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Hatzolah heroes on the frontline

NICOLA MILTZ

It was Hatzolah medical manager and advanced life support (ALS) responder Yudi Singer's birthday this week. Instead of blowing out birthday candles and spending the day with his wife Jade and their new-born son, Gilad, he was risking his life attending to countless COVID-19-related and other medical emergencies.

As the number of positive cases continues to soar in the community, Hatzolah despatchers and responders face seemingly insurmountable challenges which they deal with no matter the risks to themselves mentally and physically.

"The challenges every day are immense," said Singer, 32, "Most people are running and hiding away from the danger that lurks, but we walk straight into it."

"It's a battle we haven't fought before. There's a lot of risk. I might be going into a call that kills me. It's a difficult time to be working. It's like something out of a movie. COVID-19 is like walking into a death trap," he says of the situation he and his fellow Hatzolah paramedics are dealing with.

"Right now, we don't even know where to take our next patient as the hospitals are so full."

This is an unprecedented time in the lives of these forward-thinking and fast-acting paramedics whose lives have changed dramatically since the start of the pandemic.

Every shift from sunset to sunrise

(18:00 to 06:00) is relentlessly long, hard, and unpredictable, full of anomalies, surprises, and twists and turns. At the time of going to press on Wednesday, Hatzolah recorded 258 active COVID-19 cases, 106 new cases since Friday, and 140 closed cases.

Singer, who works 24-hour long shifts, said one of the main challenges was to treat patients while wearing full personal protective equipment (PPE). "We look and feel like aliens," he said, "It's so hot underneath all that PPE, we battle to see through the protective eyewear, we struggle to hear patients through the masks, the visors, and all the headgear. It's hard to work wearing two sets of gloves."

"My equipment and jump bag probably weighs between 20kg to 30kg, and then there are the extras like oxygen, ECG monitor, and drug bag, which all add up to about 50kg," said Singer.

But worst of all is the lack of human touch and real eye contact in a situation where it's become almost impossible to provide empathy and humanity in a moment where patients are truly petrified.

"We can't connect with our patients on a deep and meaningful level like we are used to. It's so unnatural. We can't touch them, or offer a hug, or even hear them through their sobs. We are used to working in close proximity to our patients, and now we are at a distance. They can't see our smiles, it's heartbreaking. A lot of what we do at Hatzolah is comforting patients by offering just a knowing



Hatzolah paramedics
help each other
prepare for a medical
emergency

smile or touch. People often break down when they see us, and now it's so hard to comfort them wearing all this stuff."

Even more distressing is knowing that for some spouses, especially the elderly, it might be the last time they see their loved ones as they are whisked off to hospital in an ambulance.

"When we arrive, for some patients, it's the last time they see the people they love. This is really hard for us," said Singer.

"The truth is I love what I do, the risks are worth the rewards. Helping people during the worst moment in their life and making a difference keeps us all going," said Singer, one of three full-time ALS responders.

"The number of respiratory and high infection calls have dramatically increased in the past two months with call volumes rising daily," said Executive General Manager Darren Kahn. "Our motto is 'Hatzolah cares'. Our main role is to care for people within the community who need our help, 24 hours, seven days a week."

Hatzolah has nine full-time responders and three full-time despatchers, Kahn says. There are a further 50 volunteer responders and 23 volunteer despatchers. There are 31 volunteers in the crisis response unit who are trained counsellors offering psychological first aid to patients needing emotional and mental support during the pandemic. Once a shift has been completed,

the paramedics can take up to an hour and a half to decontaminate their vehicles, adding extra time to an already exhausting shift.

Talya Chemel, a physiotherapist in private practice, is a volunteer despatcher for Hatzolah. She receives the calls at home, assesses them, and sends ambulances in emergencies. "People are anxious and overwhelmed," she says. "Many are just worried and confused, scared, and they need to talk to someone while they are isolated and alone."

Her 12-hour shift begins at 18:00, after a long working day. She works from home with calls diverted to her at any time of the night. "My heart beats fast as I lie in bed with my eyes closed in a light sleep waiting for the calls to break the silence," she said.

It's not unusual to be jolted by calls at 02:00 from frightened patients struggling to breathe. Immediately she springs into action.

"People call at the worst moment in their life when they are totally freaked out. It's impossible to help when they are screaming. My job is to get them to calm down to get life-saving information. It's difficult for people to tell me the most basic information like a street address when they are in a panic."

"The first thing I tell them is, 'Take a deep breath, and let me help you. Trust me to hold your hand [over the phone of course] and let me walk you through this nightmare.'"

Lately, calling hospitals to secure a bed in intensive care is a challenge as

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ISIS could inspire ‘lone wolf’ attack in SA

TALI FEINBERG

The terror organisation ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) has warned South Africa not to go to Mozambique’s aid in response to the vicious attacks its armed fighters have been carrying out against civilians in the north-eastern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado since 2017. ISIS made this warning in a newsletter to its followers, and a local terror expert believes it could potentially inspire a “lone wolf” attack within our borders.

Jasmine Opperman, a terrorism analyst at The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), says, “What we are left with now is an echo chamber of propaganda from ISIS trying to inspire attacks within South Africa’s borders, which leaves the question: are we in a position to protect South Africans citizens on home soil if we are going to be confronted with a lone wolf attack?

“This question must be answered by the government security sector as a matter of urgency,” she says. She is part of ACLED’s Cabo Ligado project in partnership with Zitamar News, Mediafax, and the International Crisis Group, which monitors political violence in Mozambique. The ISIS letter reads, “Before the Crusader states in Europe and America decide to send their forces there [Mozambique] and make that area a new field for the war on the Islamic State ... they are trying today to get the South Africa government and its army involved in leading the war there, because of its proximity and strong relations with the Mozambique government.” It went on to say, “But South Africa has enough internal problems to push it towards getting involved in this war that will place it in a great financial, security, and military predicament, and may result in prompting [causing a hastening of] the soldiers of the Islamic State to open a fighting front inside its

borders! By the permission of G-d Almighty.” A high-level meeting in May of the security body of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) pledged assistance for government efforts to eliminate the threat. “On 26 June, the SADC made progress toward agreement on an assistance package for Mozambique to address the Cabo Delgado conflict that would include provisions for military deployments from some member countries,” says Opperman. “Details are sparse, but the agreement would



Soldiers from the Mozambican army on patrol amid rising Islamist attacks

be tangible progress toward greater regional involvement in the conflict. The deployments themselves, however, may be mere window dressing, as one SADC expert pointed out. SADC has no in-house capacity or budget to organise military interventions, and the Mozambican government itself has been reluctant to allow troops under foreign control into the conflict zone and has been dragging its feet.” “South Africa is already involved in the conflict through its Dyck Advisory Group,” Opperman says. “This is a private military consulting group [known as mercenaries], based in Cape Town. It’s involved in counter-terrorism operations in Mozambique, supporting the Mozambique government by means of air support.” Furthermore, according to *defenceWeb*, the South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee has approved the supply of weapons to Mozambique, according to a

report tabled at a meeting of parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Defence at the end of June by committee chair Jackson Mthembu, the minister in the presidency. Mthembu confirmed that South Africa supplied weapons to Mozambique, but didn’t disclose what they were or the quantities. “We couldn’t say no to Mozambique as it’s a legitimate government under attack by terrorists,” he said, referring to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado province. “It may not be long before the power of the Islamic State threat toward other countries in the region is tested,” says Opperman. She pointed out that ISIS doesn’t make a distinction between the Dyck Advisory Group and South Africa as a whole. “South Africa’s involvement is only likely to expand, and that has consequences. “For the first time in southern Africa, we have Islamic State in its most violent form. We need to acknowledge this. We need an intelligence service that can put it into context and assist the government in understanding the implications of Islamic State for South Africa.” Senior Training Co-ordinator at the Institute for Security Studies, Willem Els, says that people become radicalised when they feel neglected and have nothing to lose, and conditions are conducive in South Africa

Continued on page 3>>

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:13	18:05	Johannesburg
17:35	18:30	Cape Town
16:54	17:47	Durban
17:15	18:08	Bloemfontein
17:06	18:01	Port Elizabeth
16:59	17:54	East London

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episode that in G-d’s world, when one sees something it isn’t an accident, and one should ask, “What can I do about it?” The convenient thing is to walk away, or shrug our shoulders, or hope that someone else might take care of the situation. Living consciously with the question of “Why am I here?” means recognising the impetus to action. It applies to so many areas. Here’s another angle. Rabbi Mordechai of Neschiz waited for many months to get wool from Israel with which to make a pair of Tzitzit. Finally it arrived. He asked his student to make up the garment. The student carelessly folded the garment twice, and cut a hole where the head would be placed. As he unfolded it, to his horror, there were two holes. Upon seeing this, instead of being enraged, Rabbi Mordechai said, “This piece of cloth was meant to have two holes. One for my head, and one to test me to control my anger.”

Torah Thought

Providence and living consciously

There is a constant interplay between divine providence and freewill in our lives. This is active not passive. It’s not co-incidence or happenstance. It means that there is meaning and purpose to the situations we are placed in, and we can (and should) ask, “Why am I here, and what must I do?” This is a logical response. It applies particularly when something of a moral circumstance arises. To better appreciate this, we must go to an episode of Noah. Noah had become paralytically inebriated, and was naked. The Torah says that Cham, his son, saw his father’s nakedness while the other two sons, Shem and Yefes, didn’t. They walked in towards Noah facing backwards so as not to see his nakedness, and then covered him. Cham here illustrates not living consciously with the question of, “Why am I here, and what must I do?”

Shem and Yefes, however, do so, and demonstrate this idea perfectly. They recognise that they are placed in a situation, and there is something to be done that is a moral duty. Instead of using the situation for their own personal satisfaction (as did Cham, indulging in his father’s nakedness), or by shrugging their shoulders and moving on, they acknowledge the providence in their being there, and respond to the challenge presented. This idea is again clearly demonstrated in this week’s portion, as Pinchas sees the openly brazen immoral act taking place amidst the camp by Prince Zimri of the tribe of Shimon as he cohabits with the Midyanite woman, Kozbi. Pinchas notices that no-one has acted against this, and after calling out the problem to Moses and realising the paralysis of others, he takes action for which he is lauded, praised, and rewarded. He becomes the only person in history not born as a Kohen to be granted priesthood. The Rebbe has taught of the Pinchas

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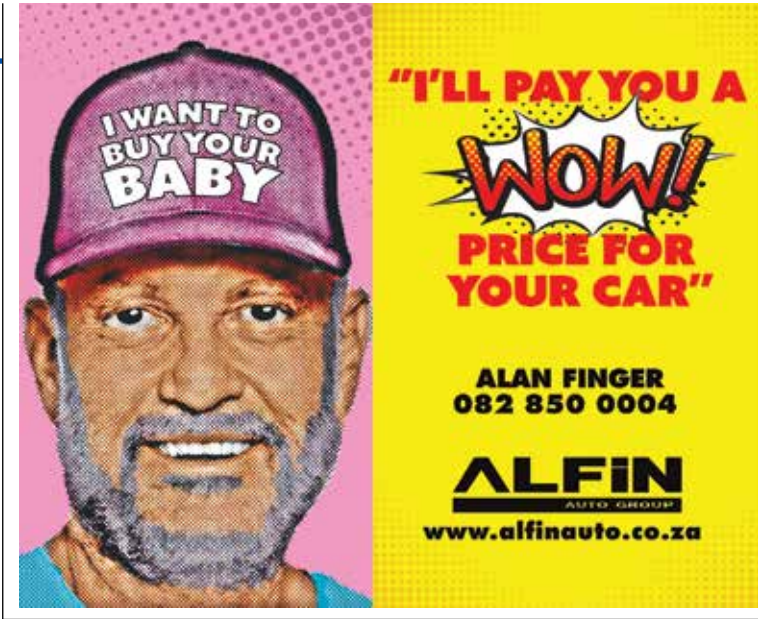
Christians criticise ‘onslaught’ against chief justice

JORDAN MOSHE

Religious Christian communities across South Africa have declared their unwavering support for Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng’s right to express his religious convictions. They join an increasing groundswell of voices that have defended South Africa’s unapologetic chief justice in the days following his comments in support of Israel.

grossly negligent breaches of the code of judicial conduct” in that he has become involved in political controversy. It says further that he has failed to recuse himself from the ongoing case of Bongani Masuku, a hate-speech matter involving the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, stating there is “reasonable suspicion” of bias. The submission also suggests that the chief justice has otherwise behaved in a manner “incompatible with or unbecoming of the holding

harbours no hate for anyone, and has only love for Jews and Palestinians alike. “I love everybody,” he said. “I love Israel. I love the Jews. I love Palestine. I love the Palestinians. I love everyone, and don’t hate anybody. I am commanded to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. “People who want to tell me what to pray for – how can you condemn me for asking G-d for peace?” The chief justice even extended his love to those condemning him for his comments, saying that those



“Thank you for not choosing convenience over principle, hatred over love,” he said. “Those who have prayed for me, Israel, South Africa, and the whole world, thank you for resisting intimidation by the enemy. Thank you for your boldness.” Religious Christian leadership representing millions of Christians across South Africa have spoken out strongly in support of the chief justice, and criticised those who condemn him.

“The chief justice is a South African first,” said Congress of the People General Secretary Papi Kganare at Friday’s virtual protest. “As such, he has right to freedom of speech and belief. When he took office, he stated very clearly that he is a Christian, and no one objected to him being chief justice and Christian. “He isn’t an employee of government. Not all South Africans are obliged to agree with the position the government has taken on Israel. The government has been inconsistent in how it handles other countries like Zimbabwe, Sudan, and the Ivory

Coast where human rights are concerned. We believe it must be consistent and cannot pick and choose where it cries foul.” Similarly, Dr Zwelakhe Elija Mthethwa of the Mthethwa tribe in KwaZulu-Natal, said that the ruling ANC had failed in its duty to the Christian population. “Mogoeng must stand his ground, and we will mobilise all South Africans,” he said. “Clearly, our ruling party has failed the people of South Africa, and is very clear about its position on the Palestinians at the expense of the people of this country.” Archbishop Mbulelo Mvubu, the founder of the Council of Churches South Africa International, said that the South African government had missed an opportunity to mediate between Israel and Palestine. “Instead, our government has taken sides rather than promoting peace and cannot be impartial,” he said. “We support the chief justice. One cannot separate Palestine from Israel. As a South African, Mogoeng has every right to express his views and talk out as a Christian.”



COPE General Secretary Papi Kganare



Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng



Pastor Barry Isaacs

“We are connected to Israel in so many ways, and salute the chief justice and pray for him,” said Capetonian pastor Barry Isaacs in a virtual march held in support of Mogoeng on Friday. “He has been faced with an onslaught from government, and we have decided we won’t be silenced and will not allow this to happen. The time has come for Christians to stand up, and speak out. “Mogoeng has not violated the Constitution in any way, but I think the government has.” Beyond the criticism of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Economic Freedom Fighters, pro-Palestinian group #Africa4Palestine has submitted an official complaint to South Africa’s Judicial Services Commission (JSC) against the chief justice for what it calls his “Israeli utterances”. The complaint was drafted by a senior legal team including advocate Ben Winks, advocate Sheldon Magardie, attorney Yasin Bham, and additional senior counsel from the Johannesburg Bar. Their submission argues that Mogoeng has committed “wilful or

of judicial office”. #Africa4Palestine maintains that Mogoeng has shown himself to be biased and in solidarity with “Zionists and Zionism”, and demands that he recuse himself from the ongoing Masuku case. If his conduct is found to be improper, the organisation requests that the JSC “send an unequivocal message, both to other judges and the public, that such conduct is unacceptable”. In spite of censure from government and the legal submission against him, Mogoeng remains unrepentant over his expressions, and has refused to retract any of his comments or issue any apology. “I will not reject my G-d,” he said in an online prayer conference held on Friday. “I will not apologise for believing in my G-d. I will not apologise for being a Christian. I will not apologise for prayer. I will not apologise for holding on to the word of G-d. I will never. “Even if 50 million people can march every day for the next 10 years, for me to retract and apologise for what I said, I will not do it.” Mogoeng stressed that he

who are “plotting against him” are already forgiven. “Everyone insulting me, lying about me, Christian or not, I love you and forgive you,” he said. “May G-d have mercy on you. “There will, therefore, be no retraction. There is nothing to retract. There will be no apology, not even this political apology that ‘in case I have offended anybody without meaning to offend them’. I will not apologise for anything. There is nothing to apologise for. There is nothing to retract. I can’t apologise for loving. I can’t apologise for not harbouring hatred and bitterness. I will not.” Mogoeng also thanked those who have expressed support for him.

ISIS could inspire ‘lone wolf’ attack in SA

>>Continued from page 2 for ordinary citizens to take up the call of ISIS. “The more desperate people become, the easier it is for them to be recruited. Government needs to be very careful in preventing this,” Els says. ISIS doesn’t “send official notice” of such threats, but uses social media to make attacks happen, he says. It has made such threats to other countries and attacks have taken place. “It’s credible, and South Africa would be unwise not to prepare. The threat is there if South Africa gets further involved [in Mozambique]. “SADC [members] should assist each other as a collective in pushing back militant forces,” says Darren

Bergman, the Democratic Alliance shadow minister of international relations and cooperation. “Timing currently favours the opportunists [terrorists exploiting the climate]. It’s at a time like this that you hope bodies established to lobby on behalf of minorities are awake and vigilant. “South Africa has crime statistics that terrorism might not dent, but it’s important to understand that this sort of terrorism isn’t specific to any community, it could affect many communities. The name of the game here would be awareness, vigilance, and community networks.”



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The long shadow of gender-based violence

TALI FEINBERG

“We like to believe there’s no gender-based violence in our community – that Jewish husbands, wives, parents, and professionals don’t abuse. However, abuse is alive and well in the Jewish community in South Africa and around the world. We aren’t immune.”

These are the words of Rozanne Sack, one of a multitude of experts and survivors speaking at a *SA Jewish Report* webinar on 1 July, which unpacked the long-term effect of abuse and how difficult it is to confront it.

Human rights lawyer Professor Bonita Meyersfeld pointed out that one in three women experience gender-based violence – even in our own community. “It’s a low-level civil war. Complicity is 50% of the problem,” she says.

Crossing a line

Sack told her story: “It was a huge shock when I realised that a medical professional, whom I had trusted completely, had crossed a boundary by manipulating me to believe that I needed unnecessary medical examinations which were for his own sexual gratification.

“There were years of ‘grooming’ [a process of manipulation and trust-building that a perpetrator will use to create an atmosphere in which they can abuse someone]. He was my doctor, and I really trusted him. I put him on a pedestal, and never challenged anything he did medically.

“So, when I realised that a boundary had been crossed, it took a long time to decide what to do. It soon became evident that I wasn’t the only one this had happened to. This helped me make the decision to press charges in order to prevent others from the same abuse. By going to the Health Professions Council of South Africa, I trusted that it would uphold the Hippocratic Oath and make the right decision about whether he was fit to continue practicing.”

Accepting that she had been abused was hard, but standing up to it was equally painful. “The whole process took about four years from when it was reported until the council hearing,” she says. Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler and one other woman, who had experienced similar abuse, joined Sack in pressing charges. Hendler and Sack have since founded Koleinu South Africa, a helpline for victims of abuse in the Jewish community that also educates about abuse and advocates for change.

No matter how hard it was for Sack, she encourages others to speak out. “During those four years, the three of us who laid charges had a lot of support from those in the community who knew about the case. However, some prominent

members of the community put pressure on us to drop the case. We were intimidated, told that terrible things would happen to us and our families, and told we were destroying this person’s family and bringing shame to the community. While the support was there, it paled in the face of this onslaught.

“It was even more traumatic to go through this victim-blaming. We were described as hysterical women on a witch hunt, liars, and *moserim* [a Jewish person who reports a fellow Jew to non-Jewish

within a five year period].

“Wendy and I started Koleinu because we experienced first-hand how hard it is for abuse victims in the community to speak up and find support and direction. While our community is doing better, we have a way to go to becoming a safe space for people to come forward. We know people might want such an incident to be dealt with internally within community structures – be it the shul, school, or other organisations – but often that protects the perpetrator and

economic circumstances don’t always allow it. And if they do move away, there’s always the chance they may need to return home, and it’s not worth creating conflict. She says we need deep, systemic changes so that women aren’t beholden to family members that abuse them.

Gender expert Lisa Vetten of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research confirmed that economic circumstances often prevent women and children from escaping violent situations. While some say a woman should find

women in her community don’t talk about gender-based violence. Even her own sisters won’t talk about their violent brother. Yet, if women joined forces, they could have a much bigger impact. She would also like to see the mothers of perpetrators say that they don’t condone what their child has done.

Even winning Miss SA didn’t mask the horror

Another speaker, Miss South Africa Sasha-Lee Laurel Olivier, told the *SA Jewish Report* that at 26, she has the world at her feet, but her life hasn’t been without struggle.

“I was sexually abused from the age of seven until I was 11. I’m grateful I don’t remember much of it, but I remember how it happened the first time. There was definitely grooming, and the person was able to get to me because my parents had just divorced and I wasn’t solely in either parents’ care, but was staying at a relative,” she says. “I know the trauma was bad, or I wouldn’t have got post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. The aftermath is much harder for me than the trauma.”

Even when she achieved her dream of becoming Miss South Africa, a dream she hoped would take her away from that past, she still woke up the next day with the reality that she was a survivor of sexual abuse. “It never leaves you. I understand that as a child, my brain suppressed the trauma because its primary function was growth and survival. It was only when I was in my early 20s that I suffered the full ramifications.”

Today, she knows that her voice and platform can empower other survivors. She believes that the primary way to support a survivor of abuse is to believe in them. They also need to be reminded of their dignity, which is why she is so supportive of the rape comfort kit packs (filled with toiletries and items like a teddy bear, that comfort someone dealing with abuse) that South African publicity guru and activist Penny Stein is working to distribute throughout the country.

“When Penny handed me that pack, and it said, ‘It’s not your fault’, I cried. I’m not a very emotional person, but I needed to read those words.”

Miranda Jordan-Friedmann of Women & Men Against Child Abuse spoke of how such violence begins even before a child is born, for example, those who are conceived as a result of rape. She says these children are the most vulnerable to abandonment or violence, which in turn might make them violent adults, continuing the cycle. “Hurt children hurt other children, and eventually hurt other adults,” she says.

Sipho Marima, a brand ambassador for the Women For Change Run, says men need to take on an activist role – it’s not enough just to be non-violent. He runs the last two kilometres of marathons barefoot as an active symbol of solidarity with abuse survivors, emphasising that turning the tide against gender-based violence in this country is in our hands.

*Not her real name



doesn’t allow for justice to take its course and for victims to be protected. We want all communal organisations to have policies in place to allow abuse to be reported to the correct authorities so that there is clear direction and no room for intimidation.”

Abuse by a sibling

Thumi*, a survivor of gender-based violence, also shared her story. She asked to remain anonymous as she has opened a case against her abuser.

Thumi has been a victim of verbal and physical violence at the hands of her brother since they were children. “I was once in a confrontation with him, and my mother said, ‘He is a man, he will beat you.’ At the time, it didn’t mean much, but now I realise it was showing a boy child that he had every right to beat a woman.”

As shown in the memoir *Educated* by Tara Westover, violence at the hands of a sibling can be extreme, and is bound up in complicated family dynamics.

“The first time I laid charges against my brother, my mother said she would be on his side, and asked how I could put my own brother in jail. I had to drop the case,” Thumi said.

Since then, her mother has realised what’s at stake, and has supported her daughter in opening a new case. However, her initial support for him is still deeply painful.

She says violence in the home is rife in her community. Many can’t report it because they depend on the abuser as a breadwinner, and because it could divide the family. While they may try move away,

authorities]. Learned rabbis have said that *lashon hara* [speaking badly of others] and the concept of the *moser* don’t apply to abuse. Safety is more important. We even had to send a lawyer’s letter to a prominent member of the community to desist from intimidating victims.

“For those four years, I lived with my ‘heart in my throat’. I was often shaky, and some days it was hard to function normally. To this day, I avoid going to doctors. I was always an open and friendly person, very trusting, but now I’m much more wary. This is a heavy price to have paid. If the perpetrator had shown remorse or acknowledged what he had done, it would have helped my healing process, but we never got that.

“The day before the hearing, one of the complainants got death threats. During the hearing, we all endured long cross-examinations which attacked our character. We pushed through, and when the perpetrator was found guilty on all charges of performing acts of a sexual nature on his patients, we felt hugely relieved.

“We were disappointed at the weak sentence [suspended from practicing for one year as long as there were no further complaints

Chev battles as COVID-19 claims more lives

TALI FEINBERG

“We are fighting an invisible enemy, and we are giving it everything we’ve got, but there is only so much that can be done,” says Chevrah Kadisha (Chev) Group Chief Executive Saul Tomson, as two residents in the group’s care facilities who tested positive for COVID-19 died over the past week.

Sam Malbin from Sandringham Gardens and Dorothy Glass from Our Parents Home (OPH), both aged 86, passed away in hospital.

They are two of 34 residents across the Chevrah Kadisha’s six care facilities that have tested positive over the past few weeks as the virus spreads rapidly throughout Gauteng. The group cares for almost 1 000 Jews in these facilities, and has conducted nearly 2 000 COVID-19 tests to date.

“It all happened so fast,” says Glass’ grandson, Chad Nathan. Known as Instagram photographer @gingerwithagopro, Nathan has raised more than half a million rand to help South Africans struggling under lockdown, but the virus still hit the heart of his family. He describes Glass as a glamorous great-grandmother who prized family above all else.

“She had a fall, and then she got pneumonia. She was taken to hospital and put in intensive care (ICU). She had a COVID-19 test the week before that was negative, but then she tested positive. It was extremely difficult for my mom, who wasn’t even allowed to talk to her mother, as phones weren’t allowed in ICU. My gran was put on high doses of oxygen, but after three days, she passed away. We never got to say goodbye.”

He says his family didn’t realise the risks of the virus entering the facility. “If your grandparents are alive, please call them and tell them how much you love them,” he says.

“There’s been no time for tears,” says Sam Malbin’s daughter, Heather Miller. A beloved great-grandfather, he suffered a number of co-morbidities, and it was only 48 hours between his positive diagnosis and his death.

“I last spoke to him on Friday, 26 June, to wish him good Shabbos,” says Miller. He had just been diagnosed as COVID-19-positive, but was doing well. The next night, her sister called to say he was on the way to hospital. By noon the next day, he had passed

away. Miller hopes that he will never be forgotten.

A resident at OPH, Doris Medalie, aged 82, contracted the virus and has since recovered. She describes being delirious, developing a sore throat, a cough, and diarrhoea, and thinking, “This is the end.” In a voice filled with emotion, she says, “I owe the staff at Our Parents Home my life. I could not have got better care.”

“Asymptomatic staff and very frail residents are a worrying combination,” says Tomson. “Many of our residents are totally dependent on our 400 nurses and carers who are risking their lives to care for our community’s most vulnerable. They have physical contact 24 hours a day with our residents.”



Sixty-one staff have tested positive out of the Chev’s nearly 1 000 staff members (including outsourced services such as cleaners) and most are asymptomatic. If a staff member tests positive, they isolate at home.

“It’s an incredibly humbling experience to be at the Chev while facing a very destructive invisible force,” says Melanie For Ming, nursing manager at Sandringham Gardens. “In the past few months, we have seen the commitment of our staff. We could not have come so far if our health and well-being was not taken into consideration and cared for by our senior management team. We have been given ongoing training, provision of PPE [personal protective equipment] for every level of isolation, flu vaccines, and continuous moral and psychological support.”

There have also been victories in this relentless battle as at least 20 residents of Chev care facilities

who tested positive are on their way to a full recovery. “Across our facilities, the vast majority of our COVID-19-positive residents are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic,” says Dr Monique Price, the group’s senior doctor.

“We had three residents in hospital. One was discharged yesterday [on Monday]. With full credit to my colleagues in the medical, nursing, and care teams, over the next few days, we will be able to de-isolate in excess of 20 residents who have recovered.”

Within most of the Chev’s care facilities, residents are confined to their rooms. “It’s a conservative approach, but seeing the way the virus is spreading

around Gauteng, our residents understand. COVID-19-positive residents that are in isolation have their SATS (oxygen saturation levels) monitored every four hours, and if these are of concern, a doctor is notified,” says care manager Lijahne Beetge. The group employs four full-time doctors, and at every facility there is a doctor on site every day.

The group is advised by an independent medical advisory committee headed by Dr Richard Friedland, a member of the Chev board and Netcare chief executive. It includes pulmonologist Dr Anton Meyberg, geriatrician Dr Lara Greenstein, and cardiologist Dr Leonard Steingo.

“The Chev has also had to be mindful of the psycho-social threat to the well-being of residents now that their environment has changed so drastically,” says Glynne Zackon, the group’s manager of social services. “Added to the fact that

communication with residents and between residents and their carers has been impeded by face masks that challenge their hearing and their ability to recognise people, the Chev has had to be innovative and creative in finding ways to keep them active, entertained, and emotionally healthy.

“When coronavirus is suspected or confirmed, the challenges of trying to isolate residents suffering from dementia, intellectual disability, or mental illness are complex,” she says. “This can result in resistance and behavioural challenges.

“Social workers reach out to those who are struggling emotionally, and a dedicated line has been set up so that residents can make contact with social workers. Residents are given breathing exercises for relaxation, gratitude, and positive thinking. There are opportunities for exercise, cognitive stimulation, and recreation throughout the day, every day. Residents are constantly provided with books, puzzles, and crafts. Staff take cell phones to residents and facilitate calls to family members.”

Meanwhile, a resident of Jaffa Aged Home in Pretoria who was COVID-19-positive, Lucille Sher (aged 77), passed away in hospital on the night of Tuesday, 7 July. “It’s a huge loss,” says director Mark Isaacs. He says another five residents are still in hospital. Three recently returned from hospital, 14 residents have recovered, and another 10 are on their way to recovery.

Says Tomson, “Our dedicated staff are really stretched to the limit, working in full PPE and taking every precaution. They are doing their best to communicate with families when required on an individual basis as we understand the anxiety many people are feeling.

“Our social workers and activities teams are going beyond the call of duty to assist our residents with all their physical and emotional needs. We ask for the community’s support and understanding at this challenging time.”

The UJW’s open letter on gender-based violence

The Union of Jewish Women South Africa expresses its abhorrence and disgust at the scourge of gender-based violence (GBV), one of the most odious realities in South Africa.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has spoken out forcefully against those who perpetrate it, and his words resonated across the country. There are no excuses or justifications for criminal and malevolent behaviour which denies women their identity, dignity, and in many cases, their life.

The abuse of women and children flies in the face of the tenets of our Constitution, and in the words of Oxfam, “South Africa is lauded for having some of the most progressive laws and policies intended to advance women’s rights and gender equality. But women are disproportionately represented amongst the poor, the unemployed, and the hungry. Alarming high rates of gender-based violence makes being a woman in South Africa more dangerous than being in some of the world’s war-torn areas.”

In spite of progressive laws and edicts against GBV, South African men continue to commit these horrendous and brutal activities secure in the knowledge that their chance of being caught or convicted are so slim as to be negligible. According to official police statistics, there were about 180 000 contact crimes against women in 2019, of which 36 597 were sexual offences, 2 771 women were murdered, and

3 445 women were victims of attempted murder. According to the most recent police statistics, a woman is murdered every three to four hours in South Africa.

The recent #MeToo movement drew support from countries and people across the globe. The results were overwhelming, as numerous men, prominent in the fields of entertainment, sport, politics, and business, who had until then raped and abused women with impunity, were identified and had to face, or are still facing, criminal charges, incarceration, and loss of reputation.

But GBV, especially in South Africa, goes even further than #MeToo because of the number of murders it spawns. And now, as the country faces a stringent lockdown and families are holed up with few if any opportunities to move out of their homes, the number of GBV attempts and successes has soared. Thousands of women live in fear and anguish, both for themselves and for their children, yet the majority of these brutes remain free to continue their horrific actions.

The Union of Jewish Women South Africa calls for the harshest possible measures against the perpetrators of these evil atrocities to give the women of South Africa the opportunity to live their lives in dignity and free from abuse.

**National Executive Council
Union of Jewish Women of South Africa**



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There’s much to be grateful for

This past week, I’ve heard of people I know fairly well whose companies have gone into liquidation, have had to put their homes up for sale, and in one case, almost died waiting for an ambulance.

These are good, hard-working, highly intelligent, accomplished people who aren’t part of our community.

Thanks to the coronavirus, the first two have fallen on devastatingly hard times because of the lockdown and the latter had a stroke, possibly due to the stress of trying to make ends meet.

Those who had to sell their homes and liquidate their businesses did their level best to find ways to solve their problems. Initially the banks helped a bit, but that help has since dried up. They were left with no choice.

In the case of the person who got sick, all the ambulances were too busy dealing with COVID-19 cases and he had to wait for hours. He’s lucky to be alive.

None of these people have the kinds of organisations on speed dial that we do. They don’t have the incredible infrastructure that we have in our community that looks after its own.

Now, I’m well aware of the kind of outreach and outstanding work that members of our community do for the greater South African society, and I salute every single one of them. This is so important for us to do and continue doing.

However, my point is how easy it is to forget what we have put in place for ourselves and how lucky we are to have Hatzolah, the Gesher Fund, the Chevrah Kadisha, Community Security Organisation, and the Rambam Trust among others to help us weather any storm that comes our way. The ticket to being able to request their help is simply to be Jewish.

That’s not to say that there aren’t people and problems that fall through the cracks. It happens, and it will continue to happen. The truth is that these organisations can only stretch so far.

But the work they do is phenomenal, and so often we overlook what we have. I hear so many of us complain bitterly about our situation. It’s only when you hear stories about people who aren’t part of our community that you realise just how fortunate we are. Is it a gift when we look after our own? I guess it’s the greatest gift of all – a gift from the community to the community to keep us alive, well, and make sure that we have a roof over our heads and remain economically sound.

When you read our front page story about what Hatzolah is doing for the many in our community who have contracted COVID-19, you realise how essential it is to us, and how grateful we should be for all that it does.

I cannot but marvel at the sheer guts, selflessness, dedication, and professionalism that the men and women of Hatzolah exemplify. They are true angels, keeping us all alive.

Then you look at an organisation like the Chev that is also dedicated to saving the lives of those who simply can’t look after themselves. The tireless work done by the Chev is astonishing. And, while it’s true there have been two deaths this week in old-age homes run by the Chev, it’s a miracle that in the peak of this pandemic, there have been only two. Around the world, old aged homes are tinder boxes when it comes to coronavirus. If one person tests positive, the illness spreads like wildfire, and has been known to decimate residents.

So far, this hasn’t happened here because of the kind of dedicated care you find at these homes. So, while people will complain simply because they can, we need to remember to count our lucky stars for the people who do so much for us.

The Gesher Fund and Rambam Trust are literally sustaining businesses and people to enable them to keep going at a time that they aren’t able to.

I’m so grateful when I hear the stories of people rescued by our communal organisations. These institutions are kept afloat by people within the community who can afford to help financially and those who don’t have that much, but realise the importance of keeping these organisations going.

Right now, many of our communal organisations are battling to survive as there’s a far greater need for help than money going around. You know when the Chev asks for donations – something it simply didn’t need to do for its first 132 years – we need to do something.

I know that for many there is no extra money to go around at the moment because we have had to tighten our belts, but if you can help, you should.

You see, these organisations can only survive if we make sure that they do.

And in that is yet another item on my gratitude list: the fact that our community does support these organisations. So many of us do dig deep to make sure that communal structures remain in place. We are naturally charitable, and generally we don’t have to be asked to offer to help.

As we sit in our homes – or at least I hope that’s what we’re all doing – at the height of the pandemic, we have a great deal to be thankful for.

However, as has become obvious, our community isn’t weathering COVID-19 so well anymore. We have been hard hit, and so many people we know are ill.

Still, there are people who don’t take the coronavirus seriously. There are those saying this is just another flu bug. It isn’t.

Even those who have had this virus lightly have been knocked by it. It’s not a joke or something to be taken with a pinch of salt. It’s serious, and we can’t carry on as normal. We have to take care of ourselves and, by doing that, take care of others.

It’s simple! Stay home, keep social distance, and keep your mask on. That’s the only way to save lives and stay healthy.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



The stark reality of life without work

TALI FEINBERG

“I’m scared for my future. I want to work and to provide for my family,” says 44-year-old Baruch Zwarenstein, just one of those in the South African Jewish community who are battling to survive without an income in the current crisis.

He represents the often untold stories of those who are trying to make it from one day to the next. “The Chevrah Kadisha [Chev] helps about 3 000 people a month with things like accommodation, food, healthcare, and education costs. This ranges from older couples to single moms to young families,” says the Chev’s financial intake consultant, Shirley Resnik. This is just in Gauteng.

Zwarenstein lives in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), where Durban Jewish Community Social Services is assisting close to 130 Jews across the province. This number continues to increase, says the organisation’s director, Janine Saperson. “Many Jews with their own businesses have been affected by the pandemic, or those who find themselves without jobs are being forced to ask for assistance.”

“It’s very hard. My nine-year-old daughter looks at me and wants a chocolate from the shop, and I have to say no. My wife can’t work as she has cornea problems and can’t see well. I’m the sole breadwinner, and as a father and husband, I can’t give them what they need,” Zwarenstein told the *SA Jewish Report*, his voice filled with emotion.

Even with 25 years of working in the fast-moving consumer goods, wholesale, and retail sectors, he’s battling to find a job.

He’s grateful to be living at his wife’s parents’ home in Richards Bay, and to still have a car. His in-laws help to pay for food and other basic expenses. He has had to give up his medical aid. As a man who has always been proactive in finding work and will do any job, the current economic situation has been his biggest challenge yet.

“Soon after my first wife [who passed away in 2009] and I got married, we moved to Israel. I was frustrated just learning Hebrew all day, so I went out to get a job, which was as a cleaner in a restaurant,” says Zwarenstein.

From washing dishes and cleaning drains, he eventually rose in the ranks to manage the restaurant. He also worked for a data-storage company in Israel. He returned to South Africa in 2003 because of the *intifada* and because he wanted to be close to family.

He took up a variety of jobs in South Africa, first as an operations and warehouse manager, managing 30 staff and employees for four years.

From 2007 to 2013, he was branch manager of a photography store in Killarney. “I was told ‘you will either make or break this store,’” he remembers. “I ended up dramatically increasing the turnover in just a few months. I did this in simple ways, for example, opening up earlier in the mornings, and building a connection with the American Embassy across the road.” He was eventually promoted to regional manager, overseeing all the stores this company owned in Gauteng.

When his family moved to KZN, he worked as a branch manager for Pick n Pay on a year-long contract, managing 120 employees as well as the daily running of the store.

When that came to an end, he worked as an accounts sales manager for a company selling liquid petroleum gas around the KZN coastline.

In 2016, he took up a position as branch, factory, and warehouse manager for a tableware and souvenir company, but was retrenched in September last year. He has been searching for work ever since.

Clearly unafraid to get his hands dirty and pursue any opportunity, he has always landed on his feet. But this time, it hasn’t happened. “I was about to be offered a new position when the pandemic hit, but since the lockdown, I haven’t heard back,” he says.

This is in spite of the fact that he has a wide range of skills, from warehouse and trucking logistics, to managing staff and food safety regulations, to technology.

At the moment his daily routine entails waking up early and browsing a multitude of job websites, as well as applying to 20 to 30 of them. He also spends time following up on previous job applications. “I believe in communication, and would rather get an answer than not know,” he

Baruch Zwarenstein and his family



says.

While he will take any job, he would love a role in sales management, company management, or any leadership role in the retail industry.

In the current climate, few companies are hiring, and even hitting the streets to find a job isn’t a possibility. “My in-laws are in their 70s, so I have to take their safety into account. And even if I were to go looking, most of the stores here are closed.”

So even though he spends many hours in pursuit of employment, many more hours are spent waiting around at home, an extremely frustrating situation for someone who has always gone out to make things happen. He tries to help his in-laws with errands and his daughter with her schoolwork.

He knows that there is financial support within and without the community, but is hesitant to take it. “I want a hand-up, not a hand-out. I would much rather give than get. If I’m working, I can help my family and others. I’m even embarrassed to take R10 from my in-laws. I don’t feel like I should take something I don’t deserve, as I do have the ability to work.”

Says Resnik: “It’s always difficult to approach a communal organisation for assistance, but the Chev does everything it can to make our clients feel comfortable and respected. This, while ensuring that we adhere to high standards of governance, follow processes, and make objective decisions.

“This means we do a lot of homework to understand a family’s financial position and ensure that we assist at an appropriate level. As you can imagine, we cannot sustain a fancy lifestyle, but we will always ensure that people have somewhere to call home, food to put on the table, and that their basic needs are met.”

Zwarenstein asks people not to “judge a book by its cover. You don’t know what that person can offer, and what they have been through. Everyone has a story to tell.”

‘Hashem helped me – there is no other explanation’

PERSONAL STORY

WARREN BANK



With the benefit of hindsight, I now know that I became infected with COVID-19 along with several other people at our shul’s Purim dinner on 10 March 2020.

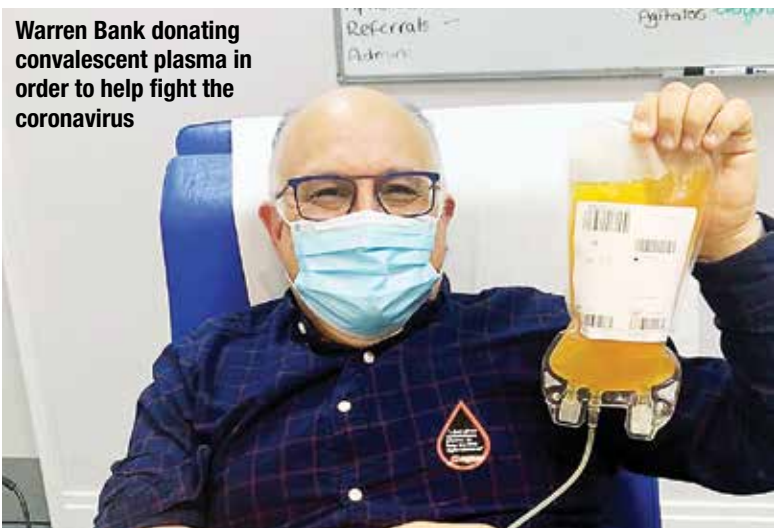
At that stage, people were already refraining from shaking hands and were doing that “fist pump” thing, but no one really took the threat of a pandemic very seriously. In fact, all the South African congregants posed for a group photo with our new South African rabbinical couple, Rabbi Greg and Hannah Bank, without a care in the world.

It took another 48 hours for me to start feeling as if I’d caught a cold along with a runny nose, sore head, and general congestion. I was unwilling to get ill because I had planned a long-awaited trip back to South Africa, leaving on Sunday evening, 15 March.

Nevertheless, I listened to advice, and isolated myself anyway to see what would happen. I did an online check-in late on Saturday night. But the next day, one hour before I was about to leave for Heathrow Airport, a local friend rang me to say that there were at least four reported cases of coronavirus in our shul (including Rabbi Bank) and that I should seriously reconsider my trip.

Within a few minutes, another friend in Joburg left me a message suggesting that I really shouldn’t travel. That did it. I immediately cancelled my flight, and I didn’t have much time to focus on my disappointment because my symptoms began to worsen.

By the next morning, I could barely move from my bed as I was dizzy, had a high temperature, and bodily aches and pains. The fever, nausea, and other symptoms seemed to come in waves: they would dissipate in the mornings but would return



Warren Bank donating convalescent plasma in order to help fight the coronavirus

with a vengeance every afternoon. I lost my appetite, and was able to swallow only some of the chicken soup that was left on my doorstep by community members and ordered from our South African-run kosher deli. Unusually, I started losing weight, which is usually a blessing (but which I’ve now found again).

Our National Health Service (NHS) told us to look out for “a new continuous cough” which I certainly didn’t have. It was only after five days that I noticed that I had lost my sense of taste and smell, but attributed this to the normal congestion one encounters with a cold or flu. It’s important to remember that at this stage, it wasn’t known to be symptomatic of COVID-19. There was no way to get to see a doctor or go to hospital unless one had encountered severe breathing difficulties (which I hadn’t).

Throughout this time, I could do very little apart from sit on the couch or lie down. It was impossible to even consider doing any work, watching TV, and certainly not reading due to dizziness. It felt like I had been attacked by five bouts of flu all at the same time, and that my body and

mind were under attack by armies of the virus. However, I had no certainty that I had coronavirus because of the lack of a cough.

I had no idea how seriously ill I was, and was far more concerned about several of my friends in London who had found themselves in hospital in intensive care with assisted breathing.

For the first 12 days, my body felt far too weak to drive, let alone walk, and my head too dizzy. The fever was so bad that by the time I took hold of a thermometer, 10 days into the virus, I was still running a temperature higher than 39°. I remember waking up in the middle of the night to find my bed completely soaked as the result of the extremely high fever I was running.

There was one occasion in which I felt that my chest was tightening in an alarming manner, but my GP advised me to sleep in a propped-up position and to report to a hospital the next morning if it was still bad. I told a few people about this.

At the time, I had no idea that people were extremely concerned about my worsening health. I brushed it off, although I secretly started to become really concerned.

The next morning, I awoke to find that the tightness and heaviness in my chest had lifted. I found out later that on that bad night, a few of my friends had quickly organised prayer groups, both Jewish and Christian, and had been saying *tehillim* and fervently praying for my recovery.

I honestly feel that Hashem performed a miracle for me that night and interceded, because I can’t explain it any other way. That night was a turning point, and my feverish bouts started becoming less frequent.

By 24 March, about two weeks after becoming infected, I was able to report that I had been free of any fever for 24 hours, and this gradually increased. By the beginning of April, I started feeling stronger and I was able to go for short walks that I gradually increased in length. I did find that I reached a “plateau” and remained feeling only 90% better for at least one extra month before this improved.

I later realised the enormity of what I had had to fight, physically and mentally. I’m grateful that I didn’t have any inkling of how long it would last and how severe the symptoms would be at the time, as it would have scared me beyond belief. It’s only when I look back now, three months later, that I realise what an ordeal I have been through.

Many people still ask whether I have “completely recovered” from coronavirus. Having joined a number of online support groups, it’s clear that no one really knows if and when one can fully recover from COVID-19. It’s too soon to say. Many people are still suffering from chronic fatigue, body pains, and other symptoms more than 15 weeks

after infection. Apart from some odd sleeping patterns that I appear to have picked up during my illness, I believe that I’m, in fact, 100% recovered.

What kept me sane during this time was being able to sit at my piano and play for hours during the day when the fever wasn’t so harsh. This has been a unique opportunity to connect with our Jewish community, not only locally but also with others in South Africa and beyond.

It turns out that my antibody levels are so high, I’ve already twice donated my convalescent blood plasma to the NHS Blood Service as part of the Remap-Cap Research Trial run by the Royal College of Physicians and Oxford University. They will use it to test whether administering antibody-rich plasma from recovered COVID-19 survivors can help fight the virus in the most critically ill patients. Here’s hoping!

Today was the first time that we had a morning *minyan* (under strict conditions) and it felt strange being back in the same shul hall where I first became infected with the virus four months ago.

Catching COVID-19 has changed the way I view the world and given me a newfound appreciation for the fragility and sanctity of life. It has enabled me to question and re-evaluate my priorities in life.

• Warren Bank moved to the United Kingdom from South Africa in 2015, and practices as a barrister. He lives in Cheadle, near Manchester, and is a member of the Yeshurun Congregation there.

‘The rollercoaster finally stopped’

PERSONAL STORY

ROSLYN BASSERABIE



I succumbed to the menacing virus. It was a terrorist attack. At first, I was in disbelief, because although I had not been feeling my best for a few days prior to the test diagnosis, I presented differently to the iconic sore throat, coughing, and inability to breathe.

I felt tired, out of sorts, and thought that I had a urinary tract infection. That test came back negative.

Two days after my COVID-19 confirmation, I felt dizzy, nauseous, and projectile vomiting shocked me into the realisation that I was indeed extremely sick.

It was a menacing blow. I couldn’t keep anything down, including water. I felt as if I had been bludgeoned and minimal relief came from my warm bed, electric blanket, puffy cushions, and sleep.

Energy seeped out of me, Talking was too much of an effort, and I was convinced that I was a mustard jaundice colour. My husband, who tested negative, became my Florence Nightingale, and assured me that I was pale but not yellow.

I recall him urging me to sip rehydration drinks slowly. I was reluctant, but knew that it was an imperative.

My most frightening moment was when both my daughters and their husbands phoned four days into my suffering. It was a Monday night, and they insisted that Hatzolah and the consulting doctor wanted me moved to hospital.

The Hatzolah nurse that had visited me that afternoon had been dissatisfied with my oximeter readings. They were lower than they should have been, and because there was only one bed with a respirator left in the clinic near me, they cautioned that I should take it up immediately in case I required emergency treatment.

With all the juices left in me, I refused emphatically. My husband saw my distress, and stood by me. So did my son in Israel. He was on the line, and obviously heard the distress in my voice.

My daughters were taking every precaution they could because they were the ones in touch with the medical fraternity, and were panicking.

In the end, I won with the promise that I would be the first to ask for an ambulance in the morning if I felt it was imperative.

With my sanity and security restored, I made up my mind that I would breathe deeper and harder for the oximeter, and I would recover at home.

The next day proved more encouraging, and when Hatzolah phoned for the results, my reading had risen into the nineties, and I felt triumphant at their satisfaction.

My sunny bedroom, with the garden pouring in through the French windows, the surrounding flower arrangements that had arrived to cheer me up, and the daily hot soups that kept coming, succeeded in providing security and a haven to assist in my recovery.

Hatzolah is to be revered for its consistent care and follow ups.

For 12 days, Hatzolah monitored my vital signs until it was content that I could be “expelled” from its COVID-19 programme.

My close family and friends, the community at large, and people far and wide who had heard that I was a COVID-19 victim, poured out love, prayer, generosity, and support.

In turn, I felt validated and nourished.

Three weeks have passed since I was struck. Thank G-d, the roller coaster has stopped its bilious making bumpiness.

The aftermath is intense fatigue, a little dizziness, and occasional headaches.

I know that in order to recover, I need to listen to my body and give in to its beckoning for rest.

I also know that healthy liquids, for example ginger and lemon teas; carrot, parsley and lentil broths; plus lots of water need to be consumed. This, together with clean, simple and high-vitamin foods, are part of the recovery and strengthening process.

• Roslyn Basserabie is a ChaiFM radio host, inspirational speaker, and author who lives in Johannesburg.



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The man who changed the face of tennis in Zimbabwe

BARBARA NUSSBAUM

Hundreds of Zimbabweans love tennis today – and have made something of their lives – because of the passion of a man called Larry Katz.

Katz, who died on 23 June 2020 at the age of 63 after a nine-year battle with cancer, dedicated his life to using tennis to uplift young people in Bulawayo.

Katz started coaching tennis in the Bulawayo district in the mid-1980s, starting at the Parkview Sports Club. He then formed the National Tennis Development (NTD) programme, which was to make a significant difference in the lives of hundreds of young Zimbabweans living in Bulawayo’s townships. In fact, it ignited a grassroots movement that took tennis to all disadvantaged areas of Bulawayo.

Katz was born on 4 February 1957, and went to Carmel Nursery School and Primary School, both Jewish schools in Bulawayo. He became head boy of Carmel Primary School before going on to complete high school at Milton.

He showed great promise in tennis from an early age, and played in junior tournaments in Zimbabwe and South Africa. At 18, he won a tennis scholarship to the United States.

He started out at Arizona State University, and then went on to Honolulu, Hawaii, where he obtained his business degree while playing for the university tennis team. After graduating, Katz joined the ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) tennis tour, initially competing in tournaments in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Portugal.

Following his tour of Europe, Katz played in an ATP Tour circuit in India, where he won his first ATP ranking point. It was in India that Katz first saw successful tennis development programmes, which influenced him to start something similar in Zimbabwe.

On his return to Bulawayo in late 1984, Katz joined his father in the family business, and taught and coached tennis in the townships of

Bulawayo in his spare time. The following year, he formed the NTD programme.

The Bulawayo council had built tennis courts in a number of townships, but it was still the preserve of the privileged. As Clement Whata, an NTD alumnus now living in Bulawayo explained, the price of a tennis racquet was prohibitive for a 14-year-old teenager living in a township.

Dr Nceku Nyathi, an NTD graduate and now a senior lecturer in organisation studies at Royal Holloway University in London, said that it was no easy task to transform a sport that was the preserve of privileged white people. However, “Where other people saw obstacles and barriers, Larry found a way.” Katz sourced racquets, balls, stringing machines, shoes, and clothing. He approached the Arthur Ashe Foundation and various American donors who sent equipment to Zimbabwe via the diplomatic pouch.

Katz’s most talented pupils developed their coaching skills to teach others, a simple technique that expanded NTD exponentially. About three decades later, the NTD legacy is still going strong.

Through Katz’s network, he was also able to open doors for youngsters who wouldn’t have dreamed that they could study and play tennis in the US on full scholarships. Patrick Mlauzi was a protégé of Katz’s who won a tennis scholarship to the US. Mlauzi completed two master’s degrees, and remained in the US.

Today Mlauzi and his family live in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he is a vice-president at Wells Fargo. Mlauzi was the first

NTD member to win a scholarship to the US. Many more NTD youngsters joined Mlauzi in the US over the years, some coaching in prestigious clubs and landing jobs across the globe, from the United Kingdom to New Zealand.



Larry Katz in front of a poster of him that was used to market the clinic in India where he went for treatment

Kabelo Masiane, who was very close to Katz, coaches at a prestigious Jewish tennis club in Boca Raton, Florida. “There is an infinite number of lives that Larry touched,” he said. “It’s difficult to quantify how many people have actually benefitted from Larry,” he said.

Nerva Ndlovu went on to become a global marketing executive for Coca-Cola, and is based in South Africa. Ndlovu wanted to do a marketing diploma at IMM Graduate School, but in the early 80s, couldn’t afford the books. Katz assisted him with the cost of his studies, and enrolled someone to teach him on Saturday mornings. Afterwards, Ndlovu would walk to Makokoba township where he would meet Katz for extra lessons in accounting.

“I can’t thank Larry enough for the foundation he gave me as a youngster. Accounting was tough for me. Larry would go to four different centres in townships of Bulawayo to coach people on Saturday mornings, and he still found the time and energy to spend two hours on Saturday afternoons tutoring me in accounts.”

Another NTD graduate, Million Phiri, was involved with NTD from the age of 14, and eventually moved to Johannesburg. He happened to go to Glenhazel Tennis Club soon after he arrived. “I thrashed one of the players, who was so surprised that he landed up offering me a job in his company.” From there, he springboarded into his own business.

Said Whata, “I could write a book about how tennis opened up avenues for myself and other kids. Tennis teaches you how to make decisions for yourself, how to be independent, and how to manage time. Tennis prepares your mind.”

“Tennis helped me with focus and discipline, and was an important factor in my becoming head boy at Milton High and later in landing a job at Coopers & Lybrand,” said Ndaba Moyo.

Moyo, now an ed tech entrepreneur in Johannesburg, said, “Larry was selfless and imparted so much to our lives. He leaves behind a precious legacy – by picking up on the needs at the grassroots, and then working things through at every level, taking the time to care about each individual.”

“Katz changed the course of tennis in Matabeleland without cell phones or smart phones,” said Nyathi. “In fact, NTD was the first grassroots sports movement in Zimbabwe. In hindsight, Larry achieved his dream, as is evidenced in the stories of so many alumni of NTD.”

He leaves behind his wife, Shana, and three sons, Daniel, Jonny, and Davey.

Israeli television unlikely medium of social reconciliation



RABBI AVI SHAFRAN — JTA

At 04:00, Israeli rocker Aviv Gefen was still crying, head in hands, in the empty Haifa-area amphitheatre where he had performed the previous late May evening. Staff members urged him to go home.

In a televised interview days later, the popular performer described what happened. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, he had performed in a venue empty of anything but amphitheatre staff and a videographer. He had dedicated a song “with love” to the community of Bnei Brak. The densely populated haredi Orthodox community there was hit particularly hard by the coronavirus.

“I leave the stage,” Gefen recalled, “and I see on my telephone, without exaggeration, 420 messages. I start opening them, scrolling, and learn that someone had given my number to all of Bnei Brak. And I cried. And I couldn’t leave the empty amphitheatre. I started to cry. The love, the division in the nation, suddenly everything came together. The love I received came from people I had denigrated since I was 19. People who now erupted with love and tears.”

The tension between secular and religious Israeli society has existed since before the country was founded, and remains a contentious societal dividing line.

“For years, we learned how to hate the other...” Gefen said. “Suddenly,

I saw the other. So how did the corona change me? Just like this: I learned to respect. A flame of love, simply amazing, was lit. I cannot even describe it in words, only in tears.”

The longstanding social schism in Israel between the country’s rapidly growing haredi community and its secular citizens isn’t disappearing, of course. Issues like religious exemptions from military service, the heavy reliance of many haredim on social services, and whether public transportation should operate on Shabbat haven’t evaporated.

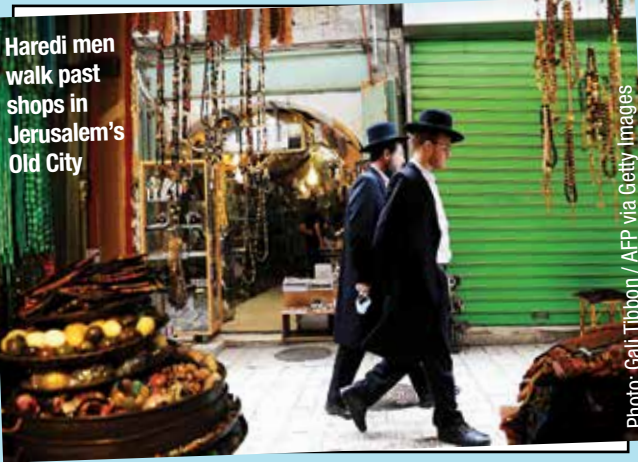
But cracks in the secular-religious divide, like Gefen’s epiphany, have begun to appear. And I believe much of the credit for the happy fissure goes to an unlikely catalyst: Israeli television.

There was a time, and it wasn’t long ago, when haredim were portrayed as aliens at best and adversaries at worst. In many American films, haredi life – as in the recent series Unorthodox – is still portrayed as something suffocating to escape from, a drab world filled with humourless men and women.

Recent Israeli shows are more

realistic. Rather than aiming at sensationalism and confirmation of biases, they seek to provide a more accurate picture of haredi life, and, in the process, help foster understanding and empathy.

It may have begun with the wildly



Haredi men walk past shops in Jerusalem’s Old City

Photo: Gali Tibbon / AFP via Getty Images

popular show Shtisel, which first aired in Israel in 2013, and was eventually featured on Netflix.

The series about four generations of a Jerusalem haredi family is a lighthearted drama, enlivened by humour and even some surrealism. But its portrayal of haredim as normal people with normal challenges and feelings, experiencing universal pains and joys, humanised haredim for many thousands of viewers.

Then, in 2017, came Shababnikim (slang for haredi youth who may not

belong in yeshiva), a comedy that portrayed four very different yeshiva students and their travails.

Most recently, Israeli viewers were treated to a remarkable and remarkably moving reality series called Od Nifgash (We Will Meet Again), which features five secular Israelis who wish to reconnect to close but now estranged family members (in one case, a twin brother) who became religious. Each individual is paired with a haredi intermediary in an effort to familiarise the secular Israelis with haredi life as part of the effort to connect them with their estranged relatives and bring about reconciliation.

The series’ brilliant conceit was to swear each of the secular Israelis to total silence for the first 36 hours they spent with their “handlers”. It forced them to fume only to themselves when they saw or heard things that riled them up, preventing arguments or expressions of anger. By the time their enforced silence had expired, they had come to experience – even from a distance – the richness and beauty of Jewish religious life, its family-centredness and meaningful rituals.

Although fundamental differences in approach to life remained, each secular

Jew and his or her haredi counterpart became friends.

The series is ongoing at the time of writing, and viewers don’t yet know whether the mission that each pair of Jews is on to see if the estranged relative can be reconnected to his or her family will be successful or not. But the hours of filmed interactions of the respective couples are their own testimony to the possibility not only of co-operation between secular and haredi Jews, but even of forming deep personal bonds.

There is irony in the fact that media like television (shunned by most haredim) and the internet (which, if used, is used for work not for entertainment) should be what is allowing their lives to become more familiar to their secular neighbours. But good things can emerge from all sorts of unexpected places.

The culture wars in Israel will surely rage on for the foreseeable future. But if enough non-religious Israelis can be brought to see haredi society through a different lens, and enough haredim will be willing to accept and befriend secular Jews, it can only bode well for the shared Jewish future.

• Rabbi Avi Shafran writes widely in Jewish and general media around the world.

Antisemitic content on TikTok doesn't 'happen like clockwork'

TALI FEINBERG

The popular TikTok video-sharing app is being used by antisemites, Holocaust deniers, and other far-right extremists to reach young people, according to the report, "Spreading Hate on TikTok" by researchers from the University of Haifa and Israel's Institute for Counter-Terrorism.

However, local social-media expert Sarah Hoffman says that while it's possible your child will come across antisemitic content while scrolling on TikTok, there's an equal chance your child will come across pro-Jewish content speaking out against antisemitism.

The report shows that from February to May 2020, there were 196 postings related to far-right extremism, with one-fifth of them related to antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

In the same time frame, the study found 14 postings of Adolf Hitler's speeches; 11 postings of the Sieg Heil victory salute used by Nazis; and 17 videos encouraging violence that featured Nazi or neo-Nazi symbols. These include the swastika and sonnenrad, or black sun; and 26 accounts featuring the numbers 88 in their username, the white supremacist numerical code for Heil Hitler. The study first appeared in the Studies in Conflict & Terrorism journal.

TikTok, based in China, has gained popularity with its short videos of users dancing and lip synching. Although the platform's terms of service prohibits users under the age of 13, many who appear in the videos are clearly younger.

"TikTok has unique features which make it more troublesome," according to the study. "First, unlike all other social media, TikTok's users are almost all young children who are more naive and gullible when it comes to malicious content. Second, TikTok is the youngest platform, thus severely lagging behind its rivals which have had more time to grapple with how to protect users from disturbing and harmful content."

The researchers identified TikTok accounts of known extremist groups, then collected posts that featured hashtags associated with extremist movements. Finally, they examined the identified accounts and posts, as well as accounts that showed interest in extremism

through liking, commenting, or following the accounts.

When Hoffman heard about this research from the SA Jewish Report, she searched for the content on TikTok using specific hashtags, and struggled to find it. Instead, she came across pro-Jewish, pro-Israel content, or posts calling out antisemitism.

Hoffman, formerly of The Digital Law Company, is soon to launch Klikd, in partnership with psychologist Pam Tudin, a platform to help "tweens", teens, and parents to navigate social media safely.

"Any platform has the space to be abused or generate hate," she says. However, she "found an abundance of pro-Jewish and pro-Israel posts calling out racism and antisemitism, all created by teens. This is the activist generation, so the platform is also being used to speak up and speak out."

"There is definitely a problem of growing antisemitism in the world, and if someone wants to spread hatred, they will find a way, no matter what the platform," Hoffman says. While the study found 196 postings related to far-right extremism in four months, this is a drop in the ocean compared to the billions of posts that make it onto the platform every day.

TikTok allows people to create 15-second music videos to popular soundtracks. "It's where all the teens are at, and is currently the top or second most downloaded app," says Hoffman.

Why is it so addictive? "It has the element of

surprise. There is a 'for you' section of trending videos based on your interests, and its short format caters to our short attention spans and instant gratification." It's mostly used by 13-24 year olds, but also 'tweens' who enter false birthdates. It's used 60% by females, and 40% by males.

"The other factor is that it's quite easy for ordinary teens to achieve TikTok fame. Teens are most drawn to the 'likes' and affirmations that these platforms provide, and TikTok feeds into that need," says Hoffman. "Finally, it's a creative outlet. Kids will spend time rehearsing their routine and choreographing it. It also has quite a lot of humour. It's not one of the apps I worry about the most. It allows kids to be themselves and be authentic as opposed to the curated and filtered content on Instagram, or the hotbed of hate that can easily be found on Twitter."



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

A minyan as a rare ritual

While shuls remain closed, one of the only places where a *minyan* can gather is our schools. Top: Herzlia Middle School, the only *minyan* in Cape Town, davens *shacharit*. Bottom photos: Yeshiva College Barmitzvah boys Yoel Krasner and Gadi Crouse *lein* their portions and celebrate their coming of age social-distance style.



Photo: Debbie Suiza



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Angels of Alex fight fires

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

A pall of smoke malingers over Alexandra Township on the outskirts of Sandton, Johannesburg. Not an uncommon sight in winter, as those living in corrugated shacks, with broken walls of wood and plastic heat the freezing Joburg mornings with coal and kerosene. And then, like clockwork, the shacks erupt in spontaneous combustion, as a knocked over lamp, an ember gone awry, or an illegal electricity connection turns the favela into an inferno.

On the morning of Thursday, 2 July, as the blaze engulfed the area, hundreds of residents dragged their meagre possessions from their shanty homes, and spaza shop owners ran to salvage what they could from their stores. Personal belongings and shop fittings littered the narrow alleyways as buildings smouldered around it. No one knows how or where the fire began, but by Thursday evening, 200 shacks had been destroyed and more than 1 000 were homeless.

Seraphs come in many forms, but when Glynne Wolman of The Angel Network heard of the devastation, she immediately activated the network. By Friday afternoon The Angel Network had delivered more than 2 500 blankets, 1 000kg of food, as well as hundreds of black bags of cutlery, crockery, and clothing

Photo: Howard Sackstein



Angels of Alex - Matthew Ndiweni, Taryn Winer, Glynne Wolman and Hayley Glasser

to the survivors of the blaze.

“We are blown-away by how people have rallied to help. We are humbled by strangers who have been incredibly kind and generous in helping other strangers in their time of need,” says Wolman.

But the guardian angels never sleep. By Saturday afternoon, a further eight tons of food and clothing were heading into Alex. Wolman’s driveway in Morningside overflowed with boxes, bags, and parcels of food.

The Angel Network also partnered with non-profit organisation Rays of Hope to purchase corrugated iron sheeting for residents to re-build their paltry homes, and Put It Out donated 250 mini fire extinguishers to be kept in people’s homes in the informal settlement.

The Angel Network has also been instrumental in establishing more than 70 Community Action Networks, mobilising neighbourhoods around Johannesburg to feed and clothe the hungry during the period of lockdown.

With the distant sound of ruffling wings, the sounds of the melancholy melody of Sarah McLachlan lingers like the smell of soot in the air, “You’re in the arms of an angel; may you find some comfort here.”

Meeting needs from Sudan to the Ciskei

JORDAN MOSHE

She dedicated her life to doing humanitarian work in disaster-stricken countries, but now Galit Cohen is applying her skills to helping South Africans ride the COVID-19 storm.

“Volunteer work gives me the ability to make a difference in someone’s life on the most basic and meaningful level,” Cohen, an expert in disaster management, told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “It’s about uplifting people at the very bottom, and it’s so empowering to empower others.”

“My job was to help people recover fast and make a life again in spite of the mess around them.”

For the past 18 years, Cohen has jetted across the globe to assist people in need. Originally from Haifa, she has gone from establishing community development projects in South Sudan to administering aid in Haiti in the wake of an earthquake, involving herself in numerous relief efforts and assisting countless individuals. Today, she is the founder and manager of nongovernment organisation Ripples for Change, and resides in East London.

Last Friday, her organisation helped to distribute food parcels to 40 destitute families at Mngqesha Great Place in the Ama Rharhabe Kingdom, a Xhosa sub-group in the former Ciskei section of the Eastern Cape. Assisted by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), Cohen was able to provide enough food to feed the families for two weeks.

This humanitarian powerhouse has a track record of helping people in need. “My job was to help people recover fast and make a life again in spite of the mess around them,” she says. “I remember when I arrived in Port-au-Prince in Haiti and found a devastated city in which people looked like zombies. There was no food in the shops, looting was rife, and people were living on the streets. I had to help them through it.”

Cohen encountered similar scenes in the Philippines after the region was ravaged by disaster.

“There were piles of debris everywhere, and people couldn’t identify their homes,” she says. “They were searching through rubble piles to find their belongings.

“We arrived to help, and I remember one woman took the jersey off her back to give to me in thanks. She felt she had to give me something. I have kept this jersey until today.”

Galit Cohen with Xhosa Chief Makinana

Cohen arrived in South Africa in 2002 to take up an opportunity to work with Afrika Tikkun. “I was looking for an opportunity overseas, and South Africa was the first to respond,” she says. “I arrived after volunteering in Ethiopia, and Ann Harris [the wife of the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris] fetched me from the airport.”

“I knew nothing about South Africa. I wanted to make a difference, but South Africa made a difference to my life. It changed me, and became my home.”

The chasm between the wealthy and the impoverished stunned her, Cohen says. “It was a shock to see the disparity. When I volunteered in Israel, my work was the cherry on the top because the government already does a lot. This was something completely different.”

Cohen reconciled the disparity by imagining that her role was to be a bridge between the two sides. “I saw it as my task to stand between the two, and try to bring different groups together and make a connection,” she says.

Cohen devoted herself to her work, helping to establish community support programmes in Alexandra, Diepsloot, and Orange Farm. In spite of her success, she felt the need to take her work to another level, and decided to return to Israel in 2011 to pursue a Master’s degree in disaster management.

“The humanitarian aid world is divided into development and disaster, or long-term and short-term work,” says Cohen. “I had been involved in long-term work for a while, and decided to try my luck at short-term with the hope of making a long-lasting impact.”

After completing her degree, Cohen returned to South Africa to take up a position in the Eastern Cape as part of the Donald Woods Foundation. Her work led her to travel across the former Transkei, helping with the distribution of antiretroviral drugs and the logistical issues involved.

In 2013, she founded Ripples for Change, an organisation devoted to strengthening rural communities by creating economic opportunity.

“My heart is in the rural areas,” says Cohen. “When I worked in the Transkei, I thought all rural residents wanted to move to the cities to find opportunities, but I found that they would remain there if an opportunity could be had closer to home. I had to bring opportunity to them.”

Cohen’s organisation therefore helps to promote small business, develops agricultural projects, and devises childhood-development plans in an effort to improve the lives of residents in rural areas. When COVID-19 hit, she set out to address the new challenges faced by rural residents, and added the feeding scheme to her organisation’s support system with the help of the SAJBD.

“I’m privileged to use the skills I’ve developed over time to help people cope with the effects of the virus,” says Cohen. “Logistics is what I’m good at. It’s my responsibility to make sure that people can eat. My experience has taught me how to get people to work together, avoid stepping on toes, and co-ordinate efforts. I need to put it to use now.

“The way we’ve handled the virus in South Africa shows what effective leadership can achieve in times of crisis. We’ve learned a lot as people, and the situation is teaching us how to prepare for what may come. This won’t be the last pandemic we face, and we need to learn lessons from it and be ready to apply them in future.”

Harvesting Brakpan’s COVID-19 survival

JORDAN MOSHE

Benoni resident Yakima Waner can’t stay at home like the rest of us as the COVID-19 pandemic batters South Africa because too many people depend on her for their daily meal.

Her efforts ensure that hundreds of people are fed, able to care for themselves, and know that they matter.

“Hunger is a force that makes people do unimaginable things just to eat,” Waner told the *SA Jewish Report*. “COVID-19 hasn’t created new issues, it’s highlighted pre-existent issues. Hunger is just one of them, and whether we have food available for people or not, they stand and wait.”

Since the onset of the lockdown, Waner has done whatever it took to provide meals for the hungry in Brakpan, providing more than 12 000 meals to date. A documentarian by profession, she has made the well-being of others a priority in her life, especially in Brakpan on the East Rand.

“My family has always had a strong connection with Brakpan,” she says. “Waner’s Shoe Store was well-known across the East Rand, and my late grandmother, Edith, was always involved in the community. My father and late uncle were joint presidents of the Brakpan Shul, and were committed to keeping it going so that there would be a Jewish presence here.”

Waner upheld her family’s values and



Yakima Waner screening the children of Plastic City

commitment to giving back when she took up the plight of a group of women and children living in the informal settlement of Plastic City. “Locals blamed them for everything,” she says. “Pollution, crime, and other things were pinned on them. I wanted to find out who they really were, and how they lived.”

To her astonishment, she discovered that the group was operating a children’s crèche within the settlement, determined to give youngsters as much of a normal life as possible.

“Sister Jessie and Hlengiwe Nkosi had founded a school in Plastic City in spite of having no income or support,” says Waner. “They did it against a background of xenophobia and hatred. I had an obligation to help them.”

Waner decided to make the settlement the focus of a documentary, sharing the story of its residents and highlighting the extent to which prejudice was robbing children of the opportunity to lead normal lives. Her film, *The Harvest*, was awarded best documentary at the Echo BRICS Film Festival in Moscow earlier this year.

However, it garnered a great deal of negative publicity as well. “I got lots of hate mail, with people complaining that the children didn’t belong in this crèche,” she says. “At the end of the day, they’re also human. They also need to live.”

Inspired by a visit to Yad Vashem in Israel, Waner created the *Harvest Foundation*, an organisation which enables individuals to use agricultural harvesting as a form of support and therapy.

“A secret food garden existed in the

Continued on page 11>>

Becoming what my Nazi father most hated: a Jew

JORDAN MOSHE

When Dr Bernd Wollschlaeger’s son asked who his paternal grandfather was, his father struggled to give him an easy answer. While most of us would have no trouble answering this question, Wollschlaeger didn’t know how to explain that his father had been a highly decorated Nazi war hero. “I could tell my son that his own father was a proud Israeli citizen who had served in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), but how could I tell him that my father was a convinced national socialist and German war hero?” Wollschlaeger told a Zoom audience on Monday night. “How could I reconcile the two?”

The Bavarian-born physician shared his extraordinary life story at the invitation of Sydenham Shul, recounting how he had gone from being the son of a prominent Nazi to converting to Judaism and moving to Israel.

Born in Bamberg in 1958, young Wollschlaeger grew up with an appreciation of German history, but also a sense that something wasn’t being spoken about. “Something was missing,” he says. “I knew the war had happened, and that people had won and lost. The fact that American soldiers were based in our city meant we didn’t win. I figured that out. But there was something else.”

After speaking to his parents, Wollschlaeger learned that his father had served in the war as a tank commander, participating in rapid advances across Poland, France, Belgium, and Russia, clearing the way for the invading Nazi army.

“He was awarded the Knight’s Cross, and said it had been awarded by a man he still called ‘My Führer,’” Wollschlaeger says. “It was the highest honour for him. His army buddies still visited him, and together, they would celebrate the old days and toast my father. He made them proud.”

However, Wollschlaeger felt that something was amiss. His suspicion was proven correct in 1972, when he and his family witnessed the brutal murder of the Israeli Olympic team at the hands of terrorists at the Olympic Games hosted in Germany that year.

“The newspaper headlines the next day said that Jews had been killed in Germany



Dr Bernd Wollschlaeger

once again,” recounts Wollschlaeger. “I was confused. What had happened the first time?”

When through school he discovered the extent of the Nazi atrocities and confronted his father, he was verbally assaulted.

“I confronted my father about Auschwitz, Mengele, Eichmann, and all the rest,” he recalls. “I asked him to tell me about the Holocaust. He stared at me, told me I was spewing communist propaganda, and there was no such thing. Was my father actually lying?”

“I learned whatever I could. I had never met a Jew, but I knew they had been wronged. I kept asking my father, but he was never upfront. One day he said it never happened, the next he said he didn’t take part and blamed the government or the SS.

“He tried to convince me that any civilians killed were partisans. I was stunned: 1.2 million children were involved in fighting, and that’s why they died? It made no sense.”

The truth emerged one evening when Wollschlaeger’s drunken father made his true feelings clear. “He told me he didn’t care what I thought, but that he had done his best to kill non-humans and make the world a better place,” Wollschlaeger says.

He learned later than his father had

enhanced the Nazi killing apparatus by clearing the way for mass murder to take place, his tank unit removing all opposition and making killing possible.

“I loved my father, but that was the end for me. I couldn’t become like him,” Wollschlaeger says.

Not only was he determined to break with his father, he decided to become the very thing his father loathed: a Jew. After meeting a group of Israeli students visiting Germany, Wollschlaeger visited Israel, toured Yad Vashem, and developed a sense of respect for Jews and how they had rebuilt their lives after the Holocaust. He decided to

become a part of it.

Returning to Germany, he sought help from the tiny community of remaining Jews in Bamberg, and asked to learn about Judaism. In return for becoming the “Shabbos guy”, he was offered Jewish tutelage and became absorbed in Jewish literature and culture over several years.

“I went every weekend, growing closer to Judaism and away from my family,” he says. “Towards the end, I missed Christmas dinner. When I came home, my mother cried, and my father yelled at me. I called him a murderer, and said that I refused to sit down with a person like him. He told me to leave, and I did.”

Liberated but without funds, Wollschlaeger tried to convince the Jewish community leadership to send him to the rabbinic court to convert to Judaism officially. His wish was granted, and in 1986, Wollschlaeger became Dov ben Avraham. After applying to the Jewish Agency, he bought a one-way ticket to Tel Aviv, and left Germany for a new life on a kibbutz, joining the IDF and becoming a doctor along the way.

His family’s past continued to haunt him, however, and he regularly feared being called out as the son of a Nazi. Only after marrying and having children did he fully confront his history and reconcile himself with his father’s actions.

“I had thrown my old life into a virtual closet, and wanted to forget it,” he says. “When my son told his class that his grandfather had been a Nazi, I was called in to see the principal. When I told him it was true, he encouraged me to talk to my son about it properly. The moment I did, a weight was lifted from my shoulders and I finally moved on.

“I decided to step out of the shadows, learn from a painful past, and make sure it never happens again. Hate has dire consequences if we let it go unchallenged. I’m a proud Jew committed to seeing other Jews flourish. Together, we need to ensure that never again means just that.”

“He told me he didn’t care what I thought, but that he had done his best to kill non-humans and make the world a better place.”

Harvesting Brakpan’s COVID-19 survival

>>Continued from page 10

Warsaw Ghetto to create hope for children,” says Waner. “The idea of harvesting promoted positivity and hope for the future, and I used the same principle for the crèche children. I wanted them to gain life skills through harvesting, learning how to survive while nurturing themselves as individuals.”

When COVID-19 struck earlier this year, Waner created the Harvest COVID-19 Relief Project to meet the additional needs of those without provisions. Working closely with Shoprite, the Lunch Box Foundation, and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the project has helped to provide meals for hundreds of people.

“Regardless of a virus, life carries on,” says Waner. “People living in Plastic City still had to make a living and feed themselves. Many of them are recyclers, and they were unable to work, so we had to do something.

“We stepped in with meals. I’ve seen grown men cry with gratitude because they wouldn’t have a meal otherwise. They live hand to mouth. We had to do something for the sake of those without, especially children.”

When logistical issues and the cost of

delivering supplies to Plastic City became a problem, the Brakpan Shul offered its grounds to the foundation. Waner says the offer highlighted the role the Jewish community can play at this time.

“The project came even closer to my heart through the use of the shul,” she says. “Jews know what it is to be oppressed and othered, and we know what help really means. We can’t look the other way when people need us more than ever.”

Waner says many individuals are contributing to the project, making food donations which are invaluable to the organisation. “COVID-19 has really brought across how important it is not to look the other way. How can you not help people when they need you? I see in COVID-19 a desperation which is universal and always present. We’re all equal in this, and need to respect and care for one another.”

Her project’s success isn’t hers alone, she stresses. Beyond her family’s inspiration, she says her colleagues are a source of continuous support. “The Nkosi sisters and Thabile Khumalo Ka Dlada are my sisters, my strength in this project,” she says. “I’m nothing without them.”

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Plague and prejudice: it’s happened to us before

JORDAN MOSHE

While the COVID-19 pandemic may be novel, it’s by no means unprecedented. From the bubonic plague to the Spanish flu, widespread diseases have come and gone, something both South Africa and its Jewish population know only too well.

“South Africa is no stranger to pandemics,” said Howard Phillips, emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town. “It has a long history of being exposed to and suffering under pandemics. If one tries to get a handle on epidemics in our country, it becomes apparent that pandemics have things they do recurrently.”

Author of *Plague, Pox and Pandemics*, Phillips explored South Africa’s pandemic history in a fascinating online talk hosted by Jacana Media last week. He suggested that pandemics have characteristically done the same things over the centuries, and that the coronavirus is no different.

“Pandemics have a tendency to reveal the underpinnings of society,” he said. “They show starkly the faultlines of society, and the way in which COVID-19 has underlined inequality in our society is true of every pandemic historically.”

Pandemics also tend to reveal underlying attitudes. “Pathogens project prejudice and reveal underlying beliefs about others in the face of disaster,” said Phillips. “At a time of pandemic, we want to know where it comes from and who is to blame.”

An acceleration of trends and patterns is also common to pandemics, whether these trends were already developing slowly before the outbreak or are new and wholly unexpected.

Additionally, pandemics have a habit of triggering a zeal for reform, especially in public health. “They show up health systems and their inadequacies,” said Phillips. “Politicians respond by stressing the need to reform. President Cyril Ramaphosa’s push for a restructuring of the economy illustrates this.”

“We should look to past epidemics because they alert us to areas in which we should be vigilant. They show what the current pandemic is likely to produce.”

Even our public-health system owes its existence to a previous pandemic. According to Phillips, the bill which created a public-health system was driven by the outbreak of Spanish flu in 1918, killing 300 000 South Africans within six weeks.

“Dr Mitchell, the man tasked with drafting the bill, went up to the Union Buildings and tried to work,” says Phillips. “There were so many interruptions, he went home, sat at the kitchen table, and drafted the country’s first public-health bill.”

The bill was finally introduced in January 1919. Between 1918 and 1919, an estimated 50 to 100 million people died of the pandemic globally.

If South Africa is familiar with pandemics, its Jewish communities have certainly had their share of virus-related affliction as well. Whether under the plague outbreak of 1901 or the Spanish flu of 1918, the Jews of South Africa suffered considerable loss of life and a complete overturning of religious life.

Although records are scant, research by retired specialist physician Naomi Rapeport and cardiologist Colin Schamroth found that 58% of the total deaths of Jews in 1918 took place during the period of the pandemic. Their research identified that victims were on average a decade

younger than their non-influenza compatriots who died in the same year, and two-thirds were males.

“More South African Jews died in the pandemic than did South African Jewish soldiers during World War I. The residual effects of the pandemic

doors were open. You could walk in and take everything.”

The earlier plague of 1901 was no different. Gwynne Schrire, the deputy director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies Cape Council and veteran writer, has researched extensively the effects of the plague on the Jewish community of Cape Town. She discovered that her great-grandparents had lived through the pandemic, though her family never spoke of what transpired.

“In his memoirs, my great-grandmother’s son mentions the plague, but does not mention that his mom had it,” she says. “It was only when I had verses written by his father translated and took them to a doctor that I realised that she had the plague. If her son didn’t know, neither would her grandchildren.”

Schrire found that her great-grandfather took her to Frankfurt (instead of their native Lithuania) because the stigma and gossip of their neighbours had angered him.

Sadly, their experience was not unlike that of Jews across the country. Antisemitic sentiment spiked dramatically, and Schrire says the plague



Women wearing masks during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic

was blamed on the outsider, on “the blacks, Asians, and dirty verminous Jews”. As a result, there was the hasty passing very soon afterwards of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1902.

“Equating Jews with dirt and disease made the climate more favourable for passing an act the following year to limit entry to the Cape of these dangerous, disease-harboring aliens,” says Schrire.

“A speaker at a protest meeting said, ‘This colony... was infested from right to left with undesirable aliens.’ The subconscious choice of the word ‘infested’, one used for vermin, sends a clear signal.”

on the Jewish community were major, and must have had a lasting effect.”

Accounts of the ordeal are difficult to comprehend. In an interview conducted by Phillips with Jenny Stern, a survivor of the Spanish flu, a grim portrait is painted of Cape Town Jewry living under the pandemic.

“Every shul was open. People went. But people tried to keep away from one another,” said Stern. “We had the streets cleaned with an old-fashioned water cart, and they sprayed the city with water and something in it. It was terrible, terrible. Every shop in Cape Town was closed. You couldn’t get anything.

“There was nothing, nothing to buy. The

Jewry battens the hatches as Brazilian president gets the virus

MARCUS M. GILBAN – JTA

The bombshell news on Tuesday was ironic for some. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, one of the world leaders who has most staunchly downplayed the potential of the coronavirus pandemic, had contracted the virus.

In spite of his ardent support of Israel, Bolsonaro’s tempered rhetoric on the virus and controversial moves to cope with the pandemic – including fiercely criticising stay-at-home measures implemented by Rio de Janeiro and other state governments, and saying that a weakened economy could kill more than the virus – have raised eyebrows even among his most passionate conservative Jewish supporters.

As of June, the country of 215 million people that is home to about 120 000 Jews had the second-highest number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the world behind the United States: nearly 1.6 million, including about 65 000 deaths.

In March, the Rio Jewish federation established its own crisis committee to advise the state’s 30 000 Jews. Along with being a state, Rio is Brazil’s second largest city and second largest Jewish community behind São Paulo. It’s home to some of the nation’s most famous landmarks, such as the Christ Redeemer statue and the Sugarloaf Mountain, and boasts some of the country’s most storied Jewish institutions, such as the Great Israelite Temple and Brazil’s largest Jewish school, the 1 400-student Liessin.

“In spite of government guidelines allowing religious temples to reopen, we have told all synagogues to wait longer,

and our request has been met,” the federation’s president, Arnon Velmovitsky, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The city’s largest synagogue, the 1 000-family Associação Religiosa Israelita, has been garnering more than 500 people on its regular Friday evening livestreamed religious services. It’s so popular that the president of the Reform temple, which was founded in 1942 by German Jewish families, says it will keep streaming services online after the pandemic.

Orthodox synagogues in the city have been holding pre-Shabbat and Havdalah celebrations. Temples from all streams offer an array of live and pre-recorded material, including prayers, lectures and classes. Since the pandemic started, Israeli Independence Day, Lag B’Omer and Shavuot observances were celebrated online.

Brazil is regularly among the top 10 list of countries that send the most immigrants to Israel every year. In 2019, nearly 700 Brazilians moved to Israel – a record that has stayed almost constant for three years in a row. Through May, 280 Brazilians had immigrated to the Jewish state this year, but that pipeline has been nearly shut down.

“Most people are frustrated because they should already be in Israel. We can’t tell anything for sure now, we have no crystal ball. It’s all a big question mark,” said Sprintza Laim, the head of the Jewish Agency’s aliyah department in Rio.

Still, immigration could increase

throughout the year, especially if the COVID-19 situation in Brazil worsens.

Last year, 750 Brazilian families opened aliyah files, meaning they began the process of gathering the personal and religious documents needed for immigration.



An aerial view of Flamengo Park in Rio de Janeiro

The 2020 tally is expected to reach up to 1 200, according to the Jewish Agency.

Rio alone currently accounts for about 45%, although it is home to only half the Jewish population of São Paulo.

Danielle Tarnovsky was among the 23 Brazilians who landed in Israel on a flight via Ethiopia in May. She was quarantined in a Tel Aviv hotel for 14 days, as mandated by Israel, from which she spoke to Olim do Brasil, a non-profit that helps her countrymen.

“We had a thousand obstacles, many people would’ve given it up, but I was loyal to my goal,” Tarnovsky said from her new home in Nahariya. “Rio is not doing well in terms of health. We left the virus

behind.”

While several private schools in Rio are providing pre-recorded classes, Jewish schools have stood out for providing real-time classes. They’re using e-learning platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom supported by the Google Classroom platform.

“The result is above our expectations,” said Celia Saada, the principal of Liessin, which has three campuses. All the Jewish schools in Brazil run from preschool to high school.

“Junior high and high-school students have responded quickly and positively. From first to fifth grade, it was a gradual thing. Preschool was our biggest challenge.”

TTH Barilan, an Orthodox school, recently posted on Facebook numbers documenting the school’s efforts to keep things running during the first three months of the pandemic. There were nearly half a million emails and files exchanged; almost 7 500 classes on Google Meet that took more than 250 000 minutes; nearly 42 000 views of class videos on social media; and more.

“Our teachers reinvented their teaching practice, families found ways to organise their homes to meet the new reality, and students took a leap of responsibility and autonomy to keep up with the new school

dynamics,” said TTH Barilan’s principal, Andre Frank. “The pandemic will pass, but the legacy will remain.”

Israeli folk dance, a passionate national pastime, has probably its biggest diaspora fans in the land of the Samba. The choreographed circle, couple, and line dances are taught in Rio’s Jewish schools, youth movements, synagogues, and private spaces.

COVID-19 has turned this world upside down – especially since holding hands is one of the key principles of Israeli dance. The 50th edition of the Hava Netze Bemachol festival, Rio’s largest Jewish annual event, has been postponed as a result of the virus.

“We now hold regular classes on Zoom. We’ve been recording choreography for our pupils to rehearse at home, and training our instructors during the quarantine,” said Daniel Adesse, the founder of Kineret Institute, an Israeli dance school that gathers about 250 dancers who perform in Brazil and the United States.

The Women’s International Zionist Organization, a group of 1 500 activists from across the country whose headquarters is in Rio, is still holding a wide range of initiatives to raise funds for educational projects.

Lectures, panels, and courses on Jewish values, Israel-related topics, and more are now livestreamed on Zoom, which the activists, known as chaverot – have nicknamed WiZoom. The events constantly reach the Zoom limit of 100 participants. The goal is to plan campaigns to collect funds on the calls, but also to share the tough personal challenges imposed by COVID-19.

Gesher Small Business Relief Fund is an independent non-profit company offering medium term interest free loans to majority Jewish owned SMMEs in South Africa. Run in conjunction with the Chevrah Kadisha, and led by over 50 volunteer professionals, the Fund aims to enable viable businesses to endure and survive the Covid-19 pandemic, saving thousands of jobs and sustaining countless families.

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Expressions of interest received	Loan value indicated
+400	+R120M

LOAN APPLICATIONS

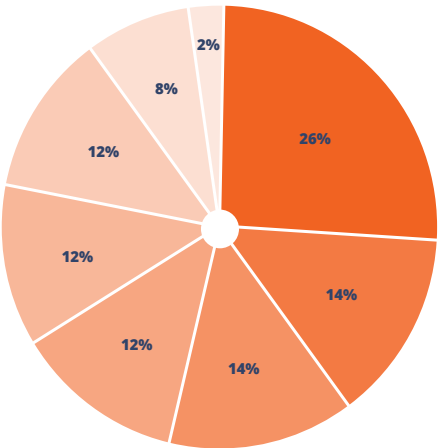
Applications received	Average loan request amount	Average turnover per applicant	Average number of employees per applicant
+140	R300K	R7M	12

LOAN APPROVALS

Loans granted	Loans currently in evaluation	Maximum loan amount	Employees directly impacted by loans granted	Direct dependants benefited
60	20	R750K	1000	10 000

6%	of loans between R50K - R150K	62%	of loans between R150K - R250K	32%	of loans between R250K - R750K
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28 MONTHS	6 MONTHS	
Average loan term	Average repayment holiday	Nationally representative



- 26% GENERAL DISTRIBUTION AND RETAIL
- 14% HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM
- 14% GENERAL SERVICES
- 12% PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
- 12% MEDICAL
- 12% MANUFACTURING (EXCLUDING FOOD)
- 8% FOOD
- 2% PROPERTY/ REAL ESTATE

Of those surveyed who had not yet sent an application, more than 50% said they intended to still apply.

Frankfurt’s small Jewish community thriving but alert

JOE BAUR – JTA

There were about 30 000 Jews in the city of Frankfurt before World War II, making it the largest community in Germany.

By the time the United States military occupied the city in 1945, there were only about 100 left.

“Jewish life was destroyed,” said Tobias Freimuller, the author of the recently published *Frankfurt and the Jews*, a history of the community from 1945 to 1990.

Flash forward to 2020, and the Jewish community of Frankfurt is once again a powerful force in the city, one of Germany’s largest and a major business hub.

There are only about 6 600 Jews in the city of 753 000, but they have a political influence that other minority populations don’t. Fighting antisemitism is a city priority. Jewish leaders are in regular contact with city leaders. When there is a tragic or otherwise newsworthy event, a representative of the Jewish community is always involved in the city’s response.

“If we open our mouth, everybody listens,” said Leo Latasch, a professor of medicine who oversees social affairs and security, among other things, for the Frankfurt Jewish community organisation. “We have an excellent relationship with the democratic parties.”

Freimuller, the deputy director of the Fritz Bauer Institute, a Holocaust research centre affiliated with the city’s Goethe University, chronicles the Jewish resurgence in his book, which was published on 15 April.

It’s a complex narrative, say members of the Jewish community and those close to it, because the Nazis’ destruction was so complete, a Jewish presence had to be rebuilt with help from the outside.

“Rebirth sounds like a revival of the community,” said Esther Schapira, a journalist and filmmaker who grew up in Frankfurt. “That’s not the case.”

After the war, the Jews remaining in Frankfurt were of two types. There were the few survivors who founded today’s Frankfurt Jewish community organisation in 1947, and envisioned returning to the roots of the community that existed before the war. That group consisted mainly of assimilated Jews who saw themselves as German and were often married to non-Jews.

Those Jews were called the *Alteingesessene*, or long-established ones, said 30-year-old Laura Cazes, an employee of Frankfurt’s Zentralwohlfahrtsstellerder Juden in Deutschland, or ZWST, a Jewish social-welfare organisation.

Then there were the displaced persons, or DPs, who came from across Eastern Europe. Many ended up in Frankfurt as a pitstop en route to the United States or then-Palestine, but immigration wasn’t initially possible. Instead, tens of thousands of Jewish DPs spent years in DP camps, such as Frankfurt-Zeilsheim.

The situation changed in 1948, when the British Mandate in Palestine gave way to the founding of the state of Israel and the US adopted the Displaced Persons Act, opening its borders. Most DPs left Germany, but not everyone was able to make the journey.

In 1949, the community organisation combined with the Committee of



Photo: Frank Rumpenhorst/picture alliance via Getty Images

Volunteers with a programme called Meet a Jew talk to non-Jewish students at a school in Frankfurt

Displaced Persons. There were about 2 000 Jews in total between the two groups.

“What’s interesting is that hardly anyone in the Jewish community at the time came from the city,” said Freimuller. “The number of alt-Frankfurter [or original Frankfurters] was quite low. That means that few in the post-war Jewish community saw Frankfurt during Nazi rule.”

After the founding of the Bundesrepublik in 1949, West Germany passed legislation to start the process of compensating Holocaust survivors.

With that help, the Frankfurt community began to build and expand.

By most accounts, Jews in Frankfurt avoided the spotlight for the first several decades following the war. Freimuller said that Jewish institutions carefully toed the line and were withdrawn in public life.

But that changed in 1985, during what Freimuller refers to as a key turning point in the history of Jews in post-war Germany.

In the 1960s, city planners redesigned the formerly

bourgeois Westend neighbourhood, which was heavily Jewish until the 1930s. The neighbourhood was only slightly damaged during the war and many of its 19th-century upper-class homes were still standing. But in the 60s, the city wanted to build commercial high-rise buildings along the central corridors of Westend because the neighbouring city centre was overcrowded.

The city started by

ripping out old homes and putting in office buildings, but this led to protests. Squatters stayed in the homes scheduled for demolition, and other protestors clashed with police in the streets.

Many of the realtors involved in the new developments were Jewish, and that led to what Freimuller calls “antisemitic undertones” in public life.

In the 1970s, prominent playwright Rainer Werner Fassbinder wrote a play inspired by the neighbourhood conflict. The play, *Garbage, the City and Death*, was protested for its perceived antisemitic main character – a real-estate speculator named Der reiche Jude (The rich Jew).

Though the play was published, its premiere in 1975 was cancelled after protests. The play wasn’t performed until 1985, but Jewish objections over the content remained and some took action during the first performance. They forged tickets to get into the premiere, and when the play began, they stormed the stage and prevented it from being performed.

Suddenly, Jews in Frankfurt had found their public

Jewish elderly isolated as community centres close

CNAAN LIPSHIZ – JTA

Tamara Boronina, an 82-year-old Holocaust survivor living in Ukraine, can barely afford her small Odessa apartment on her monthly pension of \$65 (R1 110).

She’s a widow whose only daughter died in 1999. Unable to visit the local Jewish community centre that has been her social lifeline, Boronina now eagerly awaits the weekly visit by her caseworker from the JDC, the humanitarian group formerly known as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

“The worst loss this virus and quarantine has brought for me is isolation,” Boronina said of the COVID-19 pandemic. “Communication is more important for me than material assistance.”

The former Soviet Union has about half a million Jews, most of them living in Russia and Ukraine. Many thousands of them are elderly.

The JDC, a 106-year-old Jewish international aid agency, was born in 1914 to assist exactly those types of Jews who found themselves mired in difficult circumstances at the start of World War I. It helped Jews flee Nazi Germany beginning in 1933. About 80 000 German Jews escaped Europe altogether with the help of the JDC.

Later, when the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, the JDC was the only reliable source of aid for many who were plunged into extreme poverty.

So the agency has plenty of experience in providing food and medicine in war zones, earthquakes, and the like. The trickier part, JDC

officials said, has been relieving the loneliness and isolation that the crisis has meant for the elderly Jews in that part of the world.

Before COVID-19, the JDC had offered them things such as yoga, gymnastics, pottery, language, and painting classes, and the benefit of socialising through a network of dozens of Jewish community centres and day centres.

“They’re confined to four walls, some in dilapidated homes. For some, the will to live is slipping away,” said Michal Frank, the executive director of JDC in the former Soviet Union.

“Before the virus, they could either go to the Jewish community centre or, if they were home bound, receive home visits from the JDC caseworker. For some, the virus has either complicated that or made it impossible. We’ll be dealing with the effect this is having on their mental condition for a long time after this is over.”

In response, the organisation has set up COVID-19 hotlines manned by trained volunteers, one of the only programmes of its kind for the region’s elderly Jewish population.

There are six call centres, including ones in the Ukrainians cities of Odessa and Dnipro, as well as in Chisinau, the capital city of Moldova. Working off a list of elderly clients who get regular aid from JDC, volunteers and staff chat for about half an hour with each person they call, and make sure they have what they need.

Across the former Soviet Union, additional Jewish communities and groups have also launched emergency services to help vulnerable populations



A JDC employee, right, delivers an aid package to a Jewish woman in Kharkiv, Ukraine

Photo: Courtesy of the JDC

through the coronavirus. Organisations affiliated with the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, which constitutes a major force for post-Soviet Jewry, have been churning out thousands of meals and providing protective gear to at-risk elderly Jews for weeks in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus.

One Chabad project for young volunteers, EnerJew, also attempts to address the isolation issue. Its members have been assigned elderly community members to check up on regularly by phone and sometimes on their doorsteps.

Russia and Ukraine have recorded about 10 667 deaths and 1 306 deaths respectively from COVID-19, placing them low on the table of world fatalities per million inhabitants. Those two countries have about 500 000 Jews,

voice.

Schapira, 59, whose work typically focuses on international perceptions of Israel, suggests that Frankfurt’s liberal ethos has allowed the new Jewish community to flourish, noting that it has welcomed Turkish immigrants as well. Millions of people with Turkish ancestry live in Germany, and more than half of Frankfurt’s citizens have immigrant roots.

“Frankfurt has a very liberal spirit,” Schapira said, adding that tensions with Muslim communities are not a big issue. “You have quite an open atmosphere that makes it possible for Jews to blossom again.”

The city is home to one large synagogue, three smaller ones, and a prayer room at the airport. Latasch describes these as mostly conservative as opposed to Orthodox or liberal, but adds that there are “possibilities for people who are Orthodox or liberal”.

Schapira’s father was a survivor from Romania who ended up in Frankfurt as a displaced person.

“They never intended to live here,” Schapira said of her father and his peers. “It was just the waiting time until they were able to go where they wanted to go, which was mainly either America, Argentina, or Israel.”

But Schapira’s father was tired. He didn’t have the financial means or physical strength to make the journey overseas. So he established roots in Frankfurt, and married a non-Jewish German woman.

In spite of having been born and raised in Germany, Schapira says “the idea of leaving the country” has always been in the back of her head.

“Don’t mix too much. Don’t get too familiar. Don’t feel too rooted. Be on alert. Be always ready not to miss the right moment to leave again,” were just some of the messages she says she learned from her father and others in the community.

Although moving had been a possibility for Schapira and her family, they ended up staying because, as her father put it, “Right now, this is the safest place for Jews to be, because the whole world is watching Germany.” However, in her next breath, she admits that this could always change.

Letters

VOICING OPINION ON ISRAELI POLITICS ISN'T WORTH THE VITRIOL IT SPAWNS

Bennie Katzman is correct when he says that the South African Jewish community shouldn't get involved in Israeli politics. ("Majority of Israelis support sovereignty over occupied territories", SA Jewish Report, 3 July 3). Israel is a sovereign nation, and it's entitled to do what it wants without interference from outsiders. By writing letters to the newspapers, whether you are for or against annexation, all you will do is stir up old hatreds. See what happened in the wake of the webinar hosted by the *Jerusalem Post* between Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng and Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein. Antisemitic letters and comment pieces flooded the newspapers, and Mogoeng's remarks made headlines.

The now defunct BDS-SA's (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions South Africa) "human-rights" movement – as one news report had it – has changed its name to #Africa4Palestine. However, it's still led by Director Muhammed Desai, and it has, among other organisations, filed charges against the chief justice for voicing his Christian beliefs, and his support for Israel and unhappiness with the partisan view the African National

Congress government has taken. By changing its name, BDS-SA tacitly implies that it has failed in its mission to harm Israel. #Africa4Palestine will go the same way, even though it reportedly has the support of Naledi Pandor, the minister of international relations and cooperation, who asked the African Union to back #Africa4Palestine. Until the Arabs give up their intransigence and come to the negotiating table, the two-state solution is a pipe dream. When will the Palestinians wake up and stop playing victim? Although the chief rabbi couldn't have predicted the fall-out or even what the chief justice would say, I don't think it was a good idea simply because of the hatred it spawned against Jews in South Africa. I'm not suggesting that the webinar shouldn't have taken place. I'm all for debate, but we're witnessing the start of tyrannical rule from people who don't like dissenting voices. It's one step closer to the abyss if we voice our opinion on annexation. The hate letters will be worse than those that followed the webinar. – **Brian Josselowitz, Cape Town**

Shtetl under attack



SCHOOL SAVVY

Dani Sack

It's official: the *shtetl* is under attack. After months of hibernation, when we are finally allowed back into the world of shopping, work, and school, the virus enters our community. While it was inevitable, it arrived quickly. One moment I was finally finishing my first set of prelims, the next I was afraid even to enter the school grounds out of fear that the "*chaleria*" (as my beloved Yiddishe grandparents call it) was lurking in the shadows, waiting to jump out at me and further ruin my matric year. After a rather panicky Thursday, filled with COVID-19 rumours and muddled thoughts about said rumours, I returned home from school to go through the usual motions: shoes off, bags in a separate room to be sanitised, matric jacket deposited in the dryer, and straight to my room to get changed out of my contaminated clothes. When I finally sat down for lunch, I took the time to reflect on the day. My first thought was, "Today was weird." I guess you could say that about every single day since the beginning of March this year, but I think it was more strange because I had finally come to terms with the fact that COVID-19 was real and scarily close. Before the virus started affecting those I know and live amongst, I was aware of its existence and took the necessary precautions. However, it wasn't until that Thursday that I truly felt the virus – not because I was sick, but because the people around me were sick. I started recognising names on the tehillim lists, familiar faces getting tested, and that's when it hit me: this is real. More real than it was in March or April during lockdown. COVID-19 is sitting next to me at school, walking alongside my sister on Long Avenue, joining my mother on shopping trips to Moishes, and my father on his limited visits to work. COVID-19 has made friends with my family, my friends, my community. It scares me more than "the Rona" or "the *chaleria*" because it's no longer a joke, something about which to make up funny nicknames. It's here, and it's waiting on our doorsteps. However, while the *shtetl* is under attack, we are privileged to have the appropriate arsenal to fight the virus. We are armed with

sanitisers, masks, bottles of soap, and most importantly, *seichel* (common sense). We have our amazing frontliners, the essential workers, doctors, and other healthcare professionals without whom this would surely be a losing battle. We have those who are helping behind the scenes, donating, collating collections for food, blankets, and anything else required by those in need. To those infected by COVID-19, we are supporting you throughout this difficult time, sending you strength, and praying for you constantly. Those of us who, like myself, don't necessarily fall into that category know the rules: limit contact with others, wear your mask at all times when outside your home, sanitise your hands, wash them for at least 20 seconds, and stay vigilant. With these people and weapons in our armoury, we can strike back at this unseen enemy. I'm confident that as long as we, as a community, look after each other, then we've got this. If all else fails, we'll have to call in the big guns – Jewish *chutzpah*. If COVID-19 manages to beat that, then we're truly doomed.

• Dani Sack is a Grade 12 pupil at Yeshiva College

Hatzolah heroes on the frontline

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beds are filling up fast. "This is done while at the same time calming down another patient over the phone on an unrelated call," Chemel said. "I can hear another call beeping in my ear, but I can still be busy comforting another caller – a desperate spouse trying through their tears to tell you what's wrong. "This can be followed by an attempt to help a lonely person through their most difficult and scary thoughts as they self-isolate. The greatest challenge of all is to be unable to assist a soul because of a caller's panic ridden attempt to ask for help. There are endless scenarios. It's so rewarding helping people, especially when

long and the potential is there for things to go belly up. This is something we can't foresee. It's scary." Lance Abramson, the chairperson of Hatzolah, said the organisation was witnessing an ongoing escalation in infections in the community based on the COVID-19-positive patients it's monitoring at home and those it has transported to hospital. There are 398 patients on the COVID-19 Wellness Monitoring Programme, the brainchild of Operations Manager Uriel Rosen. The programme is for any community member who has symptoms associated with the virus, has tested positive for COVID-19, or is displaying symptoms of the virus. "Once you've signed up to the programme, one of the wellness volunteers will contact the patient and Hatzolah will deliver a thermometer and pulse oximetry device which will check the patient's pulse and oxygen levels," said Abramson. "The patient is contacted regularly during their isolation and their well-being is tracked this way." The organisation has spent about R1.5 million on personal



Hatzolah paramedics dressed in full PPE after a medical emergency

things run smoothly, and there's hope. Being a dispatcher comes with immense responsibility yet endless opportunity." During one recent Shabbos shift, she took 24 calls, filled out 24 forms, and handled 14 emergencies. "It's a scary, eventful, extremely pressurising, unpredictable, and highly challenging time," said Singer following one of his 24-hour shifts this week. "We are tired. We know the nights will be

protective and other equipment. It has purchased 300 pulse oximeters which cost R650 each, and hundreds of thermometers. "Hatzolah is about saving lives, but there's so much more to it. It's about caring for you as a person. It will do anything to make sure that you are taken care of. That's true *chesed*, true kindness," said Chemel. At the time of going to press, there were 215 855 confirmed cases, 102 299 recoveries, and 3 502 deaths in South Africa.

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