stones had to be removed to create space for wheelchairs, and the design

Krohn emphasised the need to make learning a priority.

“When the founder of Daf Yomi, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, was nine, his mother made sure that he had daily lessons with a tutor. One day they moved, and little Meir’s mother communicated their new address to the tutor. Somehow, he didn’t get the message, and by 21:00 that night, she realised the tutor wasn’t coming,” Krohn said.

“She sat down and started crying. When Rav Meir asked her why, she told him words he never forgot: ‘A day of learning lost is gone forever. You cannot make it up.’ That’s why he proposed the idea of a Daf Yomi at the age of 36. The project became a reality only because of a mother’s belief that a day of learning can’t be regained.

“Tonight, every one of us needs to remember three things: consistency, tenacity, and daily dedication. That’s how you accomplish things. We need to recognise that Torah learning brings serenity, that Torah study is essential, and that such accomplishments are deserving of special celebration.”

Three men and a page of Talmud a day

JORDAN MOSHE

What do businessman Shaun Matisonn, lawyer Hugh Raichlin, and Shaun Zagnoev, the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, have in common?

They all made a serious commitment to Jewish learning by studying a page of Talmud every single day for seven and a half years. In this time, they covered 37 volumes of the Babylonian Talmud (or Gemara), the equivalent of 2 711 double-sided pages.

They were among thousands of Jewish scholars around the world who recently celebrated the conclusion of the thirteenth cycle of Daf Yomi. This is an international programme in which all participants study a page of the Gemara a day. The participants studied consistently in spite of work and family commitments.

Each page features extensive commentary and conversation among the rabbis of the first few centuries of the Common Era. Their discussions are frequently complicated and digressive, shifting between topics as varied as paying damages, betrothing a woman, even the

existence of mermaids.

These men were among more than 60 individuals who were recognised for this at the Dirshu World Siyum held last week.

In spite of initial apprehension, Raichlin took up the challenge after repeatedly being encouraged by a friend who had completed the cycle before. “I was reluctant, as it’s an enormous commitment over such a long period,” says Raichlin. “I joined the shiur initially at Ohr Sameach Glenhazel in the early mornings, at 05:15, and thereafter at Yeshiva College, altogether for about five years. Thereafter, I learnt on my own with the Art Scroll Talmud which has an English translation and excellent explanatory notes.”

Zagnoev got involved after reading a newspaper advert. Although he had spent time at a yeshiva overseas, it took him 10 years to find the right forum to resume his religious studies.

“My wife, Joanne, saw an announcement placed by Ohr Somayach in the Star Classifieds advising that they were intending to start a Daf Yomi shiur,” he says. “With her encouragement, and with a certain intrigue and reticence, I

Continued on page 11>>



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The world’s largest, longest book club

JORDAN MOSHE

If you’re looking to join the world’s largest book club, you’re in luck. Membership is free, requires no paperwork, and anyone can sign up. Take note: you’ll be reading not one book but an entire series, and you must read at least a page a day. What’s more, you will be committing to seven and a half years of this. To become a member, simply get your hands on a copy of one of the greatest page-turners in history: the Talmud.

We’re talking about the Daf Yomi programme, an international phenomenon in which Jews around the world participate in daily study of the Gemara. From Johannesburg to Jakarta, Daf Yomi (Hebrew for the Daily Page) participants read the 2 711 pages of the Babylonian Talmud – the central text of rabbinic Judaism – in seven and a half years at the rate of one page a day.

Written in a combination of Aramaic and Hebrew, the Talmud is divided into 37 volumes (known as tractates), each of which deals with different aspects of Jewish law. These range from festivals to marriage, to sacrifices and vows, accompanied by extensive rabbinic commentary from across the ages which is often discursive, complicated, and difficult to follow.

Consequently, the text often reads as more of a discussion than anything else. As author Ilana Kurshan writes in her memoir, *If All the Seas were Ink*, “The Talmud is not a law code intended to tell Jews how to behave, but a record of rabbinic legal conversations in which many of the questions are left open and unresolved. It’s a text



Daf Yomi participants making the Siyum

Thousands of participants filled venues worldwide (ranging from football stadia to indoor arenas), coming together to mark the cycle’s conclusion. The main event in the US took place at New Jersey’s MetLife Stadium, which has 92 000 seats, with a second location at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn. Ten thousand British Jews flocked to London’s Wembley Arena for similar a celebration, and earlier celebrations also took place in December 2019 in Melbourne and Vienna. Even South Africa participated, hosting a show-stopping banquet dinner at The Deck at Wanderers in Illovo, Johannesburg, attended by more than 1 200 people.

As with completion of the Torah on Simchat Torah, the conclusion of the Talmud is never final. Rather, participants return to the beginning again, starting the cycle afresh together with countless first-time participants. While some attend a shiur and learn in a group, others prefer to study alone, reviewing the daily page in their own time. Those who miss a day often do whatever they can to catch up, determined to keep up with the cycle.

Whether one learns alone or with others, the undertaking is vast. The key, writes Kurshan, is to find a way to incorporate a bit of learning into your schedule every day, whatever form that may take. “Some days you may be able to sit down and read the page itself, along with related commentaries and study aides; other days you may have time to listen to a podcast while driving to work or folding the laundry. The point is learning every day, not how you do it.”

The project is more accessible than ever, with texts featuring English translation and commentary available in print, digital, and audio format. So, if you’re looking to join history’s most unconventional book club with a following unlike any other, the Daf Yomi programme can accommodate you at a moment’s notice.

Photo: Jason Crouse

Three men and a page of Talmud a day

>>>Continued from page 10

attended the first shiur, and that put me on a path that I have now stayed on for many years. Later, I started learning by myself at times that suited me.”

Given the scope and depth of the Talmudic discussions, regular study came with certain challenges, says deputy chief executive of Vitality Group, Matisonn.

“There are definitely parts that are more interesting than others, and there are days when your time is really limited,” he says, “but knowing that you are part of a global programme creates a real commitment.

“In the beginning, I would miss days, and I quickly realised that you can’t afford to fall behind, so I would use whatever free time I had to learn, even if it meant doing the *daf* (page) in fits and starts over the day. In the worst case, I would complete it at the end of the day before I went to bed.”

Zagnoev and Raichlin had similar experiences. “A difficult *daf* can take between one and two hours to learn,” says Zagnoev. “The programme offers no respite – a new page needs to be learnt every day. There were often times when I had work deadlines or family commitments which conflicted with the time available to complete the *daf*. Also, there were certain sections that were extremely difficult to understand.”

Says Raichlin, “The main challenge was never to miss a day, and to ensure that if I did fall behind – such as when I was unable to learn during shiva for both my parents – I caught up as soon as possible. I learnt early in the morning and gave up sleep rather than miss time in the office. Sometimes I would learn at night to catch up.”

However, they agree that the benefits certainly outweighed any

difficulties.

“There was a surprise nearly every day with some of the most incredible, mind-bending cases and scenarios a human being can contemplate,” says Raichlin “The rabbis gave us the tools to work out any number of other possible scenarios that we might come up against in every generation.”

Says Zagnoev, “The Gemara contains historical information, ethical teachings, biblical analysis, and Jewish law which is presented in an engaging and challenging format.

“Learning one page of Gemara a day over an extended period has given me the unique opportunity to gain exposure to this magnificent and fascinating work. It’s also an intellectually challenging document which cannot simply be read. It needs to be studied with a high level of intensity.”

The men paid tribute to their families for being extremely supportive and understanding of their commitment. Matisonn says that he pulled out his Talmud at different times, whether on a plane or while travelling, and his family always gave him the necessary space to learn.

Says Raichlin, “My wife was the most understanding when my alarm went off before 05:00 in the morning! She also sat next to me for many hours on aeroplanes, airport terminals, trains, and buses all over the world as I learnt my daily *daf*.”

Raichlin and Zagnoev have renewed their commitment and undertaken the fourteenth cycle, whereas Matisonn will be devoting himself to studying other areas of Torah. However, they unanimously champion the programme, encouraging those who can take it up to do so.

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Why you don't have to go to university to be successful

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Starting a roaming chef business. Becoming a teenage entrepreneur. Doing makeup on film sets. These young adults might not have university degrees, but they're successfully charting their own course.

Doron Gavronsky, the founder of Chef En Route, always knew his destiny lay in the culinary world. "I couldn't get enough of the kitchen," he says. "My mom's an amazing cook as was her late mother. It was passed down through the generations."

Now 27, the King David Linksfield alumnus took a step towards his dreams when he chose consumer studies as a matric subject. While he had the full backing of his family, not everyone supported his ambitions. "The more people told me to stay away from becoming a chef, the more I challenged myself and everyone around me. I wanted to prove to them that I wasn't going to waste my talent."

Diagnosed with dyslexia in high school, Gavronsky needed a scribe to help him complete his exams. In spite of this, he attained university exemption and applied to Vega, but ultimately decided against this path.

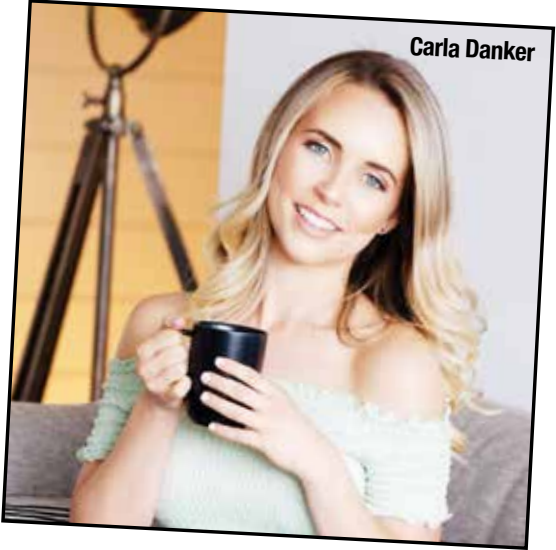
"I didn't feel I needed to go to university. I definitely wasn't the type of person to sit and listen to long lectures. I wanted something more practical."

Needing to work to support himself, Gavronsky applied to the Protea Hotel Group, and was accepted into the orientation trainee

programme at the Fire & Ice Hotel in Melrose Arch. "After 11 months, I knew I wanted to further my chef career so I went to the Chef School for Food & Wine in Krugersdorp." During his studies, he managed the kitchen at a kosher grill house.

Briefly leaving the kitchen, Gavronsky went to Israel, became a qualified fitness instructor, and then worked as a bodyguard back in South Africa, protecting Jewish community leaders.

In 2015, he embraced his first love, and opened Chef En Route, the first in-house private chef hiring service in the Jewish community. "A private chef comes to cook, serve, and entertain your guests," he says. Chef En Route also accompanies clients on their travels, offering a full chef service to clients in South Africa and beyond. Putting clients first and building a bond with them is key to the business' success.



Carla Danker

Gavronsky advises students to do something that makes them happy. "Wake up in the morning wanting to succeed, don't wake up already failing."

Entrepreneur Carla Danker, 26, agrees. "I was 18 with braces when I started Pimp My Pup, the first mobile dog spa in the country," she recalls. A 2019 Absa Jewish Achiever Award nominee, Danker was always passionate about animals. Although she'd earned an academic scholarship to Varsity College after matriculating from Crawford College Sandton, Danker soon realised that her destiny lay elsewhere.

"I went from a BCom to BA within a month, and I just didn't fit the mould. I knew it wasn't for me. I told my parents I had to work with animals and start something South Africa hadn't seen before. Their support allowed me to follow another path." She was also inspired by her entrepreneurial father.

Danker has qualifications in dog grooming and behaviour, welfare farming, and plant-based nutrition, but she's never pursued a university degree. "While my family were extremely supportive, my school pushed all of us to go to university. Alternatives weren't discussed. I feel like I was a laughing stock to some people, but it never affected me. I've never regretted my decision, and I wouldn't go back and study. I've learnt so much, and I've become a much tougher person from running my own business. Having control over everything is a great feeling, I could never work for someone."

After nine years, Danker recently sold Pimp My Pup. "I'd love to start a family and the business needs to grow, so I wanted fresh energy to take over. I've now started Plant Powered Patisserie, a vegan bakery. My deep connection with animals led to me going vegan three years ago. I had to start a business that would spread the vegan word and supply a cruelty-free, healthier, and delicious alternative."

Coming from a creative family, Samantha Schaffer knew she wouldn't follow a conventional path. Unsure of what career to pursue, she stumbled into makeup on a visit to cosmetics company, Kryolan. "There I picked up a pamphlet about a makeup and prosthetics course. That really excited me so I went for it."

Upon completing the year-long course, Schaffer entered the entertainment industry, honing her makeup skills on soapie *7de Laan*. "I met the right people, and ended up doing makeup on the sets of international films for more than seven years." Mingling with the likes of Matt Damon and Drew Barrymore,

Schaffer worked on movies including *Invictus* and *Blended*.

Ultimately, she grew tired of travelling and being away from her husband and family. So she found another calling, baking cakes. With only *Cake Boss* episodes and YouTube tutorials to guide her, she started a home-based bakery. "I made my own website, taught myself about Google adverts and my successful business, The Sweet Escape was born."

Practice and consistency is key to success, she says. "You'll always fail the first few times, but keep at it and eventually you'll get there."



Doron Gavronsky

Caryn Bachrach, an educational psychologist at King David High School Linksfield's counselling department, says that while most students tend to study after school, it doesn't always take the form of a university degree.

Bachrach says there's no stigma attached to students who take a different road. "They're usually supported by their parents and by the time they're finishing matric, they've adjusted to the path they've chosen. We encourage kids to find their own way, supporting and guiding them in achieving their potential and making their own choices."

Gita Lipschitz, a school counsellor and the head of educational support at King David High School Victory Park (KDVP), says that the school's 100% university entrance rate suggests that most matriculants will go onto a higher learning institution, whether it be university or college. "There's a desire as well as an expectation of most students to study something after school," she says.

However, Lipschitz emphasises the entrepreneurial spirit at KDVP. "Some students run businesses while they're still at school. Those who don't study immediately may start or continue to run their own businesses as a route to their professional career."

The desire to go to university is ingrained in kids from an early age, says Ariella Cohen, a registered counsellor offering career assessment. It's generally seen as preferable by parents and kids. Yet there's always another option. "These days, there are many successful people that haven't gone to university. You can do a short course and start your own business before you're 20, potentially becoming successful much earlier than those who pursue degrees."

A wholesome Jewish education

Hirsch Lyons High Schools achieved wonderful results in the 2019 IEB matric exams.

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Hirsch Lyons High Schools wishes the matriculants of 2019 a hearty mazaltov on their fantastic achievement.

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Sunday (26 January)

- Beit Luria Shul and the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre are hosting a lecture ahead of International Holocaust Day. Time: Meet at second floor reception at 09:45. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. Booking essential. Contact: Rabbi Julia Margolis 076 673 0750.

Monday (27 January)

- Chabad Seniors Club hosts enhanced brain functioning and a fun morning with Occupational Therapist, Cynthia Liptz. Time: 09:45. Venue: Chabad Seniors Club. Contact: 011 440 6600 or rak@chabad.org.za

Wednesday (29 January)

- ORT Jet is hosting a Business Induction for small businesses seeking help. Time: 17:30 to 19:30. Venue: ORT SA Academy,

44 Central Street, Corner 10th Avenue, Houghton. No charge. Bookings: admin@ortjet.org.za or call 011 728 7154

- Jewish Learning Institute with Rabbi Ari Kievman Sandton Central Shul. Time: 19:15. Venue: 8 Stella Street Sandton (opposite the Gautrain) Info: 011 440 6600 www.jli.org.za or jli@chabad.org.za

Friday (31 January)

- Friday Night Live at Sandton Central Shul. Time: 18:00. Venue: 8 Stella Street, Sandton (opposite the Gautrain) Info: 079 434 1293 or rak@chabad.org.za

WHAT'S ON

Beyond the bubble: how students fare at university

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Culture shock. That's what many matriculants from Jewish schools experience when they enter the demographically-diverse world of university. Do they embrace the opportunities this offers or simply stick with their "Jew crew"?

"There's very little integration with students from other cultures," says Kayla Ginsberg, a student at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and the national director of the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS). "It's dangerous as it has an impact on how we're perceived."

"I've been working on building coalitions between SAUJS and other student groups, and nobody wants to join up with us," she says. "They say, 'You're so exclusive. You don't get involved in student affairs.' It's a stigma we're working hard to erase." Their efforts have finally been successful, with SAUJS recently teaming up with the Wits Student Representative Council (SRC) for the first time in 40 years.

"It's going to change the dynamics for Jews on campus in coming years," says Ginsberg. "It came about as a result of the repeated personal efforts of Jewish students befriending and talking to different groups. Not many people are willing to do that, but when they do, it has great impact."

In her fifth year at Wits studying towards an LLB degree, Ginsberg, a Hirsch Lyons alumnus, admits that she, too, stuck with her Jewish friends when

she started university. "I don't think we realise we're doing it because we grow up in such a bubble."

Ginsberg says that while those who come from single-sex religious schools like she did experience an even greater culture shock than King David students, everyone is affected in some way.

Having attended King David Linksfield from Grades 1 to 12, Kayla Borowitz is in her third year of BA Law at Wits. She says mixing with other communities has been an enriching experience. Although university was a culture shock because she was accustomed to being around Jewish people, the change was positive. "I experienced the buzzing multiracial and multicultural student life I'd always heard about," she says. Borowitz loves the feeling of really being a part of South African society. She's also improved her connection to the country by studying law.

She understands why Jewish students tend to remain in their homogenous comfort zones, but disagrees with this strategy. "It's limiting to associate only with people similar to you as it won't be possible to do this in the 'real world' or at

work. Integrating with people from different walks of life also broadens your horizons. I feel like I've broken out of the Jewish bubble, and would encourage other Jewish students to do the same. Ironically, mixing with other people strengthens your sense of community. Conversations inevitably arise about your background, so I'm constantly reminded of my Jewishness."

Borowitz also stresses the value of starting afresh at university. "People aren't concerned about what might have mattered at school. Becoming friendly with people from different backgrounds has also given me the perspective that diversity is a beautiful, powerful thing. Though religion and race are often hotspots for conflict, our differences make the world much more interesting."

Suddenly becoming a minority can be difficult for Jewish students. While most say they haven't experienced blatant

anti-Semitism, they all acknowledge the anti-Israel rhetoric they face, especially during Israel Apartheid Week.

"BDS [the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions moment] was born in South Africa and the apartheid argument is an emotional one, so it's successful on South African campuses," says Ginsberg. "Israel Apartheid Week is hell for Jewish Students – often descending into anti-Semitism. But it's better than it was, largely because of SAUJS' hard work. That being said, BDS is a massive issue, anti-Semitism isn't. I wear my Magen David proudly, and I've never been scared to do it on campus."

Grant Norrie, an engineering student at the University of Cape Town (UCT) says he's stuck with his Jewish friends from Herzlia mainly because they're all doing the same degree. The chairperson of SAUJS Western Cape, Norrie argues that this is the exception rather than the rule at UCT. "Jewish people here actually try to move out of the community, and their best friends at UCT generally aren't Jewish."

In some of his classes, Norrie has worked with people of different cultures, and recently partnered with a Muslim group of students. "They knew about Shabbat – one of the few things that came up when we discussed religion," he says. "But our

focus was always on getting the work done, religious issues were a side note. There was no tension."

Yanir Grindler, a former Wits student doing his Masters in clinical psychology at the University of Johannesburg, has struggled to find his place within and without the Jewish community. "After school, I felt suffocated by the community, it was a bit too insular for my liking," he recalls. Upon matriculating from King David Victory Park in 2010, Grindler made aliyah, but returned five years later, enrolling in Wits. Here, he embraced the opportunities for integration.

"I chose to spend more time on campus, getting involved in extramural activities like student politics and connecting with students outside of the Jewish community. I've always tried to push myself outside my comfort zone. I don't think enough young Jews do that, they're generally quite mollycoddled."








"I keep Shabbat, and think of myself as a pretty observant Jew, but I try to balance that with being South African."

Befriending people beyond the Jewish community has given Grindler a more holistic perspective. "As Jews, we live sheltered lives, we don't properly engage with the complexities and challenges of the majority of South Africans. Integrating gave me the opportunity to see the challenges, understand the real hardships, and appreciate what I have."



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OPEN DAY | 29 FEB | 09:00 – 12:00

Music therapist on shortlist for a Grammy

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

From being bullied as a child to healing children through music, Jon Samson’s creative journey is deeply personal. Now nominated for Best Children’s Music Album at the 2020 Grammy Awards for his album, *Ageless: Songs for the Child Archetype*, the South African-born musician and music therapist has come full circle.

Before moving to the United States at the age of 14, Samson grew up in Johannesburg in the 1980s and early 90s. “My childhood had an impact on my career in ways that I never would have imagined,” he says. “One of the things I struggled with as a kid was being overweight and socially awkward. Even though it wasn’t the most comfortable thing at the time, it really taught me the anatomy of self-esteem. When I work with children today, I understand when they come in with issues of empowerment, self-esteem, and worthiness – those sorts of inner struggles many kids face. My experience gave me the insight I needed to help kids later on.”

While there were challenges, Samson is grateful for the grounding he received at King David Sandton. Always musical, Samson was given a chance to develop his talents from the beginning of his primary school career at King David. “There were some really special teachers, especially Efrat Wagner. She spotted me when I was in Grade 1, got me into the choir, and we worked together for a long time, even travelling to the Hallelujah! Music Festival in Israel in the early 90s.” Samson also credits private piano teacher Janet Reeder Bottomley with facilitating his early musical development.

While studying for his undergraduate degree in music composition from SUNY Purchase College in New York, Samson was inspired by the story of one of his professors, Grammy-award-winning composer and conductor Joel Thome, who largely used the healing power of music to regain full mobility after a debilitating stroke.

“I was put on a healing path early, and everything became oriented around the interplay between healing, psychology, and using music,” he says. And so, after graduating from SUNY Purchase, he studied music therapy at New York University.

Now a renowned music therapist in private practice in Brooklyn, Samson has extensive experience in working with special-needs kids, including those on the autism spectrum.

“While I use music to address therapeutic goals and objectives, I also work with quirky middle schoolers and high schoolers,” he says. “They don’t necessarily have a diagnosis, but they just aren’t quite fitting in and are looking for an alternative approach to exploring music. I offer a hybrid between music therapy, music education, and audio recording. A lot of it has to do with improvisation. Kids just need to be in a safe space where authority doesn’t get in the way so that they can feel emotionally free and uninhibited to express themselves authentically.”

Samson decided to make his first kids’ album in 2008. What began as a fun side project soon became much more than that. “Once I got into production, I realised the fullness of my artistry was coming through the songs and recordings. It opened Pandora’s box, and led me down this rabbit hole of creativity, simultaneously expressing what I was learning from the children. I didn’t realise that children’s music was going to become my main source of artistic expression, personally and as a vehicle for teaching beyond the scope of my practice.”

A skilled producer, singer, and musician, Samson also writes music and lyrics, and plays multiple instruments including piano, guitar, and ukulele. Asked if he’s ever been tempted to pursue a career as a “regular

musician”, Samson says his journey has been more about healing and personal growth.

“I realised I was going to be more fulfilled facilitating the creative expression of others. There’s one song on my current album which is largely a post-production of a live improvisation done by a child named Claire Linares. I wrote a chorus for her song, and I’m really excited that the finished product, *Video Game*, is on my album.”

Samson is working on post-producing the music of the kids he teaches, and many often sing on his tracks, with a group even directing the music video for his song, *Focus on ADD*. He also uses session musicians on some tracks, and is proud that fellow South African Wouter Kellerman – a Grammy Award winner himself – played the flute on his album’s opening song, *Predicament*.

Samson said he cried when he heard of his Grammy nomination. “There’s really only one word to describe it and that’s honoured,” he says. “Growing up, there was more than one kid who said to me, ‘You’re going to win a Grammy one day.’ I don’t know about winning, but just being nominated is more than sufficient. There’s a small percentage of human beings that get that honour, and coming from South Africa it puts me in an even smaller pool, which is magical.”

Samson says the nominated album is a subtle reflection on the human condition. “I’m tackling some sensitive issues in a way that’s primarily artistic and exploratory, as opposed to preachy. On top of being a music therapist and teacher, I consider myself an artist. My standards of artistry are quite high, and because of that, it takes me years to write a song.”

None of the songs on the album are supposed to solve the problems they tackle,



Jon Samson

which include anxiety, ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), and seeing beyond your own perspective, he says. Rather, they offer validation for those who face such issues. “They serve as a companion and a mirror as opposed to saying, ‘We’re going to fix everything.’”

“The crux of the album’s message is polarity, which is why I have penguins and polar bears as the main characters. They’re indigenous to the opposite poles of planet earth, and I’m exploring the contrast between our perspective and the importance of finding the middle path.”

For Samson, it all comes down to expressing oneself. “Everyone has their own unique configuration of creativity, of how they think and feel, and how they express that. Based on my 15 years of experience of working in mental health, I can say that when people aren’t actively expressing themselves, either through art or communication, they become depressed. You need to really take charge of your individual expression and authenticity, while making room for others to do the same.”

Bobbas for Babies knits countries together

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When Sarit Keinan came back to South Africa, the country of her birth, as the wife of Israeli Ambassador Lior Keinan, she wanted to do something to bring the two countries closer.

So, she founded Bobbas for Babies, an organisation that donates baby blankets, clothes, and dolls knitted with love by South African and Israeli grandmothers to underprivileged South African newborns.

For Keinan, the project, officially launched in February 2019, is a way to give back to South Africa while promoting the Jewish homeland. At the end of last year, she went to the Kliptown Youth Program in Soweto, to distribute the latest round of knitting done by a bevy of bobbas. Once she had handed out the wares to the moms and babies, she told them how Jewish grannies from South Africa and Israel knitted them and described her own connection to the Holy Land. “Shalom”, was the response from the moms.

Keinan also brought freshly baked cupcakes for the older kids, and expectant mothers received hair-care packages. She distributed more goods outside the Nomzamo Kids Centre in Soweto.

Keinan told the *SA Jewish Report* how the project began. Born in South Africa, Keinan made aliyah with her family to Kibbutz Israel when she was just two years old, which makes her current South African posting a bit like coming full circle. Her mother, an active member of Habonim, was a nurse.



Senathi gets a gift from Sarit Keinan at the Nomzamo Kids Centre

“Mothers and babies were my mother’s expertise on the kibbutz. She worked to guide them through the first few months.” While she now works as a cultural assistant at the embassy, Keinan herself is qualified as an occupational therapist (OT) and has also worked as a breastfeeding assistant. She’s proud to have inherited her mother’s passion for working with children and babies.

Since her nursing days, Keinan’s mother has knitted a pair of booties for every new baby born on the kibbutz. “It’s become a tradition of almost 60 years,” says Keinan. “Now she knits for the grandchildren and the great

grandchildren of her friends from Habo. My mother [now in her 80s] came to visit me two years ago for Chanukah and being an OT, I tried to think of ways to keep her busy and content while I was at work.” Knitting was the obvious answer. Keinan suggested that her mother knit a baby blanket, saying she’d find a needy recipient.

“When I went to buy the wool and I saw her knitting, it hit me that this is what I could do. I could provide the wool, and distribute it to Jewish grandmothers around South Africa. Then I’d donate the finished products to the underprivileged.”

Keinan told her South African family and their friends of her plans, and word soon spread among the residents of Golden Acres and Sandringham Gardens. As Keinan got to know the members of Pretoria’s Jewish community, Jaffa came on board too.

“I started handing wool to whoever was willing to knit for me,” says Keinan. Word also soon spread to Kibbutz Israel, where Keinan’s mother kept knitting, and told her friends about the project. Naturally, they wanted to knit too. “I started sending wool to Israel, and when we visit, I bring more wool, and we bring back the knitted products.”

The initial idea was to stick to baby or breastfeeding blankets that would function as attachment objects, easing the transition from baby to toddler. “We wanted to add an emotional element, the idea was always to keep it personal,” says Keinan. Further personalising the process, Keinan ensures that each recipient knows who knitted their gifts, and that the bobbas know who received them. The project has now expanded beyond blankets. “Some devoted knitters are almost blind, so they knit what they know,” says Keinan. “I started getting hats, jerseys, scarves, and dolls too. There’s always a need for whatever they can make.”

Keinan has worked to keep distribution structured, going to orphanages supported by the embassy, and selecting organisations within a growing base of townships. Because of the embassy’s limited budget, “Bobbas for Babies” is funded by the Keinans themselves. “We wanted to create a project that combines the South African Jewish community, Israel’s people, and underprivileged South Africans,” she says.

To date, there are 44 devoted knitters who have knitted over 250 items. Ultimately Keinan plans to expand her network of knitters and distribute their creations throughout the country. In broadening the net, she’s travelled to Modimolle in Limpopo, where she met the mayor and gave blankets to premature babies at the local hospital.

“I call on every member of the Jewish community to join hands with me,” she says. “There’s often a question of who’s benefiting more, those who give or those who receive, but this is a win-win situation.

“There’s nothing like a sense of doing good. The Israeli embassy is here to do good. I’m proud to be a part of it. Projects that help others are a long-running passion of mine.”

Keinan is working to make the project sustainable. “It’s a very small drop in the ocean, but if my vision is realised, Bobbas for Babies will continue long after I leave South Africa,” she says.

• If you’d like to get involved with knitting or donating wool, please email culture@pretoria.mfa.gov.il



A CELEBRATION OF SHEBA'S BRIGHTEST STARS

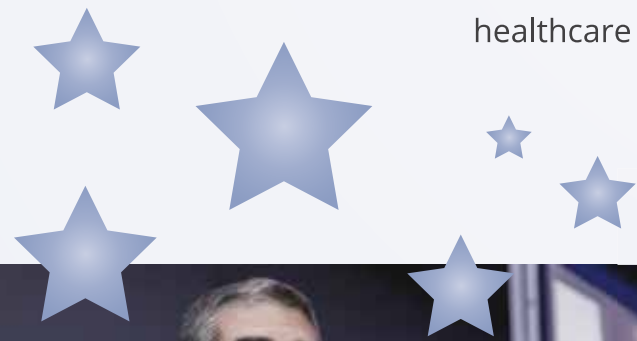


The African Friends of Sheba Medical Center Gala was a meaningful night to remember as the organization announced its expansion across the continent and revealed its new name. Over 200 guests gathered in support of Sheba's soaring medical innovation and humanitarianism.

The prestigious Mordechai Shani Star of the Year Award was presented to **Ivan Saltzman**, **Gabe Simaan** and **Lynne Du Toit**, members of the African Friends of Sheba Medical Center Board, in recognition of their altruistic philanthropy.

Professor Yitshak Kreiss, Director General of Sheba Medical Center, delivered uplifting keynote remarks by sharing Sheba's global impact as a hospital without borders, leading the worldwide digital healthcare revolution with game-changing medical technologies.

“I would like to congratulate you on a superb evening. The food, the decor, and the logistics were perfect, and Prof Kreiss was an excellent speaker. I am sure that an evening like this will open doors to a multitude of collaborations and bring new members to Sheba.”



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Naomi Hadar, Executive Director

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Performing doctor specialises in art of the voice

PETER FELDMAN

There are few doctors who understand the rigors of singing and how to save and protect the voice quite like Johannesburg ear, nose, and throat specialist Dr Lance Maron.

Maron is a unique medical practitioner in that he is an expert in voice disorders and care of the professional voice, and a professional performer with a beautiful voice in his own right.

In fact, he can be seen in the musical, *Loving You*, which opens at the Auto & General Theatre on the Square on 28 January.

Maron’s patients comprise some of South Africa’s best known celebrities, actors, and singers.

Apart from treating all medical conditions relating to the ear, nose, and throat in children and adults, Maron has become a sub-specialist in the field of laryngology, which means that he has become an expert in voice disorders and care of the professional voice.

When a singer cannot sing because their voice is ailing, they call on Maron to do his special magic. He has saved the careers of many illustrious names. In his office, he has a big collection of photographs, souvenir programmes, and CDs, all signed by the artists and given to the good doctor as a token of appreciation.

He grew up loving the arts, and performed in numerous productions on stage, television, and in film. He made his debut in *Mini Scandals* at the age of five.

He then performed in the musical *Oliver*, the BBC-produced movie *A Private Life* with the late Bill Flynn and Jana Cilliers, and the South African TV series *Oh George, A Slice of Saturday Night* for Pieter Toerien. At the age of 12, he was in famous theatrical couple Joan Brickhill and Louis Burke’s production of *Mame*.

Eventually, Maron had to decide whether to go the arts route or to help others medically. He chose the latter, happily mixing art and science – and enjoying both.

Maron is an integral member of the Naledi Theatre Awards judging panel, and concentrates his energy on musical theatre.

An important aspect of his work is keeping abreast with developments in his field. He has spent time with voice surgeons working overseas including the Harvard surgeon of pop sensation, Adele.

He recalls an “incredible” learning curve while being on standby during the 2007 run of the South African production of *The Lion King*. “It was very demanding on the singers’ voices as well as physically because of the heavy costumes they wore and the puppetry they had to execute. This posed so many challenges.”

Maron contributed to the book by actress and singer Christine Weir – of Not the Midnight Mass A cappella group fame – *Shut Your Trap and Sing*. He wrote the foreword, explaining the coping mechanisms used by singers and actors, and the skills required to avoid getting into vocal trouble.

His services have been called upon countless times during the run of a show when a singer is having vocal difficulties. Over the years, he has worked on productions such as *King Kong*, *The Color Purple*, *The Sound of Music* and *Dream Girls*. He gets immense pleasure from applying his great medical knowledge in these instances.

In his surgery, he has an impressive array of equipment used to detect vocal pathology, ranging from trauma to infections and other benign or malignant conditions that can occur in the larynx. One expensive “toy” is the High-Definition Digital Stroboscopy System, a machine that makes a slow-motion video recording of the vocal folds to observe how they vibrate. This enables the physician to detect any pathological problems that may have arisen, allowing him to be in a better position to decide the most effective course of

treatment.

However, diagnosis and treatment are only part of the journey to returning a performer back to full vocal health. The medication or surgical procedures he sometimes has to perform only gets them back on stage, but it’s the ability to recognise the vocal strain and problematic techniques that caused the problem in the first place that really makes the difference. By identifying and fixing these issues, the doctor can help to keep the artist on stage.

He describes today’s professional singers as “athletes” who have to prepare adequately to engage in the “vocal Olympics”. They have to train to the limit, and then rest to recover so that they can push themselves to even greater heights. They have to search constantly for better techniques or methods, and surround themselves with a team of professionals to help them achieve their goals – or gold.

“The act of singing is an exact science,” Maron wrote in the foreword to Weir’s book. “There

is a specific physiological process that takes place when the intricate system of muscles, tendons and soft tissue of the larynx begin to



interact with the flow of air from the lungs. This powers up the vocal cords, producing the source of sound that then filters through the mouth and sinuses adding resonance, timbre, and individuality or uniqueness to the voice.”

At 50, Maron is making an invaluable contribution to art and science, but feels he still has a way to go. His wife, Lauren, also has a degree in medicine as well as law, and they have three sons, 17-year-old twins, Elijah and Samuel, and 13-year-old Levi. The youngest is following in dad’s musical footsteps, having already performed in a number of professional productions including *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *Evita* at the Teatro Montecasino. Levi has just returned from China, having spent more than a year in the role of Eric in the international touring production of *Matilda*.

“As an artist, I wish I had known then what I know now, because this whole medical field and the understanding of the science of voice has progressed beyond recognition, and there is nothing that combines science and art to the extent that caring for the professional singer does.”

Biblical celebration in old Berea Shul

The Ethiopian church on Tudhope Avenue in Berea, located on the premises of the former Berea Shul in Johannesburg, last weekend celebrated the Ethiopian Timket (baptism) festival which honours the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan.

The shul, which opened its doors in 1968, has long since stopped operating as a synagogue. However, the structure of the shul is still visible in the church.

Photographer Ilan Ossendryver captured the ceremony in which a model of the Ark of the Covenant is wrapped in rich cloth, and traditionally carried in a procession on the head of the priest. Timket traces its roots back to biblical times. In the early days of Judaism, a sacred box overlaid with gold was kept in the most holy place in the Jewish temple. Known as the Ark of the Covenant, it represented the coming messiah.



Praying with the Ahron Hakodesh in the background



Celebrating Timket outside the old Berea Shul (now an Ethiopian Church)



Hitler’s typewriter released from SA bank vault

>> continued from page 1

idea, and I facilitated an introductory meeting between him and Nates, and they ran with the project.”

After months of discussion and reams of paperwork, the transfer was made, and the typewriter joined other Holocaust-related artefacts at the centre last week. Nates says she will endeavour to research the history of the typewriter further in months to come, investigating the relationship between Hitler and Matzner with the help of colleagues here and overseas.

However, Nates, Bayliss, and Brower agree that the significance of the typewriter lies in its historic relevance and positive educational potential rather than any shock value.

“There is a context which surrounds the typewriter,” says Nates. “When we share history, we don’t want to put the perpetrators on a pedestal. We don’t want to talk only about Hitler. Yes, this was Hitler’s typewriter, and he was central to the Holocaust.”

Nates wants the typewriter to be connected to ideology, to writing, to fake news. “It can be put into a propaganda discussion and used for so much more. We are an educational institute, and it’s important for us to use this as an educational tool rather than to shock people,” she says.

She believes dozens of similar artefacts are still waiting to come to light, all of which need to be housed in the appropriate setting and context.

“Stories are coming out all the time and being brought to the attention of museums, us included,” she says. “It’s essential to authenticate it, but we’re not always the right place for it, and it’s important to find where it belongs. Because of the South African connection to the typewriter, we are the right place this time.”

Bayliss says the typewriter’s journey illustrates the need for museums to find the right place for an artefact, even if it means giving up certain items.

“The challenge for us as historians is to preserve things,” he says. “If we don’t take it upon ourselves, it will all be lost. Eventually, the opportunity occurs for you to pass on something of which you have been a custodian, and you can ensure that it goes to where it really needs to be.”

Letters

HYPOCRISY OF SA TOURISM SICKENING

The sheer hypocrisy, brazenness, and chutzpah of the South African tourism ministry boggles the mind – “SA tourism ministry slams Israeli travel advisory” (17 January 2020). Are tourists (Israeli or otherwise) supposed to entirely ignore the local crimes statistics – about 20 murders a day and about 50 rapes a day (apart from the fact that hundreds of rapes are never reported), street robberies, car hijackings, home invasions, and so on. This, after the virtual complete withdrawal of the South African ambassador to Israel – by President Cyril Ramaphosa nogal – leaving the embassy there a seemingly miserable

nonentity. Did Ramaphosa even give the former ambassador the opportunity to express publicly his honest impression of his tenure in Israel? No chance of that, in case he had truly positive opinions, which he was probably forbidden to express. So much for multiculturalism! Please note that the ministry still went ahead with an entire list of “do’s” and “don’ts” to potential tourists. So, to the spokesperson of our tourism ministry and its protest about the travel advisory from Israel, it sickens me to the core. – Jack Miller, Johannesburg

ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS HAVE JUST AS MUCH RIGHT TO INDIVIDUAL RECOGNITION

Those schools which didn’t publish the number of distinctions lost an opportunity to recognise and congratulate students who achieved exceptional matric results. Students who are gifted academically have just as much right to be recognised as those who are gifted on the sporting field or in any other way. So what next? Are we going to stop recognising students who achieve on the sporting field? Are we going to stop recognising other forms of achievement? Sure, being strong academically doesn’t make someone a better person – we are all unique and special in our own way. However this doesn’t mean that those who have achieved academically shouldn’t be recognised for their achievements. And it doesn’t mean that these students are boasting. And, if such recognition makes a student who hasn’t performed as well feel bad, then the solution isn’t to stop the recognition, and the solution isn’t to tell the student who has underperformed academically that they deserve equal recognition as they have put in just as much effort. Rather, teach such students that they should be happy for those who have achieved good results, and that it doesn’t mean that they are inferior. Further, explain to such students that they shouldn’t compare themselves to anyone else, that they are special in their own way, and that they should focus on their own strengths and go out and be the best person they can be regardless of whether someone else has done better academically, or better on the sporting field.

Further, it was stated that some schools wanted to recognise the team rather than the individuals. This is a false dichotomy as it doesn’t have to be one or the other. We can recognise the success of the team giving credit to every individual’s contribution towards the team, and at the same time, we can acknowledge the standout performers within the team. Sure, if any student doesn’t want their picture or results in the newspaper, then they should be allowed to request that they be excluded, and we should honour that request. And yes, every student who completes matric is an achiever, and most would have excelled in some form or another during their schooling career. That should most certainly be recognised. However, the publishing of academic results isn’t the time and place for that. – Tony Kamionsky, Johannesburg

ARTICLES ON 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION EXCITING AND RELEVANT

I wish to commend you, the various schools, and teachers highlighted in the 17 January edition of the SA Jewish Report for your guidance in bringing the education of pupils into the 21st century. It’s relevant and exciting to be given an in-depth review of the latest teaching methods. I’m aware that recognition of the pupil as an individual is most important and relevant in 2020 and beyond. – Sheila Meyerowitz, Johannesburg

SAJR’S RETRACTION OF FRONT-PAGE REPORT DISINGENUOUS

South African Jews for a Free Palestine (SAJFP) was pleased to see the SA Jewish Report’s retraction of its front-page report which falsely claimed that the UN (United Nations) found BDS (the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement) to be “fundamentally anti-Semitic”. But after running this report so prominently, the retraction seemed disingenuous, and failed to address some of the bigger issues at play. For example, the SA Jewish Report did not reckon with the damage its report did to BDS supporters within our Jewish community. Nor did the publication mention the support that BDS receives from tens of thousands of committed Jews across the world. The SA Jewish Report also failed to outline the moral and legal complexities of this issue as noted in the UN report, and the special rapporteur’s acknowledgement that well-grounded concerns have been raised with the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of anti-Semitism. In general, SAJFP is concerned about the reporting bias of the SA Jewish Report, and the publication’s attempts to stoke misplaced fear. In doing so, the SA Jewish Report runs the danger of distracting our Jewish community from real instances of anti-Semitism, of which, as the UN’s special rapporteur notes, there are many. Where, for example, is

the reporting on the blatant anti-Semitism that Boris Johnson has espoused? Where is the reporting on Donald Trump’s recent suggestion that Jews will vote for him to protect their wealth? SAJFP has absolutely no tolerance for anti-Semitism. In fact, when the SA Jewish Report ran Rabbi Yossy Goldman’s article on 12 September titled “Anti-Semitism has its benefits”, we wrote a letter registering our serious concern about the piece. As active members of the South African Jewish community, we expect the SA Jewish Report to alert us to real anti-Semitism in the spaces we occupy. As 2020 opens, we hope that the SA Jewish Report will commit to accurate, fair, and unbiased reporting, representing the views and concerns of our diverse Jewish community. – Allan Kolski Horwitz on behalf of SAJFP

In our correction, to which we gave prominence on page one, we clearly stated what wasn’t 100% correct. However, we stand by the essence and substance of the story. Any organisation that focuses on the downfall of Israel is essentially anti-Semitic, and anyone that believes in such an organisation supports anti-Semitism. We also acknowledge that SAJFP is a tiny group of people with virtually no support from the community. – Editor



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THEATRE ON THE SQUARE

Deutschland über Chai

I was driving home from a wedding on Sunday night when the strangest song started playing in the car. It was in German, and it turned out that my son had connected his music to the sound system. As I am constantly in search of material for my show, I listened closely, and deemed that it would be a great choice for the 07:00 slot.

I hadn’t anticipated the outraged response that I would receive from listeners. Some hated the song (pretty much a normal day in my life), but others were “disgusted” that I would play a German-language song on ChaiFM, a Jewish community radio station. Others said that it was particularly offensive because this week marks the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz – as though this somehow made my behaviour worse.

“German songs on ChaiFM aren’t an option. With Holocaust commemoration this week, your choice is even more offensive.”

“It sounds like a youth event in the 1940s in the Sudetenland. Please, Howard!”

For clarity, the song I played is modern. It wasn’t around (nor was the artist) in the 1930s or 1940s. It has nothing to do with anything that could have been deemed offensive. It was only the language itself that seemed to trigger listeners.

In order to explore this further, I opened the conversation up to listeners. Many compared it to, for example, driving German cars, and others asked if I would play Wagner (nothing wrong with a bit of melodrama before breakfast).

The answer is that I would not play Wagner, given that he is so closely associated not just with the Holocaust, but with Hitler as well. The song I played could hardly be compared to that. Further, although Wagner is not banned in Israel, it’s accepted practice that it’s not to be

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



played publicly.

I wondered if it was comparable to the sound of Afrikaans to black South Africans, but considering that the language is spoken by people of all races in South Africa, I couldn’t make the comparison.

I also realised that to me, German is the language of my mothers. My grandparents fled Germany just prior to the war, and although my grandfather forbade German to be spoken in his home, this mattered not one bit to my grandmother, who used it as her primary language of communication with her children. I therefore grew up listening to the sound of German spoken between my mother and grandmother as the background sound of my childhood. It consequently makes it difficult for me to have a negative association with the language. I don’t find it jarring. And I definitely don’t find it offensive. Many, however, very clearly did.

I played the song because I liked it. I understand why, in retrospect, it might not have been a perfect match for the radio station. But I do wonder if we should still be offended by the language that was spoken by those who perpetrated the Holocaust.

I wonder further if there is still value in not buying German cars, and if we shouldn’t rather focus more on education and in protecting a history that is under attack. Perhaps it’s time to link the horrific rise in anti-Semitism to the events of the past. And I do wonder if being offended by a German-language song contributes in any way.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Destruction and defiance

“Mir zaynen do!” (We are here!) The defiant concluding words of the Partisan Song constitute a ringing declaration by the Jewish people that in spite of the unspeakable crimes of those seeking their destruction, *am Yisrael chai* (the nation of Israel still lives).

They remind us that when remembering those whose lives were so cruelly and unjustly extinguished, we are also testifying that for all the harm they were able to inflict on us, our enemies failed to eradicate the Jewish people altogether. This is why the Partisan Song has become one of the chief anthems of Holocaust survivors and is today sung at Yom Hashoah ceremonies the world over. For the same reason, the title March of the Living was chosen for the programme which brings people to Poland on commemorative and educational visits to Holocaust-related sites.

When the United Nations General Assembly voted to introduce International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the date 27 January was chosen since it was on that day that the Red Army liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most infamous of the Nazi death camps. This year’s event is especially significant because it marks the 75th anniversary of the camp’s liberation. Our national president, Mary Kluk, and Gauteng Chairman Mark Poznaniak will attend the commemoration in Poland as part of the World Jewish Congress delegation.

As in previous years, for International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the World Jewish Congress is running a global #WeRemember campaign, in which people are asked to take a photograph of themselves holding a “We Remember” sign and either post it with #WeRemember or send it to

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



weremember@wjcd.org. I encourage everyone to join in this meaningful demonstration of Jewish solidarity and commemoration.

It’s not only in terms of our physical survival that the words *am Yisrael chai* resonate so powerfully. In a very different context, they were uppermost in my mind when last week, I joined about 1 200 fellow community members in celebrating the Daf Yomi Siyum Hashas. This was the 13th such celebration to be held since the institution of the Daf Yomi programme in 1923. From modest beginnings, the programme, in which Jews around the world together learn the entire Talmud at the rate of one page per day, has grown to become a worldwide phenomenon, both a potent vehicle for and a striking reflection of the extraordinary revival of Torah learning that we are seeing everywhere, not least in our own country.

All this is being accomplished in spite of the wholesale destruction of the yeshivot and other great centres of Jewish learning for which Eastern Europe was particularly renowned, initially at the hands of the Nazis and afterwards under Communism. It shows that those who wish us harm have not only failed to prevent the physical survival of the Jewish people, they have been unable to break the Jewish spirit. There is perhaps no more dramatic a demonstration of how the Nazis and everyone else who has sought our destruction have failed than this.

SA, where we are free to do the time warp again

In spite of many areas that have declined in South Africa since the end of apartheid, a shining achievement is the fact that we have freedom of speech comparable with the best in the Western world. It’s enforced by our Constitution.

We can say almost anything, ridicule any political or cultural figure we like, and promote any cause, as long as it isn’t defamatory or hate speech.

At the moment, a season of Richard O’Brien’s Rocky Horror Show is on stage in Johannesburg, a fairytale extravaganza of wildness and naughtiness, which raises no eyebrows at all. In the 1970s it was banned, but today, for most people, it’s simply another show.

This production is an indication of how things have changed in this country in the decades since the show’s international debut in 1973, right in the middle of the apartheid era. The film version made in 1975 was released in South Africa a year later. At the time, under the government’s censorship board, it was restricted to audiences over the age of 21, and achieved viewership of about 250 000. But soon after its local release, it was banned entirely, along with other shows the censorship board considered too decadent or dangerous.

The tragic irony of the censorship of the show in the 1970s is that at the same time, the government was sending young white boys in the South African Army into the most horrendous violence in the Angolan Bush War from 1966. Yet, they then had to come back home to South Africa and be regarded as too young to watch the Rocky Horror Show.

In other words, violence and killing was fine, but sex wasn’t, according to the vice-like restrictions of conservative society.

Politically during apartheid, people like satirist Peter Dirk Uys pushed the boundaries of censorship by ridiculing political figures, but today, they can easily say what they like.

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



Cartoonist Zapiro is another example. His cartoons regularly lampoon all political and other public figures from the left to the right, but they are accepted as untouchable.

Even a notorious cartoon in 2008 depicting then future President Jacob Zuma unbuttoning his trousers, about to rape Lady Justice, assisted by his political allies, didn’t lead to prosecution. A formal complaint against the cartoon was lodged with the Human Rights Commission, and Zuma sued Zapiro for R4 million for alleged damage to his reputation, and R1 million for injury to his dignity. In 2012, Zuma withdrew the lawsuit. Thus, the cartoon caused a public furore, but one that went away.

In the 1970s when the Rocky Horror Show was banned, its main message was the phrase, “Don’t dream it, be it” which referred to sexuality in all its various forms and tolerance towards people’s sexual identity. The show rapidly took on cult status throughout the Western world.

The production’s interest for South African audiences was apparent by the packed-to-the-rafters auditorium at Montecasino. Also apparent was the exuberance of audience members, screaming with delight almost throughout, which is uncharacteristic of the normally sedate South African audiences. Go to almost any show in this country, and the audience might laugh or be thoughtful, but usually little more than that.

South Africans tend to see their country in an extremely negative light. Often with good reason, given the mess that’s been made of it. But some things we can be proud of. One of them is that we’re free to “Do the time warp again”, the dance of the Rocky Horror Show, which brings many freedoms.

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Back to school 2020



Zoe Katz, Ella Wagenheim and Emily Jocum at Herzlia School



Morah Joan Lurie with Cole Tanner, Dean Reubenson and Judd Angel at Minnie Bersohn Nursery School



King David Primary School Victory Park pupil Lila Hoff with her parents Jason and Thalía



Orli and Lev Bushkin and Jesse Sloat started Grade R at King David Pre-Primary School Linksfield



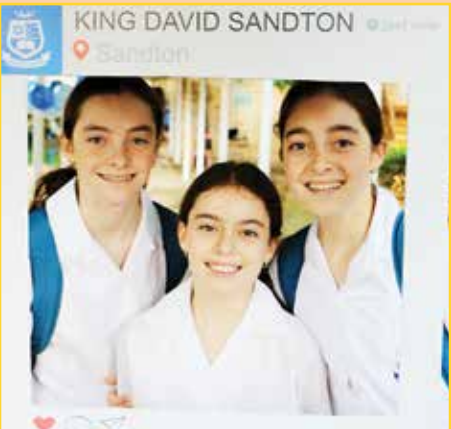
King David Pre-Primary School Victory Park pupils Aviyah Theunissen and Noa Milner



King David Rosabelle Klein pupils Layla Dodo, Olivia Uria and Mila Price



Nina Meyerowitz and Georgia Rittoff at Sydenham Pre-Primary School



Twins Leora and Sara Joffe (Grade 7) with their sister Shayna (Grade 5) at King David Primary School Sandton



Matrics last ever first day at Crawford College Sandton



King David High School Victory Park's SRC students. Alexa Bortz, Erin Midzuk, Lauren Gruz, Jonah Kollenberg and Dan Rom



Matrics celebrate their last ever first day of school with a cake at King David High School Linksfield



Grade 1 students at King David Junior Primary Linksfield: Danni Cohen, Ariella Alhadeff, Jayde Goldberg, Alyssa Rachbuch and Gabriella Marcus



Emily Lyons (Grade 2) and Sienna Benatar (Grade 5) at King David Ariel



Gita Liberow and Elisheva Zwick and their teacher Gila Ash at Torah Academy Primary School.



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LUKE ALFRED

“Roy demonstrated his capabilities

"This is another landmark moment for Israeli sport," he said. "Hundreds of millions of motor racing enthusiasts across the world will get to see a different side of our country, what I call 'normal' Israel. Roy will do a fine job of representing Israel with dignity and pride. I can't wait for the moment when we see the blue and white flag on a Formula One car."

He complained that the car “had too much grip” as it went round the Hungaroring track outside of Budapest. A comically undistinguished few days were rounded off when Chanoch’s car spun off the track towards the end of a

his opportunity. The calendar is 22 races long this year, the longest ever in Formula One history. It starts with the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne in mid-March, and progresses to Bahrain, Vietnam, and China, before ending up via the European summer season in Abu Dhabi in late November.


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