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BDS attack on Unterhalter 'defamatory and shameful', says SAJBD

NICOLA MILTZ

The South African Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Coalition this week tried everything in its power to stop esteemed Gauteng Judge David Unterhalter from being interviewed by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) for a position on the Constitutional Court.

In spite of its venomous attack on the judge for his association with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), his interview went ahead.

After it was brought to the JSC's attention by BDS, Unterhalter was grilled about his involvement with the SAJBD. Unterhalter briefly assisted the board with the upliftment and welfare of the Jewish and broader community during the direst phase of the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

The BDS coalition earlier this week vehemently opposed Unterhalter's candidacy. In a letter of complaint to the JSC, the loosely formed coalition accused the SAJBD of being "akin to the Broederbond", serving as a "conservative organisation that supports and minimises the actions of the Israeli apartheid state".

It said Unterhalter couldn't "honestly proclaim to be a supporter of human rights for South Africans" and be a member of the board.

Unterhalter is one of eight candidates being interviewed by the JSC for two vacancies on the Constitutional Court bench. It was announced on Wednesday that he did not make the shortlist for appointment.

During his interview on Tuesday night, Unterhalter said he was asked to serve on the board last year during the pandemic. "You should understand, the SAJBD is concerned with the welfare of the Jewish community, with old-age homes, and burial societies," he said. "It's also concerned with people who have fallen on hard times generally, but particularly now in the pandemic, and assisting other communities where there is need and hardship."

He explained that the board's other concern was

antisemitism, and preventing it.

"It's not a body that promotes Zionism. It's a body that has existed for well in excess of 100 years, and its precursor organisations many decades before that. I went onto it because it seemed to me to be about assisting – to the extent that I could – with welfare issues for communities in sometimes very dire need. And I don't therefore think it's concerned with promoting Zionism. There are other organisations that do so, but I have no affiliation or connection to them."

He said that from time to time, the SAJBD engaged in litigation against hate speech concerning antisemitism and on occasion, matters had gone to the Constitutional Court. "It did seem to me that in those circumstances, if I was going to offer myself as a candidate for judicial office in the Constitutional Court it would be appropriate to step away from that organisation because it does have this role, and whatever I might have been able to do by assisting welfare in a time of great need must perhaps yield to the perception that one shouldn't be connected to a body that is engaged in litigation."

It was for this reason that Unterhalter stepped down from the SAJBD.

"I don't think my connection in accepting a position on the SAJBD is one that impacts and is connected to Israel and the Palestinian and Israeli conflict, which is an entirely separate matter," he said.

He stressed that the Jewish community was made up of people with "radically different views" about Israel and the Israeli/Palestinian debate.

"Because members of the Jewish community are so varied in their views across the board on this point, I would have been very uncomfortable to be in an organisation that took a particular position on that



Judge David Unterhalter at his JSC interview

attempt by BDS to "sow division and hatred in our society".

SAJBD national director Wendy Kahn, said: "When calls are made for Jews who serve on the Jewish community's democratically elected representative body to be excluded from public service, it amounts to gross antisemitism."

"There is a long and dishonourable history of Jews being targeted for boycotts and other discriminatory treatment on the basis of their religious and/or ideological beliefs," the board said. "The demand by the SA BDS coalition that anyone associated with the SAJBD be denied the right to serve on public bodies like the Constitutional Court is just the latest chapter in this shameful saga."

It said that throughout its existence, the BDS movement had "persistently incited hatred" and "even harm" against the mainstream Jewish community and its leadership.

Milton Shain, a local antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, said, "Identifying as harmful to career prospects involvement in a legitimate Jewish organisation which serves a specific minority that enjoys full constitutional rights reeks of antisemitism."

He said it was "preposterous" to penalise someone for generously assisting a legitimate civic organisation in a democratic country.

"The SAJBD has a proud record of dealing with issues pertaining to Jews and safeguarding the interests of this tiny community, which has never numbered more than 120 000 and numbers today a mere 50 000. It seems to me that those criticising Judge David Unterhalter are confusing the board of deputies with the South African Zionist Federation,

issue," he said. He stressed that he saw taking on this SAJBD role as "being able to do something for welfare".

Asked about his views on a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, he replied, "A two-state solution, although it's now unfortunately one that seems to enjoy much less currency than it did in decades gone by, remains the only solution I think feasible, but JUST in what is a hugely complicated and difficult conflict."

The SAJBD on 14 April lambasted BDS for attempting to have Unterhalter rejected from applying for this position, describing the organisation's efforts as "yet another shocking display of bigotry and intolerance". The board said it was an

Continued on page 2>>

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Schoub allays fears about vaccine red flags

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been a week of high drama on the global COVID-19 vaccine stage as niggling concerns about both the Pfizer BioNTech and Johnson & Johnson vaccines have raised red flags for different reasons.

This week, Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize halted the Johnson & Johnson vaccine rollout after the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) made a similar decision. The FDA reported that six women had developed blood clots soon after getting the vaccine. More than six million Americans have so far received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

This is the second time South Africa has paused the rollout of a vaccine, causing concern among the community.

Pressing this pause button caused “quite a bit of confusion and even anxiety in the general public”, said Professor Barry

Schoub, emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

He explained that built into the regulatory requirements for the licensing of the rollout of a vaccine programme like this is a vigilant lookout for any signals potentially relating to safety.

The report from the US, which like South Africa is extensively rolling out the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, “constitutes one of these safety signals”, he said. “Even if the incidence of one in a million is extremely rare, nevertheless it does need to be investigated as part of the protocol in order to make absolutely sure that the vaccines do meet all safety standards.”

Schoub said it wasn't a suspension of the rollout, but “merely a temporary pause for a few days at most”. During this time, investigations will be carried out to see if these reports carry any meaningful signal about safety. It was a routine response to a reported safety signal, as rare as it is.

Meanwhile, red flags were also raised when the results of an Israeli study found that the South African coronavirus variant was more adept at “breaking through” the Pfizer vaccine. Israeli scientists said more research was needed.

Israel predominantly used the Pfizer vaccine to vaccinate millions of citizens.

Schoub said the scientists had made interesting observations, but as the authors stated, they were preliminary, and they couldn't draw any real conclusions from this study.

He explained that there were several important limitations to the observations. The sample size was small – “too small to derive any significant statistical meaningfulness”.

The “breakthroughs” occurred from two weeks after the second dose. “We know that the efficacy of the vaccine matures and starts being fully effective only from

four weeks onwards,” Schoub said.

There was no mention of the clinical manifestations of the breakthroughs, he said.

“Were they symptomless, or only mild symptoms? The latter is important as it's known that the Pfizer vaccine is a potent stimulator of the immune system and elicits very high levels of neutralising antibodies, so that even if there is a reduction of activity against the variant, adequate levels of neutralising antibodies still remain to prevent at least severe disease, even if mild disease isn't prevented.”

He said if it didn't regularly prevent mild illness, “this can be tolerated”, as we do

anyway in the case of common colds and flus.

He assured that the scientific data did suggest that the Pfizer vaccine would be very effective in preventing at least severe disease and hospitalisation against the South African variant from four weeks after the second dose of the vaccine.

“Nevertheless, until the pandemic is brought under control, it's mandatory that all infection-prevention precautions – the non-pharmaceutical interventions – are maintained,” he said.

Schoub said that he was sure that interesting data would be

forthcoming from Israel, which is in a pivotal position to carry out these studies following its highly successful mass rollout supported by an excellent data monitoring resource.

Mkhize announced on 14 April that a batch of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine will arrive in South Africa in May.



Professor Barry Schoub

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
17:32	18:21	Johannesburg
18:04	18:55	Cape Town
17:18	18:07	Durban
17:37	18:27	Bloemfontein
17:35	18:26	Port Elizabeth
17:27	18:17	East London

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Torah Thought

Slave to the Omer – why counting makes us free

We are in the midst of counting the Omer – a commandment to count the days and weeks from the second day of Pesach until Shavuot.

Interestingly, the very first commandment we perform, marking our transition from slavery to freedom, is to count time, to count days.

Why is this? Rabbi JB Soloveitchik, in his essay, “Sacred and Profane”, offers a profound insight, as follows:

“The basic criterion which distinguishes free man from slave is the kind of relationship each has with time and its experience. Bondage is identical with passive intuition and reception of an empty, formal time stream.

“When the Jews were delivered from the Egyptian oppression and Moses rose to undertake the almost impossible task of metamorphosing a tribe of slaves into a nation of priests, he was told by G-d that the path leading from the holiday of Pesach to Shavuot, from initial liberation

to consummate freedom, leads through the medium of time. The commandment of *sefirah* was entrusted to the Jew; the wondrous test of counting 49 successive days was put to him. These 49 days must be whole. If one day is missed, the act of numeration is invalidated.

“A slave who is capable of appreciating each day, of grasping its meaning and worth, of weaving every thread of time into a glorious fabric, quantitatively stretching over the period of seven weeks but qualitatively forming the warp and woof of centuries of change, is eligible for Torah. He has achieved freedom.”

A slave owns no time of her/his own. Every second of life is owned by a master, and therefore a slave can have no concept of responsibility because they have no ultimate choice of action. A slave may “choose” to go for a walk at 17:00 on Friday only to have that choice countermanded by the master at 16:59.

regarded as a jurist of the highest calibre.”

“Before he was elevated to the bench, he appeared before the Constitutional Court in a range of landmark cases that have vindicated fundamental human rights for all who reside in our country. He would be an outstanding candidate for a position on our apex court. The attack launched by BDS demonstrates its venomous attitude towards South African Jewry and Israel,” he said.

A well-known Cape Town advocate who asked not to be named for professional reasons described the BDS complaint as “toxic”.

“It's appalling, blatant antisemitism, and many of my colleagues who aren't Jewish agree with me,” he said.

Unterhalter, a former winner of the Professional Excellence Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, was born and raised in Johannesburg. He attained his BA degree from the University of Cambridge, LLB from the University of the Witwatersrand, a Bachelor of Civil Law from the University of Oxford, and an MA from Cambridge. In 1990, he was called to the Bar in South Africa, where he practised as an advocate for 27 years. He was appointed judge in 2018, and has since presided over a number of high-profile cases.

Rabbi Ramon Widmonte,
The Academy of Jewish
Thought and Learning



Inevitably, a slave has no concept of their own time, their ability to choose to act in one way at a particular time, and to take responsibility for those actions in the fullest sense of the word.

So, the Jews needed to learn to own time, to feel its contours and use it so that they could learn responsibility.

One of the signs of real maturity is this time-responsibility awareness – just think of a child saying they will clean up their room “later”. Children lack a sense of true responsibility because they feel that there is always an infinite “later”, a period in which every wrong can be righted, every desire fulfilled, every mistake corrected.

A free adult recognises that they own a very limited amount of time, and that the gift of freedom is the choice of how to use that time. The burden of that self-same freedom is the responsibility for the consequences of that choice.

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UCT lecturer's Hitler comment causes outrage

TALI FEINBERG

The fact that a high-level University of Cape Town (UCT) lecturer told his students that “Hitler committed no crime” seems too unbelievable to be true, but it happened on 7 April 2021, on the eve of Yom Hashoah.

The phrase was uttered in a pre-recorded “introduction to political science” lecture by Dr Lwazi Lushaba, a lecturer in the political studies department at UCT, for first-year students. His only response to questions by the *SA Jewish Report* about his comment was, “please watch and be educated”, attaching the lecture and signing off as “Commandante Lushaba”.

During the talk, he claimed that politics hadn't been informed by the lived experiences of black people, and that it took “what Hitler did to white people” to have massacres recognised in political science. “All Hitler did was to do to white people what white people had reserved for us – black people,” Lushaba said. “And so his crime, if he had a crime, was to do unto white people what white people have thought was right to do only to black people.” He went on to say that the Holocaust mustn't be prioritised over other massacres.

The comments have sown deep division, and have been hijacked by some wanting to criticise Israel and the Jewish community. However, leading educator Professor Jonathan Jansen tweeted, “From the Wits student, Dlamini, to the UCT lecturer, Lushaba, the positive referencing of Hitler is more than attention-seeking behaviour by the intellectually vacuous. They reveal the utter depravity of the public discourse on university campuses today.”

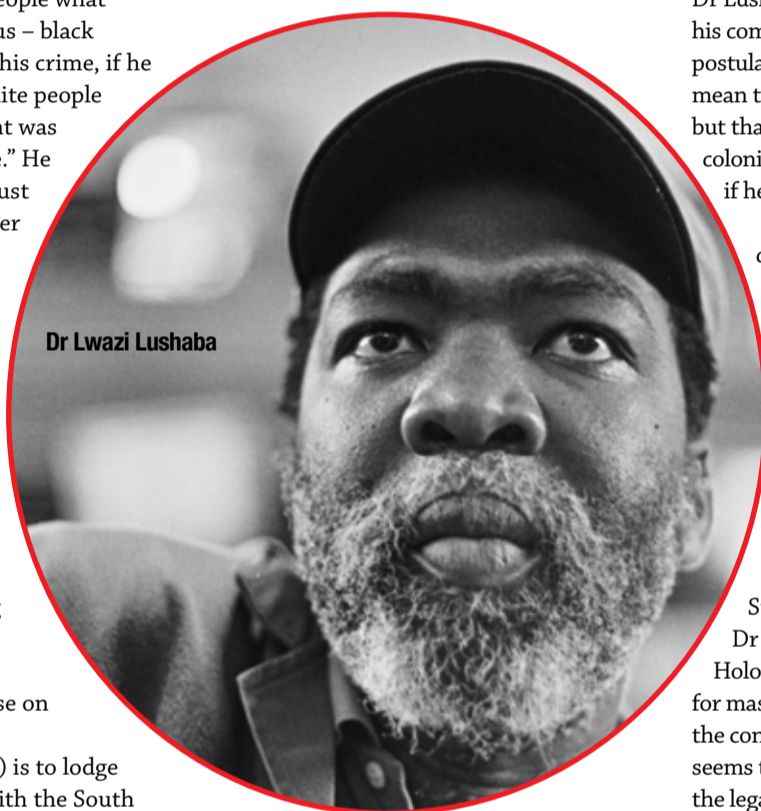
The Democratic Alliance (DA) is to lodge a complaint against Lushaba with the South African Human Rights Commission. “The Holocaust was unequivocally a crime against humanity orchestrated by Hitler. The DA therefore strongly condemns the comments made by Lushaba,” said DA MP Natasha Mazzone.

“His comments weren't only racist, offensive, and vile, but also completely insensitive to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and the Jewish community as a whole. In remembering the victims of the Holocaust, we must place a renewed sense of responsibility on those in positions of

power and influence to defend the truth and defend our democracy against any racist or antisemitic sentiments.”

“Lushaba has a long history of offensive and controversial actions,” Mazzone said. “In 2019, he allegedly took exception to one of the contenders in UCT's election of its dean of humanities being Tanzanian and not South African. In an interview with Power FM, Lushaba stated that “reason and rationality are white”. Lushaba was also suspended by Wits [the University of the Witwatersrand] in 2015 for “participating in activities which weren't conducive to free and fair elections, and were intolerant to a democratic society”.

The DA urged the institution's vice-chancellor, Mamokgethi Phakeng, to place Lushaba on suspension pending the investigation. But UCT's students' representative council (SRC) has defended the lecturer. SRC chairperson Declan Dyer said it noted the public reaction, but the



Dr Lwazi Lushaba

comments had been taken out of context, and were part of a larger critique of political science.

Student responses have varied. Jewish student Sam McNally, who is studying for a Bachelor of Arts in English and politics, told the *SA Jewish Report*, “As someone who has watched the lecture in its entirety, I believe Dr Lushaba's point about the hypocrisy of ‘Western’ or ‘white’ political science holds up, but only in a very general sense. But his argument neglects to mention that Jews at the time weren't exactly considered white and

certainly weren't considered such by eugenics, the prevailing racial ‘science’ of the time that formed a large part of Hitler's justification for his actions.

“My main issue regarding the statement that ‘Hitler committed no crime’ is that it bears little to no relation to the point [Lushaba was trying to make],” continues McNally. “White people being hypocritical about genocide has nothing to do with Hitler's criminality. As to whether Dr Lushaba meant something different by his comment – which is a theory I have heard postulated, particularly in the form, ‘He didn't mean to say that Hitler committed no crime, but that he committed no more of a crime than colonial architects of genocide’, my view is that if he meant that, then he should have said it.”

Another Jewish student, speaking on condition of anonymity, says, “I believe Dr Lushaba is very critical of white people. I believe he was very negligent in his use of words. However, I don't believe his statements were hate speech or antisemitic. I believe he was trying to illustrate the point that the world took notice of atrocities only when they were done to white people.”

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, says, “On the face of it, Dr Lushaba's comments appear to justify the Holocaust and absolve Hitler of responsibility for mass murder. Hearing his comments in the context of the broader lecture, Dr Lushaba seems to be claiming that Hitler acted within the legal and institutional system of the German state, and was therefore – according to the prevailing terms of German law – guilty of no explicit crime. This interpretation may make sense given Dr Lushaba's larger argument about the shift of thinking within political studies as well as his repeated recognition that Nazism was responsible for genocide.

“All that being said, the historical claims that Dr Lushaba makes – about Hitler's rise to power, the role of law within the Nazi state, the nature of Nazi antisemitism, and the ‘whiteness’ of Jews, the timing of the Final Solution – betray significant historical blind spots and errors,”

Mendelsohn says. “At many points in his lecture, dubious historical claims are yoked to polemical claims. He could do with reading much more about Nazism and the Holocaust.”

Mathilde Myburgh, communications officer at the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, says the board has given videos of Lushaba's lecture and supporting information to its antisemitism and legal subcommittee, which is investigating the matter.

“Academic freedom and freedom of expression mustn't undermine the central aim of our Constitution, which is to build a united and democratic South Africa based on mutual respect, understanding, and human dignity. Universities help shape the minds of the future leaders of our country. The personal views shared by this UCT lecturer were received as hateful and deeply offensive, and should have no part in the academic syllabus of a public university,” she says.

“To our knowledge, Dr Lushaba hasn't yet apologised for or retracted his remarks. We await his further engagement on the matter, and would be willing to meet him. We have reached out to Vice-Chancellor Phakeng, and the university has launched an investigation. We believe the matter is for UCT to investigate and respond before any further measures are considered.”

Tali Nates and Mary Kluk of the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation say, “The Holocaust is one of the most horrific periods in the history of mankind. It's deeply disturbing to hear reference to this painful history in a manner so laden with irony and cynicism without consideration of the damage and hurt that this flippant reference can cause.”

Says UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola, “The University of Cape Town has been alerted to and notes with grave concern comments allegedly made by a staff member during an online class. We are verifying all the facts. In the meantime, UCT is clear that all brutalities of genocide constitute both formal crimes against humanity and ongoing sources of pain. We distance ourselves strongly from any other view. The matter is receiving attention through all appropriate channels.”

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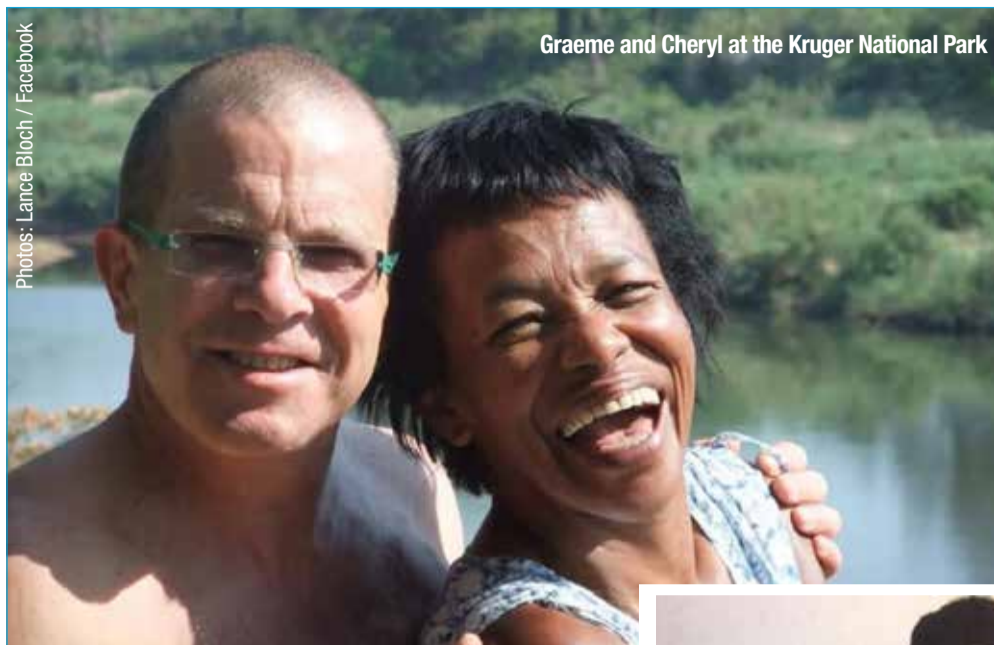
Graeme Bloch: icon of education and activism

TALI FEINBERG

In a tragic irony, a man who lived life to the full was condemned to endure an illness that meant he could no longer move or speak. But when Graeme Bloch died on Friday, 9 April 2021, at the age of 65, there was little doubt about the impact he had made on the struggle for a democratic South Africa and in the field of education, his true calling.

Watching their brother deteriorate from someone who hiked, ran marathons, loved to debate, and was an excellent speaker has been difficult for Lance and Shaun Bloch, two of his brothers who spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* in the wake of his death. Graeme was diagnosed with Progressive Supranuclear Palsy seven years ago.

The seven Bloch siblings have faced much trauma and tragedy in recent years, when their elderly mother, Rosalie Bloch, and her partner, Aubrey Jackson, were murdered in their home in 2018.



Photos: Lance Bloch / Facebook

Graeme and Cheryl at the Kruger National Park

“At the same time it was a very active family – we spent almost every weekend on the mountain,” says Lance. “He was a high achiever academically. I was often known as ‘Graeme’s brother’, as he really blazed a trail at school and university.”

Bloch’s passion for education and equal access to it started young. “In Standard 6 [Grade 8] he joined the organisation National Youth Action [NYA], which was the first non-racial schools’ organisation that agitated for fair and equal education for all,” says Lance.

Cape Town academic David Scher also remembers Bloch from their school days at Westerford High School. “There were so many Blochs that they were called ‘Blochlets,’” he joked. “Joining the NYA was really brave, as school principals disapproved of it, and it was unheard of for schoolchildren to be politically involved.”

As a University of Cape Town student, Graeme got involved with the National Union of South African Students and End Conscription Campaign. He was detained and arrested by apartheid security forces in 1976, and was “banned” from 1976 to 1981.

Scher recalls, “At the age of 20, he [Graeme] was beaten up in detention by the infamous [Warrant Officer Hernus JP] Spyker van Wyk, who brought his children along to watch the interrogation.”

Says Lance, “Being detained and on the run scarred him a bit. It made him more nervous, but also more determined. He was extremely brave.

“When he was banned for five years, he

wasn’t supposed to be in touch with more than one person at a time, but he used to break that law,” Lance says. “He would come to family meals, and the Security Branch would be sitting

outside the house. Sometimes, my mother would go out and give them coffee!”

Scher reconnected with Graeme when they both worked in the history department at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) around 1986. “He was part of the temporary staff. He couldn’t get a permanent position because he was so often on the run. I remember once I was staying with my in-laws. One evening, there was a knock on the door and there stood a stranger. I didn’t recognise that it was Graeme in disguise! He had come to collect exam scripts to mark.

“As a lecturer, he couldn’t be seen on campus in case he was arrested,” says Scher. “He would say that it was a ‘soulless experience’ not to be able to have a permanent academic job – he felt it keenly. Such was his sacrifice. And the

students at UWC really adored him. He came to the university straight after he was released from detention, and they gave him a massive reception as he addressed them.”

“Education was really his passion,” says Lance. “He inspired a whole generation of youth.”

Former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel elaborates on this. “In the mid-1980s, Graeme ran education programmes for children who have since gone on to do amazing things in life. He gave them vision, determination, and hope. Many of them attribute where they are today to Graeme ‘unlocking’ their potential. That was Graeme – education wasn’t just academic, it was a deeply felt and passionate thing.”

Doron Isaacs, a founder of Equal Education (EE), remembers how “Graeme was an EE board member from 2010 for two and half years through the organisation’s most intense period of campaigning. What I most admired in Graeme was how seriously he took the school-going activists within EE, how he listened to them and engaged them, almost treating them as his leaders. He retained an instinctive radicalism acquired in his youth, but what he most admired in young activists was conscientiousness, discipline, hunger for knowledge, and patient organising. In spite of his close ties to the ANC [African National Congress], he never wavered in backing EE to confront the government and its leaders.”

Manuel continues, “Graeme was willing to do even the most menial tasks. When we launched the UDF [United Democratic Front] in August 1983, he landed up making soup. I don’t think his soup would have made MasterChef, but he did it because someone needed to do it.”

It was in the UDF that Graeme met his soulmate and future wife, Cheryl Carolus, who would later become the ANC’s deputy secretary general. Many describe how they complemented each other – Graeme was more subdued while Cheryl is more extroverted. Together, they were a force of nature.

“Another thing I remember is that all the mothers of other activists adored him,” says Manuel. “All of them, without exception, had the most unbelievable affection for Graeme. And being invited by so many families for supper made him the envy of his friends. Many of his networks were built like that.

“Whenever I visited his house, the most common feature in all their photos was laughter. He was a radiant, happy individual. The illness took away his ability to speak, but even as recently as a month ago, he would laugh at jokes. Notwithstanding the fact that he couldn’t talk, his *joie de vivre* wasn’t dimmed.”

Former Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs remembers how Bloch played a key role in welcoming him back to Cape Town after 24 years in exile in May 1990. “My first wish was to climb Table Mountain. I got the message out that after I landed at the airport, I wanted to go to my mom and have tea with her, then put on my takkies and climb my beloved mountain.

“But I needed someone to escort me. My arm had been blown off, and I wasn’t sure I could make it. I was told that comrade Graeme Bloch was the ANC’s ‘exercise person’, and had put together a team of comrades to join us,” Sachs says. “He took me up Constantia Nek, we walked past the reservoirs ... I still remember the exact route after two decades ... down Kasteel’s Poort, along the pipe track, and finally arriving at Kloof Nek corner. I felt triumphant. I wasn’t sure I could even do it, but he made it happen. You couldn’t have found a more gracious, warm, and generous person. He loved the mountain, and he loved freedom.”



Graeme speaking at an End Conscription Campaign meeting

“I was actually in Cape Town to wrap up their estate last week when Graeme got pneumonia and was hospitalised,” says Shaun. “Graeme tested COVID-19-negative. Ironically, my brother, Guy, was admitted to the exact same ward at the same time for a minor health issue. It was a blessing in disguise because Guy could check on Graeme in the night.” He says Graeme was “up and down”, but “eventually deteriorated quite quickly and passed away”.

His life was fascinating and full from the start. As one of seven siblings (six boys and a girl), “it was an exciting, vibrant, intellectual household”, says Lance. “My father was a plastic surgeon, my mother a lawyer, so it was a really stimulating environment.” Shaun feels that debate, discussion, education, and recognising that all people are equal were all Jewish values instilled by their parents, and had a profound impact on Graeme, informing his choices from a young age.

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Lost Barmitzvah boy finally finds his way home

TALI FEINBERG

When Stephen “Sugar” Segerman started searching for the Barmitzvah boy whose photograph was on his mantelpiece, he didn’t imagine he would find out from someone half way around the globe that the boy had once lived a few houses away from him.

Last week, the *SA Jewish Report* described how Segerman – who once searched for and found the musician Sixto Rodriguez [depicted in the Oscar-winning 2012 documentary *Searching for Sugar Man*] – was now trying to identify the boy in a photograph he found at the Milnerton Market in Cape Town a few years ago.

Within a few days of publication and the story spreading around the world, the identity of the barmi boy as the late Arnold Kleinberger was revealed. Segerman had an emotional meeting with Kleinberger’s daughter, Aura Zartz, who lives in Cape Town, on Tuesday (13 April) this week.

“In the days following the story appearing in the *SA Jewish Report*, it was shared all over the world, judging from the enthusiastic responses I immediately received,” Segerman said.

“I started receiving a lot of emails from people who thought they recognised the barmi boy. One said, ‘My name is Cedric Reingold. I grew up in Highlands Estate and matriculated from Herzlia in 1978. I recently read the article, and recognised the person in the picture. His name is Arnold Kleinberger. He was in our third-grade year and if I’m not mistaken, left [Herzlia] sometime thereafter.’”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Chicago, Reingold said that he was scrolling through the online version of the paper, when he saw the photograph and immediately recognised Arnold. He then confirmed it with others in his matric year Facebook group. “But actually, I was 100%

and Anita, son-in-law Maurice, and granddaughters Nadine and Aura.”

He searched the name Kleinberger on Facebook, and found a Doré Kleinberger, whose mother had been Eva Wolovitz. That led Segerman to Wolovitz’s tombstone, where again, he saw the name Aura. Further googling led to the birth announcement of Aura and Adam Zartz’s son on the Herzlia Alumni Association site.

At this point, Segerman turned to his daughter, Natalia, and son-in-law, Ryan Rabinowitz, who were visiting from London, and asked if they knew them.

“Ryan looked at me with great surprise and told me that not only did he know Adam very well, but they had sat next to each other at shul that very morning,” said Segerman. “He immediately contacted Adam, and we spoke to his wife, Aura, who confirmed that the barmi boy was her late father, Arnold.”

“She said that Doré was her mother, and her aunts were the late Anita Shenker and Marlene Kleinberger. Marlene had lived in Milnerton and passed away a few years

sometimes work for the Segermans. This is just one of many other coincidences linking all the people connected to the story.

Zartz, whose first-born child, Allegra, is named after Arnold, said that her father was always “elusive” to her. Her parents divorced when she was three, and she didn’t see her father much in the years before his death, which were marked with difficulties.

She said that when Segerman phoned, she felt like she was on some kind of ‘Candid Camera’ show – it didn’t feel real. In some ways, she felt heartbroken that her father’s photo had landed up in a stranger’s home, “but then I felt a huge amount of comfort that he was so close to where he grew up”.

She spent much of her childhood in her late grandmother’s home, and feels closely connected to it. Segerman emphasised that he has always felt very protective of the photograph, which meant a lot to Zartz.

Her mother, Doré, is the last remaining Kleinberger. She said Arnold’s father, Ernest, came to South Africa from Germany in 1936 when he was 13. “He had his Barmitzvah on the boat!” His mother, Sadie, was born in South Africa. She understands that Arnold was quite a “troubled child”, but also had many happy moments in his parents’ home and general goods stores, where he would help himself to chocolate.

“Their home was always warm and welcoming – a central meeting place that people gravitated towards,” Kleinberger said. “Arnold had a tough exterior, but was the kindest person. I think he had a difficult time in the army. But he loved Formula One racing and motorbikes, and would time keep at Killarney. He also loved to braai and surf. For our honeymoon, we went up the coast with his surfboard.”

Segerman was deeply moved by these revelations and in the days after finding all of this out, he went on his regular walking route, which passed the house that Kleinberger grew up in.

“Today my walk was different – more special and emotional than ever before. I stopped at both gates and thought about Arnold and all that has happened these past few days.” He has decided that he will say Kaddish for Arnold on his *yahrzeit*.

Zartz said that when Segerman first called, “I thought, ‘What is my father trying to tell me?’ And when I heard Stephen say he lived in Forest Road, I realised that he was just trying to make his way home. I don’t want to keep the photograph. I give it to Stephen with a happy heart. This story means that my dad is exactly where he needs to be.”

A selection of photos of the Kleinberger family, belonging to Aura Zartz



Aura Zartz, the photo of her father (the late Arnold Kleinberger) and Stephen ‘Sugar’ Segerman

sure, even though he wasn’t at Herzlia for long [he then went to Cape Town High]. I can’t explain it – I just knew.”

Said Segerman, “I was elated. I then started an online search, and found that Arnold Kleinberger was born in 1960, which meant his Barmitzvah would have been in 1973, fitting with the timeline. Sadly, he passed away at the young age of 37 in 1997. I found a photo of his tombstone from the Cape Town Chevrah Kadisha website, and studied it to find any clues.

“It said that he was mourned by his family, but only his mother Sadie was named. I found out she had passed away in 2015. Her tombstone said that she was mourned by her daughters Marlene

before. Anita had cleaned out Marlene’s house and sent numerous items to the Milnerton Market.

“Aura was nine when her father passed away. She confirmed that his Barmitzvah was on 13 January 1973, and she had recently been given his Barmitzvah book by Anita’s husband, Maurice Shenker, which contained the same photo I had. She then told me that her father had grown up in Oranjezicht.”

Segerman and his wife have lived in Oranjezicht for the past 24 years, and it turns out they live just four houses away from where the Barmitzvah boy grew up.

In addition, Arnold’s parents’ domestic worker, the late Lettie Gal, would

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Case of the pot calling the kettle

The South African BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) Coalition, much like the former BDS-SA, which is now Africa4Palestine, claims that it is made up of human-rights activists and definitely isn't antisemitic. In fact, they both make a big thing about having a handful of Jewish members.

I wonder, though, what their definition of antisemitism is, especially in light of the SA BDS Coalition doing its best to stop the honourable Judge David Unterhalter from becoming a Constitutional Court judge. His crime was working on the executive of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) for some months.

As we all know, the role of the SAJBD is clearly stated as being the "umbrella representative spokesperson and civil rights lobby of the South African Jewish community. It promotes the safety and welfare of South African Jewry, including combatting antisemitism in all forms, and builds bridges of friendship and understanding between Jews and the broader South African population".

Like most South African Jews, the board doesn't want South Africa to cut ties with Israel because Israel is a Jewish state, a place that most Jews feel very strongly about. The board – much like the South African government – is also unequivocal about its belief in a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

There are members of the board who are left-wing and right-wing, and some fall somewhere in between in terms of Israeli politics. Although they don't agree on Israeli politics, they do all believe in a Jewish state. And that's their right. They possibly have vast political disagreements about Israeli politics, but it doesn't matter because their job has nothing to do with Israeli politics and everything to do with safeguarding our community here.

Judge Unterhalter is Jewish and, by virtue of that fact, he is part of this minority community. In fact, in 2018, he very deservedly won the Absa Jewish Achiever Award for Professional Excellence.

He is a judge beyond reproach, and takes what he does very seriously. He is a professor of law, and before becoming a judge at the beginning of 2018, he was an exemplary senior advocate. As an advocate, he spent 27 years tackling many high-profile cases. These include representing then Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa at the Marikana Commission and the SAJBD in a hate-speech case. He also appeared for the Helen Suzman Foundation when businessman Hugh Glenister tried to get the Hawks permanently separated from the police.

When the *SA Jewish Report* interviewed Unterhalter on becoming a high court judge, we asked about his being Jewish in the judiciary. He explained that his judiciary function isn't one to which this is relevant, nor does it have any bearing on his role. "Judaism is truly a part of who I am. It offers a rich tradition from which concepts of justice stem and which are exemplified in the field of law. Although it has no direct impact on my legal decisions, Judaism offers tenets which inform the values of justice."

Most of us in the community agree with that. We also feel strongly about values, ethics, and morals, as well as the South African Constitution. In fact, our chief rabbi created a "Bill of Responsibility" more than 10 years ago that aligned to the Bill of Rights and is still being taught as part of the South African school syllabus.

Had he been selected, Unterhalter would have been the fourth Jewish judge on the Constitutional Court.

There was Arthur Chaskalson, who was president of the court from 1994 until 2001, who then became chief justice of South Africa until 2005. Then, of course, there was our esteemed Judges Richard Goldstone (1994-2003) and Albie Sachs (1994-2009).

When Unterhalter agreed to be on the executive of the SAJBD, it was to help with dire welfare issues during the pandemic. He wanted to help give back to society, and he saw working through the community he was born into as one way of doing so. Somehow, this got twisted and manipulated into being something so ugly in the SA BDS Coalition's complaint.

It claimed that the board's values, ethos, and actions didn't align with government policies and our constitutional values. What a lot of hogwash!

It went on to say that the board is "akin to the Broederbond".

Let's see. As far as I know, the Broederbond was a men's only secret society whose aim was to promote the interests of Afrikaans nationalism. I guess the only thing similar is that our board promotes the interest of the South African Jewish community, but certainly not by treating anyone else badly. To the contrary. And as for supporting so-called war crimes against Palestinians, that's certainly not on the board's agenda.

To jump to the conclusion that Unterhalter also unquestionably supports "war crimes" is a giant assumption to make. Never has Unterhalter made any such comments or suggestions, but that didn't stop this coalition from demanding that the Judicial Services Commission shouldn't even interview Unterhalter.

It didn't even want to give him a chance to be interviewed to find out his views.

It also called the board an "organisation that has a sordid history of hurling allegations of antisemitism against people in South Africa who advocate for Palestinian rights". Talk about a "sordid history of hurling allegations"! That's exactly what the SA BDS Coalition is doing right now and seems to take pleasure in doing. They are in fact the ones who "smear individuals and organisations in an attempt to silence" them.

The board, on the other hand, makes sure that it uses legal recourse in situations of antisemitism. Let's be real about who is calling who what.

Or is this yet another smokescreen and the SA BDS Coalition simply doesn't want another Jew in one of the highest legal positions in the country? Oh, but that wouldn't be the case because they aren't antisemitic. They would never tar all Jews with the same brush. They would never say that all Jews are the same, or would they?

What, in their view, is Unterhalter's crime? The fact that he spent a few months on the executive of the Jewish board of deputies. Because of that, they make incredibly demeaning and ugly assumptions. Are you sure this can't be construed as antisemitism. Hmmm, what do you think?

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Saluting Zan Swartzberg – one of the 800 SA volunteers who fought for Israel

TALI FEINBERG

Zan Swartzberg from Bethlehem in the Free State was one of 800 South African Machal volunteers who heeded Israel's call for help after it was surrounded by seven armies determined to obliterate it in 1948. He was just 21.

As he celebrated his 94th birthday and the launch of his fourth book this past weekend, he recalled those heady and harrowing days. "My first book is called *The Hammers: A Personal Story of the 1948-1949 Israeli War of Independence*. It's called *The Hammers* because we flew huge American B17 flying fortresses. Three of them, day and night, for weeks on end. In other words, we hammered them, so our official name was The Hammers," Swartzberg says.

As Israel mourns those lost in defence of the country and to terrorism on Yom Hazikaron, and celebrates its 73rd year of independence on Yom Ha'atzmaut, the man who was there at the start says the country shouldn't be taken for granted.

His memories are still vivid of joining thousands of other Machal volunteers in fighting for Israel's independence, and the enormous stress and challenges they faced.

"Many were World War II veterans, and knew the odds were against us," says Swartzberg. "An air shuttle service was started to transport volunteers, and I needed to get 100 hours of experience, so I got it on the shuttle flights. Each flight could take only 19 volunteers at a time. The South African government was aware of the volunteers

also tells how the Swartzbergs were reunited with their long-lost daughter, and how his brother Joe cheated death – twice.

Speaking at the book launch, Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft of the Small Jewish Communities Association described how "Zan [or Zundel which is his full Jewish name], for most of his life has lived in Bethlehem. He remains to this day on his farm proudly named Masada Farm/Loch Katrine Farm in the Bethlehem district." Swartzberg's wife, Noreen, describes her husband as a "proud Jew", which motivated him to name the farm Masada.

Describing Swartzberg as "an ardent Zionist" Silberhaft said, "It's a remarkable fact that of the approximately 3 000 Jews from around the world who volunteered to fight for the Jewish state in its time of supreme need, more than a quarter came from South Africa, whose Jewish community at the time numbered barely 100 000 souls. Only the United States, whose Jewish population was fifty times larger, produced more volunteers for the cause. Since then, it has always been a matter of great pride to him to be able to claim to have been one of 'South Africa's 800'.

"Having obtained an international radio operator's licence prior to this, Zan joined the Israeli army and became a radio operator and air gunner in the fledgling Israeli Air Force. He was in the air force division from 1948 to 1949, serving in the famed 69th squadron, and was also an instructor in radio telegraphy.

"A number of the 800 South African volunteers went on to achieve considerable fame and success. They included Judge Cecil Margo, who played a key role in the establishment of the Israeli Air Force, anti-apartheid hero Arthur Goldreich, former Woolworths Chief Executive David Susman, and former Johannesburg mayor Eddie Magid.

"After the war, Zan devoted himself to various pursuits. He was a yachtsman, served in the merchant navy, and later in army commandos. In due course, he became a business man and then a farmer. In collaboration with Lorraine Houston, he has become an increasingly prolific author."

His second book, published in July 2019, was titled *Ovamboland Border War: An exercise in Futility*, focusing on South Africa's border war in then South West Africa. The following April, his third book was published about the realisation of his life-long dream of sailing the open sea. Titled *Survival, The Voyage of Yacht Black Jed*, it told of his yacht trip from East London, South Africa, to Villamoura, Portugal.

To mark the celebration of his 94th birthday, Silberhaft surprised Swartzberg by presenting him with the mittens he wore as a Machalnik. "Fifteen or 20 years ago, I donated my bomber jacket and mittens to the Machal Museum in Israel. I don't know how he did it, but when he

handed me those mittens on my birthday, I was so emotional. The tears poured ... I was gobsmacked. And then I asked him to please re-donate them to the museum."

With less than 10 known Machalniks still alive, Swartzberg feels grateful to have been there and to be able to tell the story of Israel's miraculous fight to survive. He recalls how while walking in the streets of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa, Israelis would stop him and thank him for his service to the founding of their country. "They don't forget what the Machalniks did. I feel so privileged that I played a small part in the birth of a Jewish state."

• *Zan Swartzberg's books can be bought on Amazon.*



Zan Swartzberg with Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft

heading off to fight, but turned a blind eye. We should always be grateful for that."

His latest book, launched on Sunday, is titled *I Salute you Sir!*. "This is because a few years ago, I got a call late one evening from an Israeli official, inviting me and my wife, Noreen, to celebrate Israel's independence. He said, 'Are you Zan Swartzberg? Are you still alive?' A special meeting was arranged with President Benjamin Netanyahu. And when he saw the ribbons on my windbreaker, he knew exactly who I was. He came and put his hand out and said, 'I salute you sir.'"

The book tells other fascinating stories. "First, how my father escaped Lithuania, and about the Jew hatred that we as schoolchildren went through in Bethlehem." It

Rwanda: the 'never again' that was repeated

MIRAH LANGER

"Rwanda, for many second-generation Holocaust survivors, is a kindred experience," says Tali Nates, the founder and executive director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre. "I remember going to a church in Rwanda that had been a killing site, and someone had written in Kinyarwanda and English, in blue handwriting on a white canvas, 'Never Again', and I thought ... really?"

This is one of the moments of connection that drew Nates into becoming a guardian, not just of memory linked to her own background as the daughter of an Oskar Schindler survivor, but that of the atrocities in Rwanda as well.

Nates has pursued this "memory activism" in her capacity as chairperson of the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation, as well as heading up the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre. Most recently, the foundation launched two publications – one of testimony from Holocaust survivors who had links to South Africa, and another containing the equivalent from Rwandan survivors.

7 April marks the 27th commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi minority in Rwanda perpetrated by the Hutu-extremist-led government. Nates has been involved in a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) panel discussion, as well as writing on the subject for the UN this month.

In fact, she is one of the earliest pioneers not just on the continent but internationally of educational programmes and commemorative activities that draw on links between this genocide and the Holocaust, as well as the South African experience of apartheid.

She is careful to note, however, that she didn't see the correlation between the genocide in Rwanda, the Holocaust, or the South African context immediately.

"On 27 April 1994, we were standing in the election queue for hours and there was such elation, happiness, and relief at the coming of democracy and Nelson Mandela. Yet, at this point, it was three weeks into the genocide in Rwanda. There were already thousands upon thousands of people who had been murdered. And I didn't yet make the connection. For me, that's the real light or warning: that even those of us who have been involved in this topic for years didn't make the connection. [Going forward], we have to recognise these connections earlier and to do that, we need education."

For Nates, it was only months later, when news footage

and stories came out and survivors began to arrive in South Africa, that she started to pick up the resonance between these events. At the time, she was working with the Foundation for Tolerance Education, and it liaised with the department of education in Rwanda to initiate teaching programmes on the subject.

Telling the Rwandan story alongside that of the Holocaust wasn't about comparing them but rather "with sensitivity and impact" placing them side by side for connections to emerge.

"The Holocaust was an unprecedented case of genocide in history. Gas chambers were never built again and hopefully will never be built again. But those who committed genocide in Rwanda learnt how to kill much quicker. In 100 days, they killed one million people.

"There is a process to telling the stories in a dignified and meaningful way."

In terms of her work at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, Nates notes that it doesn't function as a place marker for a site of genocide. Instead, it serves as a "space of memory", which asks people to reflect on morality and choices, encouraging them to contemplate "where things went wrong in the past" and reflect deeply about "where we should go now".

For Nates, it was being on the ground in Rwanda that would come to shape her priorities in the work that the centre does now.

In 2003, she made a documentary with Paula Slier that explored travelling to Poland and Israel to explore her personal history of the Holocaust, and then to Rwanda to document its experience of genocide. It was the first of about 30 visits to the country.

However, it was an individual encounter with a survivor at a later visit that remains most indelible in Nates's mind.

In 2006, she travelled to Rwanda with the cast and crew of a play called *Truth in Translation* that dealt with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. While there, she served as a facilitator for audience discussions and took the cast around the country to see key sites of genocide.

"One of our drivers was a survivor himself. He had a big machete scar on his head, and he was very shy. In the morning, we visited the Kigali genocide memorial where there are mass graves of 250 000 victims. His parents and



Tali Nates in Rwanda for the 25th commemoration of the Genocide Against the Tutsi in April 2019 with Dr Jean-Damascène Gasanabo and Sue Hampel



Tali Nates with a student in Rwanda

siblings were buried there.

"That day, he was very sad and withdrawn. You could see it. In the afternoon, we visited other memorial sites, and he just sat outside with his hands down.

"I left the group and sat next to him, and I took his hand. We held hands. I said, 'I am so sorry and my thoughts are with you.' I said, 'I don't know how you are feeling, but I know it also happened to my family about 60 years ago [at that stage] in Europe. My grandmother, my aunts, and the rest of my family were also killed in a genocide, and I don't have graves for them.'

"I will never forget it, he touched my face, in disbelief," Nates says.

There seemed two facets to his response. One was perhaps a realisation that these atrocities cut across racial lines. "On the other level, I think it was shock. 'So if it happened before, then how come it has happened to me...?'"

"All my life, I grew up with the Holocaust as the daughter of two parents from Poland. The lessons about choices, about the need for moral leadership, were always there. When you go to Rwanda, when you speak to survivors and get close to people, there is no way you won't feel a bond.

"You stand in the churches that were killing sites for those dark three months of the genocide. In earlier years, you would still see the clothes on the floor, the piles of bones. In Murambi, which was a huge killing site where about 40 000 people were murdered, as an act of commemoration, they mummified some of the bodies. It's like when you go to Madjanek and see the pile of ashes or to Auschwitz and see the ash pool."

Change is vital, Sydenham rabbis say

STAFF REPORTER

On Shabbat morning over Pesach, Sydenham Shul passed the leadership baton from the incomparable Rabbi Yossy Goldman to his successor, Rabbi Yehuda Stern.

For the first time in the history of the shul, there was a lectern on either side of the pulpit, and the two rabbis gave a joint *drosha* on the theme of transition.

They spoke of the need to hold onto our history and tradition, yet innovate. They spoke of building on what they had learnt so well until now to create an even more successful future.

"Just like the Jews of Egypt, we must always hold onto our history and traditions, and we must ensure these qualities remain with us for future generations," Stern said.

"But while we cherish our history, we must continue to build our destiny. Innovation and creative planning for the future is vital if we are to continue to be the premier congregation in this country," Goldman said.

He recalled a conversation with Issie Kirsh, who started Radio 702, and changed the format a year after launching the successful station. "I remember asking him, 'Issie, if it's not broken, why are you

fixing it?' You know what he answered? 'In this business, if you don't innovate regularly, people get tired and move on. As good as it may be, it needs to be refreshed frequently. It's very easy to change stations.'

"I don't think it's as easy to change shuls as it is to change radio stations. But we, too, need to innovate."

Goldman told the community it had "nothing to fear" as he would still be around for many years, but he asked it to "embrace the change".

"Nothing is broken here either," he said. "We're strong, and will only grow stronger."



Rabbi Yehuda Stern and Rabbi Yossy Goldman



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Nazis targeted children, survivors say

MIRAH LANGER

"I can't remember her face for some reason." So said Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter of his pain at the fragmented memory of his twin sister, Sabine, who was murdered at Madjanek.

Gutter was one of six Holocaust survivors from around the world who spoke at the communal Yom Hashoah ceremony held online this year. The ceremony was held in collaboration with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation, and the Beau Bassin Jewish Detainees Memorial and Information Centre.

"We were born together; we lived



Pinchas Gutter

together for 11 years. We shared the ghetto. We shared the same room together with our parents," recalled Gutter. Gutter and his sister were born in Lodz, Poland, in 1932. He now lives in Toronto, Canada.

"When I saw her the last time, running towards my mother, I saw her beautiful braids. She had this long, blonde braid. We were both blonde and blue-eyed.

"She is running towards my mother and, of course, immediately after that, they were taken away and murdered.

"All I can remember now of my sister is nothing for a whole 11 years except the

braid."

Untold stories of lives cut short and generations lost was the focus of much of the survivor's contribution to the ceremony. Recording their testimony from separate locations, mostly in their private living room or study, scattered with the paraphernalia of the lives they lived in the aftermath, they shared intimate memories.

Their stories were juxtaposed with the participation of young Jewish people from all over South Africa and Mauritius, representing the continued responsibility to remember.

Survivor Miriam Lichterman's reflection

had a particularly poignant origin:

"Even in inhuman circumstances, we must remain human and caring of each other.' This is the last message my parents gave me – and I give it to you," said Lichterman. She and a sister were the only survivors

of their family. Along with the loss of their parents, their brother died fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Lichterman, who now lives in Cape Town, also contemplated the extreme horror of how Nazis targeted children in their killings.

"Massacres have occurred throughout history, but even in the most evil circumstances, it wasn't usual for children to be slaughtered along with their parents. This wasn't the case in the Holocaust. Rather, the Nazis hunted down Jewish children as thoroughly as they hunted down all others. Along with



Ella Blumenthal



Marian Turski

the elderly and infirm, they were generally marked for immediate murder on arrival at the death

camps.

"Nazis didn't view Jewish children as innocent and harmless but as the seed bearers of a biologically polluted and inferior race that had to be exterminated just like any other dangerous virus."

Survivor, Marian Turski, who was born in Polish territory and still lives in Poland today, said it was important to remember the martyrs and heroes not only of the armed resistance, but anyone who had



Helene Sieff

Zionist, who was a good Jew, a good family [man], that when he was gassed at Auschwitz, he died without dignity.

"We should reject this kind of opinion," Turski implored.

Helene Sieff, who was born in Belgium and survived the war in hiding and in foster homes, made a call especially to honour the Righteous Amongst the Nations who had the vision of looking beyond "religion, race, and ethnicity" to the "fact that we were fellow human beings".

Oscar Langsam spoke of his experiences as one of 1 584 Jewish refugees who were detained in Mauritius by the British when, in 1940, they tried to flee to then Palestine.

The 90-year-old who now lives in Israel, spoke in memory of the 128 detainees who died before they would ever know freedom. He mentioned, in particular, his three-year-old brother, Herman, who died of typhus while at a temporary detention camp in Atlit, as well as Dita Eisler, a "beloved 20-year-old music teacher" who died of polio a few

months before their release in Mauritius.

Survivor Ella Blumenthal, who was born in 1921 in Warsaw and now lives in Cape Town, spoke of her happy childhood as the youngest of seven children before the Nazi regime took power. By the end of the war, 22 members of her family had



Oscar Langsam

been wiped out.

She recalled the joy she later experienced in rebuilding her life in South Africa, and the pleasure of having four children, 11 grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren.

Nevertheless, she questioned, "How many more children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren would my brothers and sisters have brought into this world had their lives not been so brutally taken from them?"

"When remembering the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust, let us think also of those generations that were never allowed to come into being."



Miriam Lichterman

Accusations surge against "Israel's Jeffrey Epstein"

MIRAH LANGER

The magnitude and nature of the sexual-abuse allegations against Zaka founder Yehuda Meshi-Zahav have even shaken Shana Aaronson, the highly experienced executive director of Israeli anti-abuse advocacy group Magen for Jewish Communities.

Her organisation was involved in exposing the alleged perpetrator after being approached by a journalist who was in contact with apparent victims. Aaronson discussed the role her organisation played in the matter during an online seminar this week. The talk was organised by the Co-ordinating Council of National Jewish Women's Organisations of South Africa, and chaired by the Union of Jewish Women.

"It's still kind of shocking to me, even after all the years that I've been doing this, to have a case like this. We just keep hearing worse and worse and more and more horrific allegations. We knew it was bad, but I don't think we ever could have imagined the number of victims that started coming forward [after the first allegations were published]. It was so extreme: the extent and the depravity of the abuse, and the fact that a number of people had known about it in the community for so many years and hadn't told anyone."

Aaronson said that Meshi-Zahav, the head of a prominent emergency response service in the country, was a popular figure who was just about to be awarded the Israel Prize before the case broke. While some claimed the timing of the release of abuse allegations was a conspiracy to prevent him from receiving the accolade, in fact, she said, nothing was further from the truth.

The first victim had actually reached out to the organisation many years ago, but had been unwilling to take the matter further. "This sometimes happens, and then we have nothing to go on."

They had a breakthrough, however, about eight months ago, when they were approached by a journalist from *Ha'aretz* who had been in contact with victims now willing to go public with their experience.

Together, Magen and various media organisations collaborated to find and support victims, "and eventually the case was exposed. The article

came out." Yet, it was just the first trickle of a flood of abuse allegations that continues to surge.

Meshi-Zahav has maintained his innocence, but has announced that he won't accept the Israel Prize and has stepped down as head of Zaka. An extensive police investigation is now underway in Israel.

Aaronson also spoke more broadly about the work of Magen, explaining that it dealt primarily – but not exclusively – with sexual abuse within religious and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. Most of its staff grew up or still live in these same communities, and thus are able to approach their work with nuance.

Aaronson lamented the many myths that still exist about sexual abuse. "There is a lack of understanding about how sexual abuse works.

In the religious community, there's a tendency to conflate sexual abuse with other 'sins'. So, they mush together sexually abusing a child with premarital sex; with homosexual sex; what they consider to be sexually inappropriate behaviours."

It's a mindset that is itself "outrageously inappropriate" and has to change, she said.

Furthermore, it has led some community leaders to try and resolve abuse cases as private matters rather than taking criminal or legal steps.

"I hear this sometimes from well-meaning rabbis who say, 'Well, I called him and I told him to stop, and he said he would.' They don't understand that there is an addictive element to this; that the abuser isn't just going to stop. It's not as if the abuser didn't realise yesterday that he shouldn't be doing this. He knew he shouldn't be doing this. He knew what the potential cost would be, and he did it anyway because he couldn't stop himself or didn't want to stop himself."

She said these community leaders were often "genuinely shocked" when the people to whom they had spoken went back to offending.

Aaronson said that a key focus of her organisation is support for survivors. As strange as it sounds, stories of abuse "are at their core, stories of empowerment because in almost every single one of those cases, the case is out there publicly only because the survivor had the courage to tell someone. There's so much perseverance and courage to be learned."

Aaronson lauded, for example, sisters Dassi Erlich, Elly Sapper, and Nicole Meyer, who came forward first in 2008 to speak about the abuse they suffered as teenagers allegedly at the hands of Malka Leifer, who, at the time, was principal of the Adass Yisroel School in Melbourne. Leifer fled to Israel when the abuse claims emerged, and it was only in January this year that she was finally extradited to face the charges against her.

"For any survivor of sexual abuse to share something which for so many years has felt so shameful and so terrifying is incredibly difficult, but this is specifically so in this community, where these young women aren't raised with any kind of language around sexuality or abuse or consent, or even having any understanding of what it is that is happening to them."

Aaronson's organisation worked to help gather the evidence that proved Leifer wasn't as psychiatrically incapacitated as she claimed to be, and was thus eligible for extradition.

She said that while Leifer's arrival back in Australia was "only the beginning of the road", she was relieved that the trial would finally take place soon. For the past 12 years, "the victims were literally just fighting for their right to face her in court. That's all."

When it comes to building a broad picture of sexual abuse in Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel, Aaronson said a lack of sufficient research and statistics marred clarity. Based on the available statistics and anecdotal evidence, there seemed to be similar rates of sexual abuse against boys and girls. A probable reason for this was that in religious communities, gender segregation shapes the kind of access that perpetrators have to potential victims.

For example, most female sexual-abuse survivors from ultra-Orthodox communities were abused within their own families. "If most sexual offenders are male, they would most likely have access to female victims if they are family members: cousins, sisters-in-law, and siblings. Unfortunately, we definitely do see high rates of incest in terms of the people who reach out to us."

She said it was important for people within the community to create a sense of safety that encourages those experiencing abuse to come forward. When the victims of abuse see people in the community sharing articles or information about abuse, it makes an impact. "They notice that you are somebody who is at least to some degree a safe person or ally to this cause. It doesn't mean there won't be pushback if they come forward, but at least, they'll have a supportive environment in the community as well."



Shana Aaronson

Imbi Evenhuis 22 years with PPS
PR and Communications Manager

A graphic of the number 80 formed by three overlapping circles. The top and bottom circles are white with a thin grey outline, and they overlap in the center. The middle circle is a solid gold color and overlaps the other two. To the right of this graphic is the text 'YEARS OF SHARING SUCCESS' in a bold, sans-serif font. 'YEARS' and 'SUCCESS' are in white, while 'OF SHARING' is in gold.

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Our title deed to Israel was given by G-d

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



Yom Ha'atzmaut is an opportunity to declare proudly and publicly our connection to Israel. This is our opportunity to remind ourselves and the world what Israel means to us.

We can draw our inspiration for this from a beautiful and powerful *mitzvah* – *bikkurim* – the *mitzvah* for farmers to bring the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem and dedicate them to G-d.

The Talmud paints a colourful picture of the farmers' procession to the Temple as they brought the *bikkurim*. They didn't arrive one by one in Jerusalem; rather, they would go up in a group, accompanied by music and a whole entourage to mark the occasion. At the head of the procession, there was a bull decorated in gold. And all the residents of Jerusalem – the shopkeepers and all the workers, sometimes even the king – would come out to greet the farmers. Upon arriving at the Temple, the Levi'im would sing a song from the book of Tehillim.

Then, on dedicating their baskets of produce to the Temple, the farmer would make a declaration summarising Jewish history and expressing gratitude to G-d for bringing the Jewish people to the land of Israel – to the sacred ground from which these first fruits were

harvested.

Why all the fanfare? And how is any of this connected to Yom Ha'atzmaut?

One of our great sages, the Malbim, explains that the declaration on the *bikkurim* was a response to those who would challenge our right to the land of Israel. He cites Rashi's very first comment on the Chumash – the question of why the Torah begins with the book of Genesis, the more narrative-driven portions of the Torah, when really the Torah is a book of commandments.

Quoting from a prescient *midrash*, Rashi explains that the reason the Torah begins with the story of creation is because one day, the Jewish people would be accused of unjustly appropriating the land of Israel, to which we can respond – G-d, the creator of the world, gave it to us. That is our title deed. And we underline this claim by publicly declaring and celebrating our connection to the land of Israel in the *bikkurim* ceremony.

There's certainly a lesson we can draw on here in our own age about proudly and unapologetically celebrating our connection to the land of Israel.

But *bikkurim* has another – no less important – lesson for us for Yom Ha'atzmaut – the lesson of gratitude. Through the declaration, farmers express gratitude for the

fact that G-d took us out of Egypt and brought us to the land of milk and honey from which the fruits were harvested. In this way, the entire farming experience becomes grounded in a deep appreciation. And the way we show our gratitude is by dedicating the best and the first to G-d through the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon Haben*, of redeeming a first-born son, and through the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*.

Gratitude is at the heart of Jewish identity. The word "Jew" comes from the word "Yehudi", derived from the name "Yehuda", Leah's fourth son. When she gave birth to Yehuda, she said, "I will give thanks to G-d." As Jews, we know that everything we have, every blessing we enjoy, comes from our creator.

And so, as we mark Yom Ha'atzmaut this year, as we look back with satisfaction on all of the immense achievements of the past 73 years, our hearts are filled with gratitude and appreciation to G-d for His blessings

that have made it all possible.

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, is famous for having said, "In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles." G-d's miracles have accompanied the birth, growth, and development of the state of Israel throughout these 73 years. From the great military victories and economic



and technological achievements, to the miraculous rebuilding of *yeshivot* and Torah learning on a grand scale beyond the wildest dreams of those who saw the destruction of these institutions in the Holocaust, the

Jewish people have established, with G-d's blessing, a thriving state in spite of all odds. Israel has, with divine help, continuously defied the natural order of things.

This Yom Ha'atzmaut, as we once again declare our historic connection to the land and celebrate all that our

beloved state of Israel has miraculously accomplished, let us do so with deep gratitude and unabashed pride – and through this, let us unleash abundant divine blessings for many more years of greatness.

SA's unique connection to Israel makes Israelis feel at home

YOSEF KAUFMANN

Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut are generally tough days for Israelis in the diaspora as it isn't easy to experience them properly thousands of kilometres away from Israel.

But in South Africa, many Israelis say it's easier.

"The first few years in South Africa, I was amazed at how similar Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut felt to how it is in Israel," says Israeli ambassador Lior Keinan. "I made a point of visiting different communities and schools on Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut. It felt so familiar. They played the same songs and danced the same dances. It was a relief."

Liat Amar Arran, the local Jewish Agency representative and the director of the Israel Centre, agrees. When she moved here, she thought these particular days would be when she would be most needed with her "personal stories and sense of connection" with Israel. "Instead, I met a community that was already strongly connected and was very involved in commemorating and celebrating Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut. It was amazing."

For South African Jewry, Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut showcase their connection with Israel.

"Yom Hazikaron is an incredibly important day when we commemorate those who fell protecting Israel. Without those who have given their lives to keep *am Yisrael* [the people of Israel] alive, we wouldn't feel protected here in South Africa," says South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Rowan Polovin. "It's really important to realise exactly what the people of Israel have gone through to keep Israel alive."

For Israelis living here, it's a lot more personal.

"Being here on Yom Hazikaron has extra special meaning for me," says Keinan. "I'm fortunate that none of my family has been killed in action. However, one of my best friends who I studied with in high school was killed in the second Lebanon War. Ashi Novik was a South African who moved to Israel. So

now, for me to be an ambassador in South Africa, I can look at the memorial of all the South Africans who paid the ultimate price for Israel, and I see the name of my high school friend. When I light a candle for him personally and all those whose names are on the memorial, I feel like I'm closing the circle.



Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations

I knew him in the past, and now I'm here honouring his memory."

Habonim Dror Southern Africa shaliach Lior Agiv says learning to appreciate Yom Hazikaron has been a process.

"As a young child, these days of Zikaron and Atzmaut always seemed to be something amorphous. Hearing my father's stories of all the wars he had taken part in, watching these series and movies on TV, it all remained a bit abstract. As I grew up and my army chapter was getting closer, I started to wonder more about the meaning of these days.

"All these feelings grew much stronger after my army days near Ramallah. Since then, every year, no matter where I'm located, I honour these days by lighting a *neshama* candle for my fallen friends and try to deepen my knowledge of our wars and fallen ones."

Batya Shmueli, also a shaliach in South Africa, says, "I was born on the African continent in Ethiopia, and at the age of 11, my family fulfilled our dream of returning to Jerusalem. Returning to Africa as an Israeli to do a mission with my family is closing a huge circle. We will connect with our brothers and sisters and remember the loved ones who fell and sacrificed their lives in various wars for the sake of the people of Israel and future

generations," she says.

"Independence Day is a day in which we stop for a moment and look at the fact that we have a state and a home for the Jewish people," she says.

Arran says that everyone in Israel knows someone who has been killed, which is why

Yom Hazikaron is felt so keenly. "My good childhood friend, Ariel, was killed in the army," she says. "My brother-in-law lost his entire unit in a helicopter crash. Everyone knows someone that has been killed."

Lee Salama, a Habonim shaliach in Cape Town, says, "In officer boot camp in the IDF [Israel Defense Forces], we have a saying, 'We have to realise that in order for us to be able to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut, there were people who had to die.' And then we have this beautiful transition to Yom Ha'atzmaut and celebrating life."

Says Polovin, "Yom Ha'atzmaut is an incredible celebration of everything Israel has accomplished in its very short 73 years. No matter where you look, Israel is a 'light to the nations' showing the way. Whether it's technology, medical advancements, or even showing the world how to recover and rebuild from the coronavirus pandemic, Israel is at the head of the pack."

Says Keinan, "The beauty of going straight from the sombre day of Yom Hazikaron to the happy day of Yom Ha'atzmaut shows us that from great pain and sorrow can come the greatest joy. The suffering and pain, and the joy and celebration, are really just two sides of the coin."

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What Hunter Biden's memoir tells us about Melissa Cohen, his Jewish wife

IRENE KATZ CONNELLY

There's a lot going on in Hunter Biden's new memoir, *Beautiful Things*.

First and foremost, it's a love letter to Hunter's brother, Beau Biden, who died of brain cancer in 2015. The book starts with a recollection of Beau's last moments, and ends with the 2020 election and the birth of Hunter's son, whom he named after his oldest brother.

It's an unvarnished account of Hunter's years of substance misuse and his behaviour as an addict, and a glimpse inside a political family whose steadfast support of its prodigal son is one of its most compelling qualities.

It's also a brusque dismissal of all concerns about Hunter's involvement in Burisma, a Ukrainian natural-gas producer whose board he joined in 2014 with seemingly no qualification except being the son of America's then vice-president. ("I did nothing unethical, and have never been charged with wrongdoing," is most of what Hunter has to say on the subject.)

And it gives new insight into Melissa Cohen, the South African filmmaker Hunter met at the depths of his addiction and married days later. Since joining the Biden clan in 2019, Melissa has deleted her social media and kept a low public profile – some of her first public appearances came during the inauguration festivities. Here's what *Beautiful Things* told us about her.

She grew up in Johannesburg.

In *Beautiful Things*, Hunter gives us an overview that is perhaps purposefully broad.

As a toddler, he writes, Melissa lived in a "children's home" for a year before being adopted by a Jewish South African family with three sons. He notes that she's fluent in five languages including Italian and Hebrew, and describes his wife as an "activist" and "aspiring documentary filmmaker". Melissa was briefly married to Jewish Los Angelean Jason Landver, and met Hunter just after ending another two-year relationship. On the day of their first date, she'd just returned from visiting her brother to recover from the breakup.

When they met, Hunter was at a breaking point.

In 2019, with Hunter deep in the throes of his cocaine addiction, the Bidens staged an intervention, confronting him at the family home in Delaware. Hunter agreed to check himself into a rehab facility, but as soon as Hallie Biden (Beau's widow, with whom Hunter had a brief relationship) dropped him off in the lobby, he hopped in an Uber and boarded a plane to Los Angeles. There, he lived in a series of hotels, occasionally getting blacklisted for receiving guests in the wee hours of the morning or leaving drug paraphernalia out for staff to see. Any efforts at recovery seemed futile.

"I was a crack addict and that was that," Hunter writes.

At the same time, Rudy Giuliani was

making a series of "unhinged" accusations of corruption over Hunter's involvement with Ukrainian natural-gas producer Burisma. Hunter was worried that his business dealings and inevitable revelations about his drug problem would affect the 2020



Hunter Biden and Melissa Cohen with their son, Beau

Photo: Getty

a plot point in a dramedy about a political scion. Just after getting the boot from the Petit Ermitage, a swanky Los Angeles hotel, and while sitting on the rooftop pool figuring out where to go next, a drunk and high Hunter struck up a conversation with

a group of hipsters, who all seemed to think that he needed to meet one of their friends: Melissa Cohen. Late that night he texted her, asking to meet up for drinks. She countered with an offer to meet for coffee the next morning – but didn't show up until dinnertime.

Hunter describes his first glimpse of Melissa, who arrived with "oversized sunglasses pushed atop her honey-blond hair" as a "bell-ringer". Within a few minutes, he told her she had the same blue eyes as Beau, his brother. Then, he announced he was in love with her. An hour later, he confessed to his drug addiction.

Melissa, according to his recollection, was unfazed. "Not anymore," she said. "You're finished with that."

She helped him to kick the addiction.

Beautiful Things details a slew of rehab programmes that never quite worked. Instead, it took Melissa's care to catapult Hunter into his current sobriety. A day after meeting him, she disposed of all his drugs. She confiscated his car keys, wallet, computer, and phone, deleting all contacts

campaign. So, when New York writer Adam Entous called, looking for the truth about the Burisma situation, he saw an opportunity to clear his name and pre-empt future negative press. But interviews for the piece, which turned into a deeply personal profile, became a kind of therapy and, Hunter believes, primed him for a new beginning. "I honestly believe I wouldn't have been capable of seeing Melissa for what she would become to me if I hadn't explored my most meaningful relationships during those interviews."

Melissa ghosted him - sort of.

The Biden-Cohen meet-cute sounds less like an event in the life of a political scion than

except immediate family members. When drug dealers knocked on the door, she "turned to steel" and dispatched them unceremoniously.

After a difficult period of withdrawal – Hunter doesn't specify how long this lasted, but credits Melissa with putting up with "my whining, crying, and scheming" – he slept for three days. On the fourth day, Hunter popped the question "like a trial balloon, light and breezy: 'We should get married!'" That night, the two visited destination tattoo parlour Shamrock Social Club, where Hunter got the tattoo *The Schmooze* can't stop talking about: the word "shalom" inked on his left bicep, which matched one of Melissa's pre-existing tats.

The Bidens welcomed Melissa.

"Shalom" tattoos tend to usher in major life decisions, and the next morning, Hunter and Melissa decided to get hitched – that day. Wedding preparations were slapdash: Hunter located a "marriage shop", and paid its owner to hurry to Melissa's apartment in rush-hour traffic. Yet, he said, there was no sense of haste. "The decision never felt rash or hare brained or reckless. It felt urgent. I felt like I'd been given a reprieve."

Before starting the ceremony, Hunter called his father to give him the news. It was the first time anyone in the family had even heard about Melissa, so we have to give the elder Biden kudos for his poised response. "Thank you for giving my boy courage to love again," he said, echoing the words with which his own grandmother had welcomed Jill Biden into the family.

• This article was originally published on *The Forward*.

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Trauma and forgiveness at heart of new novel

TALI FEINBERG

Johannesburg in the 1970s is the setting of a newly published novel, *We Were the Newmans*, by Beverley Lester, where the quiet innocence of a Highveld spring afternoon is shattered by an unimaginable act of violence in a Jewish family.

Some survive, some don't, and the novel follows ripples of trauma from South Africa to the United Kingdom to Chile and back again, against a South Africa trying to forge a path of healing through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from London, where she lives and practices as psychotherapist, clinical supervisor, and lecturer, Lester says that while such acts of violence in a Jewish family seem almost unheard of, she knows of a number of such atrocities that occurred in Jewish homes while she was growing up in Johannesburg.

"It's not unknown. Some were a result of mental health, some as a result of the loss of affluence. Just because we're Jewish, doesn't mean we aren't safeguarded from intense despair," she says. "For example, in a lot of shuls in London, on the inside of the toilet doors is information for women in case they are being abused. For some, it may be their only moment of safety and privacy to get help. It shows that it can happen anywhere."

This is Lester's first novel, and it centres on the fictional character of Ruth Newman, a teenager growing up in a typical Johannesburg Jewish family. The rhythm of their lives is familiar and ordinary: driving through the Karoo for family holidays, Shabbat dinners where underlying resentments simmer along with the chicken soup, Thursday night supper at the local steakhouse, and what seem like minor

squabbles between parents.

But Ruth is suddenly ripped from that world and spends years in London, where she heals but also becomes a shell of herself. Time in Chile brings her into confrontation with other traumas, and the way women create rituals for healing when family members simply disappear under a despotic regime. But it's when she finally returns to the country of her birth that she faces how much she is willing to forgive.

Lester was born in London and grew up in South Africa and Israel. She studied law in Johannesburg, and worked in publishing

in relation to loss. It's about holding people's stories. Often people struggle with forgiveness and how to move on without bitterness. The book looks at these questions."

In addition, Lester was profoundly affected by a documentary about the TRC that she saw at the cinema a few years ago which included interviews with perpetrators and victims of apartheid. "The lights went up afterwards, the audience was mostly South African, and everyone was sobbing, including me. I couldn't stop crying, and felt overwhelmed with guilt, shame, and confusion about my South African identity."

This feeling of "if only" infuses the novel, where Ruth grows up in sheltered suburbia, coming of age in a space of naiveté while the country burns. Just as the Soweto riots of June 1976 burst a bubble of ignorance, Ruth's own confrontation with reality follows in October 1976, when violence ruptures her happy youth.

Lester says it's no coincidence that she placed the event in 1976. "Those were years of brutality, and the event was very much a response to that environment. The personal is political, and the political is personal."

The characters are richly drawn, and their voices ring authentically true. Lester says she "breathed in" a South African voice during her childhood, which flows onto the page. One character, an elderly black woman named Constance, shares her experience of the TRC in the form of letters, and Lester writes her voice in a way that is real and raw. The author says she was conscious about writing the characters "with integrity".

It's a tough time for writers, Lester says, as some publishers are nervous about authors writing characters that are different to themselves in case of a backlash that they aren't written authentically. But Lester feels it's a shame to force writers to write about only their experiences, believing writing is a way to bridge gaps in understanding each other.

The period that Ruth spends in Chile explores the important role that women play in healing broken societies. For example, the *arpillera* is a tapestry that women made using materials from their missing loved ones' clothes, and the *La Cuenca* is a Latin American couples' dance that women danced on their own, with a photograph of their loved one.

"If we look at the recent murder of [London resident] Sarah Everard, most of the mourning and protest has been driven by devastated women," says Lester. "Women have always found ways to demonstrate, to say, 'Stop, you are destroying us!' Can you arrest a woman for making a tapestry? No, you can't, but they were significant and important forms of storytelling and resistance."

Lester says that while her characters are "hugely damaged", she wanted to "create a feeling that maybe people can get a second chance. If we have compassion for the characters, maybe we can find compassion for ourselves. We don't hear enough about people who have never recovered [mentally] from atrocities like the Holocaust. People and life are complicated."

When it comes to generational trauma, Lester says, "Your history is your history. It gives us our compassion and empathy. I'm hoping that this book is about compassion and recognising the complexity of being human."

• *'We Were the Newmans'* is available on Amazon and Amazon Kindle.

Beverley Lester



in Tel Aviv before settling in the United Kingdom. She is particularly interested in transgenerational trauma. She has written three children's stories and a collection of short stories.

She was motivated to write the book as long as 15 years ago. Reflecting on a friend's early death, she realised she would regret it one day if she didn't give more attention to her writing. Her work as a therapist ties into writing, she says. "Therapy is largely about managing, negotiating, and thinking about ourselves

Demystify death for children

TALI FEINBERG

Death is part of life, yet it remains a taboo topic, especially when it comes to children. Yet, with COVID-19 bringing death to our doorstep, it's vital that parents and children are comfortable with talking about it, says social worker Carin Marcus.

Marcus spoke at a recent event hosted by Nechama Bereavement Services. In introducing her, Nechama Director Rebbetzin Avigail Popack said Marcus had been touched by death from a young age as she lost her father in the Helderberg plane crash. She went on to specialise in counselling in the fields of oncology, palliative care, grief, loss, crisis management, and bereavement.

"We need to demystify death. It's an unavoidable reality," said Marcus. "Instead of seeing death only through the lens of fear and vulnerability, we can see it as an amazing teacher that makes us appreciate life and its impermanence."

The pandemic has been a time of loss and trauma, she said. In addition, games like Fortnite are full of death. It means that children need to have the language to talk about it in a way that suits their developmental stage. "The golden rule is to trust your gut... you know how much information your child can handle."

"Children aren't homogenous. We need to unpack the capacity they have. Children up to the age of two or three don't have the concept of death, but they can pick up on an atmosphere and environment, even if

they don't have the language." This is why it's important to be aware of the atmosphere one creates around these children if someone has died, Marcus said.

These children may experience a "double loss" when they are older and don't have a memory of the person who died when they were a baby or toddler. It means that as adults, we have to develop a "memory" of sorts. The child can still form a relationship with who the person was, even if they are gone.

Children from the ages of three to six start to understand the life cycle, but the world is still magical to them. They may "lack an understanding of permanence. So, if they hear that granny has gone to Hashem, they may still expect her to come back," Marcus said.

Older children have more concrete thinking, and will understand that the person isn't coming back. They may feel grief, displayed in regressive behaviour, separation anxiety, or struggling to sleep. They start to understand the universality of death, that "it can happen to me".

Most adolescents need to be included fully in discussions and rituals around death, as they are at the stage where they need to feel included and are contemplating bigger questions about life and death.

No matter how old the child is, "the information we use must be honest and factual", Marcus said, pointing out that euphemisms often create confusion for children. For example, if you say, "They lost their granny," a child may say, "Well, why don't they just go find her?" And if you say,

"Granny's soul is with Hashem," a child may confuse it with sole (the fish). If we say, "She is up in heaven," children may expect to see her in the sky, or when they go on an aeroplane. So, we must be careful with the language we use. "Even for adults, it's hard to use the proper words, but we need to do so," Marcus said.

We must use moments of life and death to develop skills. For example, if the child's school has a farmyard and a rabbit dies, instead of rushing to replace it so children don't notice, use the moment to acknowledge feelings and develop a ritual around death. Looking at the seasons and nature – the way leaves fall off the trees, or how animals and pets die – are also ideal opportunities to discuss the impermanence of life.

Even though it's scary, parents need to impress on their children that no question is out of bounds. In addition, let children guide you in how much information you give them. "It's like building a Lego city – one block at a time. As they develop, they will learn more."

Parents need to be role models and show that it's okay to cry or grieve, that these are "natural responses to life", explain why they are sad, and that they will be okay.

Parents can describe grief like a wound. At first, it's raw and open, but as time passes, it heals – the scar is still there, but it's less painful. They can also explain the idea of the body and the soul by putting their hand in a glove – when the hand leaves the glove, the soul has left the body. In explaining death, give factual information about how

the body shuts down and no longer works and that they cannot come back to life.

It's also important to explain what a cemetery is, and to emphasise that it's a serene place, unlike the scary cemeteries depicted in stories or films. When it comes to funerals, explain to children what will happen, and leave it up to them to decide if they want to attend. If not, there should be no guilt.

It's meaningful to allow children to describe heaven as they imagine it, Marcus said, and this can evolve as they get older. It's also important to engage children in rituals of remembering. In addition, if their friend has had a family member who has died, it's important to emphasise that they shouldn't be scared of that child.

One of the hardest moments as a parent is when a child asks, "Will you die?" The best way to respond to this is that everyone dies, Marcus said, "but I hope to live long, and I'm trying to stay healthy so that I can". It's also vital to assure a child that death is never their fault. An even harder moment is when a child asks if they will die, or says that they don't want to die. "You can promise that you will do everything to help them be healthy and live a long life. Help them focus on the present, and the fact that

they will achieve all their dreams."

Sometimes, people want to wait to tell a child that someone has died, Marcus said, but the risk is that someone else might tell them – and in the wrong way. Rather, "try not to delay, but find the right moment. In therapy, people often say they never forget how they were told someone had died. It's a moment they hold onto, and it's very painful if it's not by a person you trust."

While adults often feel they are "drowning in grief", children are more resilient and "jump in and out of puddles" of sadness. "I always think of life like the Shabbat box that the kids bring home on a Friday and return on a Monday. We need to treat life like that. It's a gift, but we're eventually going to give it back. So treasure it while we have it."

Carin Marcus



Lockdown opens world stage for determined teen

TALI FEINBERG

Like many other teens, 15-year-old student Jevan Sifrin found himself with too much time on his hands under the hard lockdown last year. But instead of spending endless hours watching Netflix, he decided to use the time to improve his fitness.

That little decision has led to astounding opportunities, showing that committing to a goal can take you places you never imagined.

"Jevan went from being bored to being selected to attend an acting programme in New York or Los Angeles this year, and potentially setting off to New York for modelling and acting next year as well," says his mother Taryn Sifrin.

He started working out during lockdown because "I had been playing rugby at school and at Pirates Rugby Club, and I was motivated to work out to become bigger and do better at rugby after lockdown. I also had a lot of time on my hands," he says.

"Jevan starting training with calisthenics. We helped to equip a home gym for him, and he trained for hours every day, totally self-motivated," says Taryn. "Calisthenics is training using your own body weight, and anyone can do it, anywhere," says Jevan.

"He decided to start an Instagram account featuring his training and fitness videos, and was eventually noticed by a scout for talent agency 33 & Me in Illovo.

"We scheduled a meeting for January when we were back from holiday. They were so impressed with his interview and look, they signed him up immediately and scheduled his first portfolio photoshoot," says Taryn.

"It was there that he was noticed by Elsubie Verlinden, who is a director at the agency, and she suggested that he audition before directors of the New York Film Academy and apply to attend their summer holiday acting programme in July/August. He had a great audition, and we were informed that he had got into the programme and can choose to attend either in Los Angeles or New York. We have applied for New York. This is a huge

achievement, and we are so grateful to Elsubie for arranging his audition."

"It's a three-week acting programme taught by lecturers who have taught many famous graduates in the field," says Jevan.

He has also been accepted to perform in the International Art Talent Showcase in September, which is judged by a large panel of influential people mainly from New York. If he makes it through that, he will be back in New York in June next year for acting and modelling.

"I would never have imagined that

working out during lockdown would've taken me this route," says Jevan. "The first goal was to train for rugby, then aim to become a Navy Seal one day, or to go international with my calisthenics training. I would never have believed it would take me on the modelling and acting path."

Fitting in training isn't easy for a busy teen, but he makes it a priority. His daily routine begins with a cold shower, a healthy nourishing breakfast, and then he goes to school. He does most of his homework at

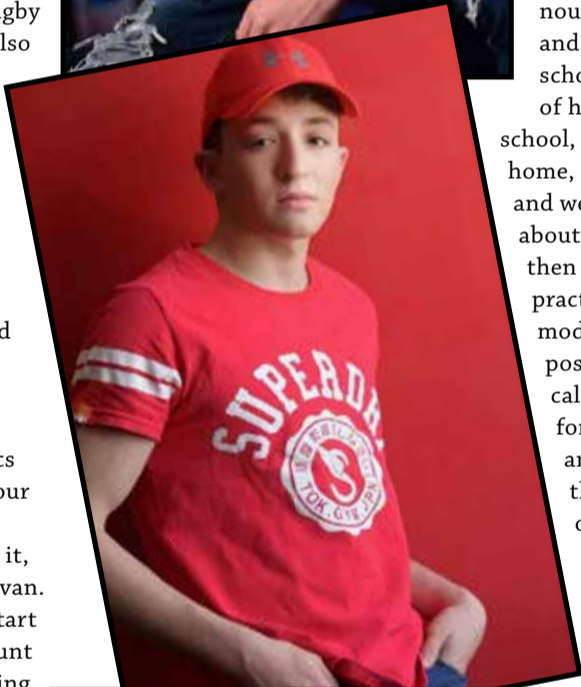
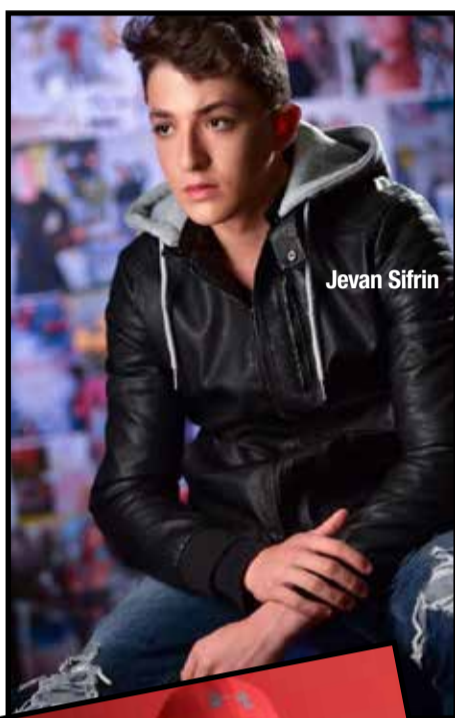
school, so when he comes home, he can eat lunch and weight train for about two hours. He then researches and practices monologues, model walks, and poses. Then he does calisthenics and goes for a run for about an hour. "Most of the auditions are online these days, which helps save time," Jevan says. "I can catch up school work on the weekends."

His audition with the New York Film Academy "was nerve wracking and scary", he says, "but I thrived under the pressure, and did my best. Normally, directors come out here from New York to interview potential candidates, but this year, we had to do it on Zoom. I'm hoping to be able to get to New York to attend the course in person, but if not, I'll be able to do it online."

His ultimate goal is to attend the New York Film Academy after school, learn all about film and the entertainment

industry, and hopefully be able to play his dream role, the Joker.

His advice to other teens wanting to reach similar goals is "to work harder than others, do the same thing every day – eat, train, and focus the same way every single day. If done for hours consistently, it will bring success."



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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Yom Hashoah 2021 shows our ability to adapt



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

been able to ensure not only the continuation of normal communal activities, but if anything, an improvement in their quality and reach. It bodes well for our ability to meet and overcome whatever future challenges our community will face.

More underhanded malice from BDS

At a time when South Africans perhaps more than ever need to work together in addressing the many urgent issues confronting our society, certain fringe groups continue to push radical ideological agendas at the expense of the country as a whole. They include the various BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions)-oriented groups, which never lose an opportunity to sow conflict and division in order to spread hatred against Israel and its supporters. This week, we saw yet another instance of this when the South African BDS Coalition came out with a demand that a Jewish candidate for appointment to the Constitutional Court be rejected because of his association with the SAJBD. As the Board is the elected representative of South African Jewry, and since the vast majority of Jews roundly reject the rabidly anti-Israel BDS ideology, this is tantamount to calling for Jews to be excluded from public office in South Africa.

In our response, we criticised this self-evidently bigoted, discriminatory, and totalitarian initiative. We are nevertheless confident that all those genuinely committed to our country's democratic, non-racial values will reject with contempt this latest attempt by BDS to sow division and hatred in our society.

- Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM every Friday, from 12:00 to 13:00.

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

Vaccination needs reality infusion



INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

I'm generally enthusiastic about whatever it is that I do. I'm either putting on weight or losing it. I'm never maintaining it. I'm either building up in order to run 10km or I'm at risk of suffering from bed sores. I either read two books a week, or I finish Netflix. A balanced, measured, healthy approach might be an aspiration, in theory.

But I'm as unlikely to achieve balance as I am to become an astronaut.

Which makes my current approach to events in South Africa challenging for me. I'm inherently positive. I prefer to live surrounded by joy and humour, and actively remove negativity from my universe. So much so, that I wrote a book called *Smile Dammit!*, which is a personal exploration into learned optimism.

And yet, repeatedly over the past few weeks, I have been accused of being "too negative" and "unhelpful" as a result of my predictions regarding the COVID-19 vaccine roll out.

In early February, I wrote an article, "Doomed to failure", in which I explained why the strategy was unlikely to succeed. In essence, my concern was:

- Few trust the process or the government. We tried to trust. When COVID-19 hit South Africa, we believed the president when he said that there would be no stealing and looting of funds. Because he looked sincere and tired, it meant that he meant it. Only he didn't. We bought into it for a while. But not anymore.
- Lack of successful examples. Try as we might, it's impossible to find an example to use. Eskom, South African Airways, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the post office, are some failures. Try as they might, it's virtually impossible to find an African National Congress success story.
- Simply too big a job. It's not all about the

money. It's a massive job that requires significant planning, logistics, and buy in.

The answer, I suggested, was simple. Get everyone involved. Open up negotiation and acquisition of the vaccines to those who know the business. The private hospital groups, the pharmacies, doctors, and medical aids. Share the load, ease the burden, and let South Africans receive the vaccine through whichever channel they can get it. Regulate it, and demand a one-for-one or even one-for-two rule, in which for each vaccine gained by the private sector, one or two are required for the more vulnerable.

Since I wrote that article, less than 300 000 people have received the jab.

It's not that I'm attracted to negativity. On the contrary, I believe in seeing the positive in a situation. I believe in the joy of the moment, of the magnificence in minutiae. Of the celebration of each day that brings with the dawn infinite possibility and opportunity.

But delusion optimism can be dangerous if it means not holding government to account and pretending that its version of events is acceptable.

Less than 300 000 South Africans vaccinated is nothing to be proud of. And we cannot pretend that it is.

I haven't turned towards negativity. I haven't embraced pessimism. Not by any means. But I also cannot pretend that the vaccine vial is half full when there isn't one.

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Beth Din works to make Pesach "lesstressingmoreblessing"



OPINION

RABBI DOVI GOLDSTEIN

The kosher department spends nearly six months of the year planning for Pesach and making certifications.

This year was particularly challenging with the sad and untimely passing of Rabbi Desmond Maizels in Cape Town. His care and knowledge added much to South African kashrut for many decades.

Various products available all over the country are manufactured in Cape Town. With the help of the Cape Town kosher team, we ensure that the highest standards are kept, and all essential items that the community needs are made available across the country.

This year, we launched a #lesstressingmoreblessing campaign, which we hoped would help make everyone's preparation ahead of Pesach a little easier. We shared our expanded Green List, which is a list of products that don't require a special Pesach *hechsher*.

We all know how expensive this time of year is and unfortunately, it's costly for companies to manufacture Pesach items. In many cases – locally and internationally – the ingredients need to be changed, and factories often need to be closed for at least 24 hours to kosher production lines.

Furthermore, runs are often done in small batches and in most cases, production is done under the direct supervision of a mashgiach. We do what we can to research products all year round to add to our Green List to make it easier and more cost-effective to keep Pesach.

We then shared some delicious recipes from Romi Rabinowitz. Next, we created and shared helpful videos on kashering some of the latest kitchen appliances, which also enabled the community to meet some of the kosher team. Most importantly, we extended the hours of

our kosher desk hotline to answer all the community's questions.

Pick n Pay again printed our Pesach Guide, and innovated by placing a variety of Pesach-specific products on its Bottles app. This is something we hope to expand in the future.

What's most important to us is community feedback. After Pesach, we reached out to the community via a survey, and got just less than 800 responses.

Here are the most pertinent:

- Most of the community was happy with the product range available this year;
- They prefer to buy locally-made products as it keeps costs down;
- More than two-thirds of the community felt that the kosher department gave them useful information this year;
- The Green List was found to be the most useful information shared;
- There is a range of locally produced items that people would like to see available next year, namely: Orley Whip, sweets, cold drinks, diet drinks, chocolates, spices and sauces; and
- Many expressed appreciation for our team, which we are grateful for.

The survey is now closed, so if you didn't have the opportunity to respond to it, we invite you to contact us directly with your feedback.

We are grateful to everyone who completed the survey. We value the feedback and, with the positive and useful information given, we have already begun to plan for Pesach 2022. We hope we will keep you #lesstressingmoreblessing.

• Rabbi Dovi Goldstein is the kosher managing director at the Beth Din.



JOURNALIST

The *SA Jewish Report* is looking for a phenomenal journalist passionate about writing news, investigative journalism, and following up on quirky, unusual stories related to the Jewish community.

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You need to have a good Wi-Fi connection as for now, it's a work-from-home position. You also need a drivers' licence and the use of a car.

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UJW announces winners of mobile meals donation drive

Jane Klein won first prize in the Union of Jewish Women's Kosher Mobile Meals (KMM) Donate and Win Pesach Appeal – a three-night stay at Savanna Private Game Reserve valued at R75 000. The prizes were awarded by the UJW outside Kosher Pie Works in Sandringham on 6 April. KMM supplies cooked meals to 110 mostly elderly and often very lonely members of the community who are unable to cook for themselves. These meals, packed and delivered by volunteers once a week, are made possible by donations and fundraising initiatives. Second prize went to Melanie Burman; third prize to Ann Smith; fourth prize was won by Yvonne Rimer; and fifth prize went to Shelly Stein.



First prize winner, Jane Klein

Yeshiva appoints new pre-primary school principal

After a rigorous search, Yeshiva College has announced the appointment of Morah Janna Kirkel as principal of Yeshiva Pre-Primary School. The school wishes Kirkel much *hatzlacha* and *brocha* in her new position, confident that she will take it to new heights.



Morah Janna Kirkel

KDL remembers fallen Israeli soldiers and civilians



In a moving Yom Hazikaron ceremony, King David High School Linksfield on 14 April commemorated the fallen soldiers of all the wars in Israel and those who lost their lives to terrorism. May their memories be a blessing.

Deputy head student leader Samara Jay takes part in King David High School Linksfield's Yom Hazikaron ceremony

Promoting tolerance through Holocaust talk

Rabbi Ilan Herrmann of Soul Workout Shul spoke to the pupils of Tshiriletso School in Soweto on Yom Hashoah about World War II, focusing on the Holocaust and encouraging understanding and tolerance. The school's principal, Ghardy Mokgethi, said teachers would reiterate the message of the Holocaust and tolerance in the days ahead.



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