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■ Volume 25 – Number 38 ■ 4 November 2021 ■ 29 Cheshvan 5782

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Farewell to Mr Wolf – a King David legend

NICOLA MILTZ

Johannesburg Jewry and former King Davidians around the world this week mourned the sudden passing of legendary educator and much-loved former Jewish school headmaster, Elliot Wolf.

There has been a groundswell of grief from generations of people whose lives he had a profound impact on. Hundreds of people turned to social media to express their sadness and to recount anecdotes in which Wolf, who was also director of the King David Schools Foundation, featured.

Wolf was laid to rest in the section of Westpark Cemetery reserved for people who have displayed exceptional commitment to the community. His contribution to Jewish education for 50 years in South Africa was extraordinary.

His identical twin brother, Jeffrey Wolf, is distraught, said his family. "My father is battling," said Graham Wolf. "It's as though he has lost a limb. He feels like he has lost his other half."

"For the community, this is a huge loss, but for our family, uncle Ell was a giant as well," he said.

The Wolf twins are synonymous with Jewish education in South Africa and the King David School system. Born and bred in Yeoville, Johannesburg, the brothers devoted their careers to teaching and made it their life's ambition to enhance Jewish education.

This week, Elliot was looking forward to visiting the Westcliff Hotel with his long-time close friend Sheryl Benjamin to admire the jacarandas which are in full bloom across the city. Elliot, an avid horticulturalist and

gardener, delighted in the purple display each season. The two taught together for more than 40 years.

"Elliot had a special, empathetic way of dealing with children's problems. He'd share their heartache, joy, and pain, and he was fair," she said. In later years, when they attended school reunions together, he was always the favourite, while she was "second best".

"Past pupils absolutely adored him. They marvelled at how he remembered almost every one of them down to the minute details of their school career and family lives."

News of his passing sent shock waves through the community. Up until last week, he had been well and enjoyed spending a few days in the Kruger National Park with members of his family. It was an extended 80th birthday celebratory holiday for Barbara Wolf, Jeffrey's wife, with whom Elliot was very close. They arrived last Thursday, and enjoyed a few days in the bush, one of Elliot's favourite places. A few days into their holiday, he took ill and was rushed to hospital in Nelspruit, where he later passed away. Pictures of them in the bush show a happy, smiling Elliot.

To those who knew and loved him, Elliot was the quintessential gentleman and mensch. He had a keen understanding of the teenage mind, saw through their pain and innumerable behavioural quirks, and revelled in their achievements in the arts, sciences, sports, and academics.

"Every child mattered," said Benjamin, "he took notice of all his students and cared about their well-being."

As head of the King David Schools Foundation, Elliot travelled the world, meeting up with alumni whose lives he had



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

King David Linksfield pupils escorting the coffin at Elliot Wolf's funeral

an impact on.

Raelene Tradonsky, the executive director of the foundation, described Elliot as "a dear colleague, mentor, and a loyal and trusted friend".

"He had a real passion for Jewish education and particularly the underdog. He had come from very humble beginnings and believed that everyone should be afforded the opportunity of a Jewish education of excellence, irrespective of their parents' financial position," she said.

He was an excellent fundraiser who was "uncomfortable" asking for money. "I told him it was our job to ask, and they could only say no," she said.

"On one of our first trips to Australia, a wonderful alumnus and donor remarked that we made a great 'horse and pony show' – I was the 'iron-fist' and he, the ultimate gentleman, was 'the velvet glove'."

She said alumni were stunned at Elliot's memory as he took delight in reminding them of stories from their school days which they had long since forgotten.

"He remembered because he took a genuine interest in people, and he cared. He really cared."

"Elliot would revel in the success of his former pupils, and delighted in sharing his pleasure with them, reminding them how their interests and passions were sparked at school," she said.

"We shared a passion for travel and boy, did we have fun doing it! We were wine and dined by some of the wealthiest alumni to have come out of King David, and he relished in being treated like royalty by many a successful Davidian. They embraced Elliot as someone who had played a pivotal role in their success," she said.

An alumnus, Discovery Group Chief

Executive Adrian Gore, said this week that much would be said of Elliot's legacy and incredible achievements and he was determined to add to that narrative over time.

"But on the day of his passing, my overriding emotion is one of sadness, and particularly of loss for the community. This brings with it a realisation that is important to me: Elliot Wolf was and always will be "Mr Wolf" to me. You see, it wasn't because he was my headmaster; bear in mind that we worked as colleagues for more than a decade in building the King David Schools Foundation. Instead, it's because he possessed this rare quality of integrity, conviction, and timeless style. And this, together with his wisdom and sheer intellect, created an ability to shift generations of people. His impact is

Continued on page 2>>

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Israeli brainpower ‘most valuable energy source’

CNAAN LIPSHIZ

At the closely-watched COP26 conference on climate change in Glasgow, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said Israel's famed start-up sector could add a “mighty” contribution towards mitigating the climate crisis if its entrepreneurs focused on it.

“As the country with the most start-ups per capita in the world, we must channel our efforts to saving our world,” Bennett said in a speech on Monday, 1 November, the first day of the United Nations conference with dozens of world leaders, scheduled to run until 12 November. “This is why I say to our entrepreneurs and innovators: you can be the game changers. You can help save our planet.”

The conference has been hailed by some international leaders as the “last, best hope” to produce policy needed to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius during this century – a target scientists say is needed to avoid climate catastrophe.

“Our carbon footprint may be small, but our impact on climate change can be mighty,” Bennett said. “If we’re going to move the needle, we need to contribute Israel’s most valuable source of energy: the energy and brainpower of our people.”

Also on Monday, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of the Church of England, apologised for making a statement at the opening ceremony that critics said constituted an inappropriate Holocaust analogy.

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The archbishop, Justin Welby, said that politicians who failed to tackle environmental issues would be spoken of by future generations “in far stronger terms than we speak today of the politicians of the [19]30s, of the politicians who ignored what was happening in Nazi Germany”.

Hours later, Welby wrote on Twitter, “I unequivocally apologise for the words I used when trying to emphasise the gravity of the situation facing us at COP26. It’s never right to make comparisons with the atrocities brought by the Nazis, and I’m sorry for the offence caused to Jews by these words.”

Farewell to Mr Wolf – a King David legend

>>>Continued from page 1

humbling, and his example is a light for the entire community.”

Alumni this week set up a Facebook page called “In Loving Memory of Elliot Wolf” which has more than 1 000 members.

Hundreds of tributes have continued to flow in, testament to his profound influence over so many people’s lives, young and old.

“School was more than academics to him” said former head girl Karin Kopenhager-Mervis. “He refused to allow me to take history as a seventh subject in matric. He said I had enough on my plate and should rather focus on enjoying my final year of school. I could always read up on historical events that interested me in years to come. I took his advice [who didn’t?], and he was so right.”

Her sister, Dena Bloch, remembered being visited by him during a long stay in hospital when she was in Grade 10.

“He brought me a book, *The Color Purple*. He asked me to read it and said he would like to discuss it with me when I was done. I was never much of a reader, but read the book because, hey, Mr Wolf said so! He visited me a week later, and sat chatting to me about the book, recommending others. Not only did he instil in me the love of reading, but I was in awe of his genuine care for me.”

“He really believed in me when I certainly didn’t believe in myself!” said Dani Janks.

Journalist Shira Druon wrote, “I recall a particular discussion we had

for the purpose of a newspaper article I was writing about him. I asked him what he attributed his success to as an educator. His reply made an indelible impact. ‘I grew up in a house in Yeoville. My mother was an extremely outgoing person, and so my brother and I stayed on the quieter side to keep up. This taught me there was beauty in silence and from that, I learned to listen. So when I interacted with my students, I listened more than I spoke.’ I was so moved, I promised myself I would take that forward with me into my life as an educator.”

Elliot’s November letter to the foundation, which is still to be published at the end of this month, was prophetically titled “Reason for Introspection”.

In it, he wrote how a recent fall and injury to his shoulder had given him the opportunity to reflect on his life and times.

“At this stage of my career, I feel I must have a further challenge – to compile with much assistance a history of KDHS Linksfield. This is certainly not an easy task, as how does one restrict oneself when there is such a diverse and rich record of achievement. However, I shall try to accomplish this with an advance apology for any oversights. *Chazak ve’ematz* [be strong and have courage] will be my watchword in compiling this record. I hope that that it will reveal as many of the threads as possible that make up the rich tapestry of King David High School Linksfield.”

Torah Thought

Which way does your compass point?

Theories abound about the Tembisa 10. Something seems not quite kosher about the birth of those decuplets. And, there was something not so kosher about the first multiple pregnancy recorded in the Torah – Rebecca’s twins Jacob and Esau.

What made the expectant mother really uptight was the peculiar behaviour of what she believed was a single foetus. Whenever she walked past the famous Academy of Shem & Ever, the baby seemed to get really excited, as if longing to get out and join the learning. (Shem and Ever, the son and grandson of Noah, were teachers of monotheistic faith and trained their disciples in this belief.) However, much to her chagrin, the same behaviour repeated itself when she was in the proximity of the far more numerous centres of idol worship.

There was a certain sense of relief when it was prophetically revealed to her that she was to be the mother of two sons, who were already acting out their respective destinies in utero.

Mothers speak of their unborn babies reacting to outside stimuli. Some sounds make the foetus excited and unsettled, kicking away in the mother’s stomach. Soothing music apparently calms the child. There have even been suggestions that listening to classical compositions while expecting will stimulate intellectual and emotional development, resulting in higher EQs and IQs! Schubert, Liszt and Mozart top the pregnancy playlists. But how could Jacob know his mother was walking past a Yeshiva?

The answer is that sanctity attracts sanctity. Like the magnetic needle of a compass inexorably drawn to

the north, like the small flame pointing towards a nearby larger fire, holiness is pulled to holiness. The lofty soul of unborn Jacob couldn’t help but feel tugged towards a place imbued with purity and divinity.

In Psalm 119, King David tells us, “I considered my ways and I turned my feet to your testimonies.” Vayikra Rabba explains: David said, “Master of the universe! Each and every day I would consider and say, ‘To this place or to this home I am walking’ but my feet would bring me to the synagogues and to the houses of study.”

So here is a question we all need to ask ourselves: in which direction is our internal compass irresistibly drawn?

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin,
Oxford Shul



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Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd. Tel: 0860 525 200 • Board of Directors Howard Sackstein (Chairperson), Dina Diamond, Herschel Jawitz, Shaun Matisonn, Benji Porter. • Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.



Husband reunited with his family after ordeal

NICOLA MILTZ

A Johannesburg father was rescued and safely returned to his anguished family after going missing for several hours in Pretoria following a string of bizarre events which allegedly resulted in him being held against his will and robbed.

Details are still vague as to exactly what businessman Bryan Port was doing in Pretoria on Sunday afternoon in his white Toyota bakkie while his wife, Adina, couldn't reach him after he didn't come home.

What is clear is that the religious father of two went missing for several hours, causing panic and fear amongst his family and close-knit community in Glenhazel, Johannesburg, who feared the worst.

Active Protection (CAP) and the Community Security Organisation (CSO) who, together with a multitask team comprising the provincial Serious and Violent Crimes Unit of the South African Police Services, mobilised a search for the missing father.

News of his disappearance spread fast, and worried members of the community prayed for his safe return.

Following intense detective work and a major team effort, Port was finally tracked down several hours later driving home alone in his car on the highway after the suspects gave him back his keys and vehicle and let him go.

The details remain hazy, but Port is thankful his nightmare is over.

"I'm relieved it's over, and I'm grateful for the help of CAP, the CSO, and members of the



Alarm bells went off after Port sent a couple of cryptic WhatsApp messages to his wife late on Sunday afternoon when she tried to reach him. She immediately sensed something was off, and that Port might be in some sort of danger.

"He sent a strange message using some words in Hebrew, and said he was with his friend CAP. He also used the word *neshek* [weapon]," she said this week.

She immediately alerted the Community

police," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

He said he was hijacked and kidnapped on Sunday morning by four suspects, including a woman, near the Philip Nel Park in Pretoria. He said he had been there to attend a car show. When he arrived, he said, there was no sign of the show, so he pulled over to the side of the road and searched for details on his cell phone, thinking that perhaps he had got the directions wrong. It was then, he said, the

suspects approached his vehicle and held him up with guns.

"They forced me to drive a short distance away to a nearby complex where I was taken to a little room at the back," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

He said the suspects threatened him to reveal the pin numbers to his credit cards.

Two suspects then made off with his credit cards, he said, while two others stayed behind and kept watch over him.

As a risk manager at Rand Merchant Bank, he said he had received training on how to behave during this type of incident.

"I was actually calm, I knew what was happening, what would happen, and how the day would pan out. They made me lie on the bed and face the wall, they didn't tie me up," he said.

He told the *SA Jewish Report* that he didn't ask questions, did what he was told to do, and remained calm. At one point, after his phone kept on ringing, he said, he asked if he could send his family a message.

"They said I could WhatsApp as long as they could read the message before sending it. I used the word CAP, and the odd Hebrew word such as *neshek*, *kartis* [card], and *kese*f [money] to try hint that I had been kidnapped and that the robbers had my credit cards and were taking money," he said.

It's understood that two of the suspects went to the Mall of Africa and purchased high-end electronic devices such as laptops, cell phones, and air time as well as lunch, which they brought back with them sometime later, said Port.

Port said it was about 20:00 when the robbers drove him to a nearby shopping centre, gave him the keys to his vehicle, and let him go. He said he was disorientated and stranded without a phone, the rest became a blur as he said he tried to remember the telephone numbers of his loved ones whom he knew would be worried. After locating his vehicle in the parking lot of the centre, he said he got onto the highway to make his way home.

It wasn't long before he saw blue flashing lights in his rear-view mirror and realised he had been found.

CAP Chief Operating Officer Sean Jammy said this type of incident was extremely rare. It was understandable that the community was concerned following the recent incident in Gallo Manor involving a mother who was hijacked and dropped off shortly thereafter, and the ongoing high-profile Moti brothers kidnapping and hostage drama in Polokwane.

However, he said kidnapping for ransom in the community was extremely rare, and hijackings with kidnappings for immediate cash rewards were isolated and not on the rise, according to the organisation's records. There had been less than a handful of incidents like this experienced by the community over a 10-year period.

"We have gone back through our records for the past decade, and we don't believe there has been any noticeable increase to suggest there is a rising trend [in this method]," Jammy said.

He cautioned people to be sensible about their behaviour, not to be flashy and draw unnecessary attention to themselves, and to make sure that members of their family are aware of their whereabouts and the approximate time they are due home.

"It's also helpful to install tracking apps on cell phones. One must remain aware of one's environment at all times and remain cautious," he said.

The incident is still under investigation by police.

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AU chairperson’s state visit a diplomatic coup for Israel

TALI FEINBERG

Israel's observer status at the African Union (AU) was strengthened in recent days when Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) President Félix Tshisekedi visited Israel at the end of October. With Tshisekedi also chairperson of the AU, the trip was a vote of confidence in Israel remaining an observer in spite of vehement opposition from other countries including South Africa.

The visit came after Tshisekedi announced last year that he would appoint an ambassador to Israel for the first time in 20 years. Speaking at the annual AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) policy conference in Washington on 1 March 2020, Tshisekedi said, "Relations between my country and Israel have long been lethargic, yet we have huge areas of convergence, interests in security, economics, culture, and science."

A lot has happened since then – including a global pandemic – but it looks like Tshisekedi will deliver on that promise of diplomatic relations and more. At a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, Tshisekedi informed him that he would soon open a diplomatic and trade mission in Jerusalem. He said he supported Israel's accession as an observer to the AU and was "working to this effect". The two leaders discussed strengthening bilateral co-operation in agriculture, communications, and trade.

His diplomatic working meeting with Israel President Isaac Herzog began with a "full circle" moment, emphasising that Israel had always had ties with the DRC and Africa, even if this had been interrupted at times. "My father was the

sixth president of the state of Israel, whose first state visit was to your country in 1984, and now the first president to make a state visit of my presidency is you," said Herzog. "I see this as a sign of friendship and respect."

Herzog promised to do everything he could to ensure that Israel reopened its embassy in Kinshasa, after it was shuttered in 2003 amidst ongoing warfare in the country. Israel used to have observer status with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), but lost it when the OAU disbanded in 2002. Just less than 20 years later, that connection was re-forged when AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat granted Israel observer status in July 2021.

"Knowing your central leadership position, especially yours personally in the AU, I thank you for your support for our status as an observer state in this important forum, a status that I believe and hope will be preserved, not least thanks to our close relationship," said Herzog at the meeting.

In response, Tshisekedi said, "We want to develop the best possible relations with Israel. During our meeting, we spoke about issues where we want to collaborate with Israel. We're talking about security, because we know Israel's strength in this field; agriculture; infrastructure; and the whole digital arena."

Local political analyst Steven Gruzd notes that Tshisekedi is one of several African leaders to have travelled to Israel in the past few years. The list includes presidents, prime ministers, or foreign ministers from Côte d'Ivoire, eSwatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

"Tshisekedi is also leveraging his

relationship with the United States with respect to Israel," Gruzd says.

Regarding the AU decision on Israel's status, Gruzd says the countries who opposed it (including South Africa) forced it onto the agenda of an AU meeting on 15 October. "It was pushed to the bottom of the list, and the meeting, chaired by the Congolese foreign minister, ran out of time to discuss the issue fully, kicking the can down the road to the AU summit in February 2022 in Addis Ababa. Critics charge that the issue is sowing serious division in the AU, and that the DRC deliberately delayed the discussion."

South African Institute of International Affairs senior researcher and expert on the DRC, Stephanie Wolters, says, "The significance of the visit is in terms of the bilateral relationship between Israel and the DRC, less so with regard to how the continent is seeing Israel. I don't think it's symbolic of any kind of substantial shift. Mostly, the origins of the relationship between Tshisekedi and the Israelis come from the strong relationship between the United States and the DRC. It all really started when Tshisekedi went and spoke at AIPAC."

"I think that from the Israeli perspective, for its general public, it can be seen as a public relations *coup* to have the head of state of the third largest African country come to visit," she says. "But I don't believe this is the beginning of any kind of trend. This is very much Tshisekedi pursuing a bilateral

relationship."

The DRC president also enjoyed a state dinner with Herzog, and greeted diplomatic and religious dignitaries including the Latin and Greek Orthodox patriarchs of Jerusalem. He visited biblical sites, Mount Herzl, and Yad Vashem, and was given an honorary degree from the Academic College of Netanya.

In addition, the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) and Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNF) presented Tshisekedi with the first Israel-Africa Olive Tree Award, which honours those who help to strengthen ties between the people of Israel and Africa. The two groups said that his trip marked a new phase in Africa-Israel relations. The award was presented at a ceremony in Jerusalem organised by the JNF, which unveiled a plaque to mark the occasion.

Says SAFI spokesperson Bafana Modise, "Israel and Africa have much to gain

from further co-operation, and Israeli technology can help address challenges that are vital to further the development of Africa. These include areas such as water, healthcare, agriculture, cyber security, and youth development."

Michael Kransdorff, the chairperson of JNF South Africa, thanked Tshisekedi for his friendship, saying, "The JNF of South Africa is committed to developing agricultural and environmental projects that promote development on the continent. In South Africa, the fund has for many years been supporting environmental education through the JNF-Walter Sisulu Environment Centre in Mamelodi, Pretoria, and the Victor Daitz Centre in Hammersdale, Mpumalanga, reaching thousands of children a year."

"The South African Zionist Federation [SAZF] welcomes Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi's important visit to Israel," says SAZF national chairperson Rowan Polovin. "It's notable that the sitting chairperson of the AU places a high priority on this official trip, and shows that Africa is committed to positive engagement, dialogue, and development with Israel. The SAZF believes this is a glimpse into the future of relations, and encourages other states on the continent, particularly South Africa, to become part of Africa's progress going forward."



Israeli COVID-19 vaccination pill trial to take place in SA

TALI FEINBERG

An Israeli company has been given the green light to begin clinical trials for a COVID-19 vaccination pill in South Africa, which could be a game-changer for the pandemic.

On 29 November, Oramed Pharmaceuticals, a clinical-stage pharmaceutical company focused on the development of oral drug delivery systems, announced that its majority-owned subsidiary, Oravax Medical, had received clearance from the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority to commence patient enrolment in a first human, phase-1 clinical trial for its oral COVID-19 vaccine. Preparation to begin the trial is now underway.

"Oravax's oral COVID-19 candidate has many benefits including ease of use. Who wouldn't prefer a pill to a shot?" says Nadav Kidron, the chief executive of United States-listed company, Oramed Pharmaceuticals. South Africa is the first country to run a clinical trial for this possible vaccine.

Asked why South Africa was chosen, Kidron says, "We were speaking to a number of places to begin clinical trials. South Africa was chosen because of the low incidence of the population being vaccinated against COVID-19 [just about 20% of the population is fully vaccinated]. In addition, one of Oramed's board members, Leonard Sank, is from South Africa, and he's been very involved, introducing us to relevant experts and authorities."



The trial in South Africa is expected to run concurrently with a Tel Aviv trial that will start when approvals by Israel's health ministry are finalised.

Kidron says 24 unvaccinated people will participate in the phase-1 clinical trial, which will take place in Johannesburg. "This follows a pre-clinical study that showed that the oral COVID-19 vaccine promoted both systemic immunity through immunoglobulin G [IgG], the most common antibody in blood and bodily fluids that protect against viral infections, and immunoglobulin A [IgA], which protects the respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts against infection," he says.

In addition to the preference for a pill over a shot, the oral vaccine could allow for "easier distribution, as it doesn't require a freezing supply chain as other vaccines do, nor does it require a professional to administer," says Kidron. Though the tablets may need to be

“ORAVAX'S ORAL COVID-19 CANDIDATE HAS MANY BENEFITS INCLUDING EASE OF USE. WHO WOULDN'T PREFER A PILL TO A SHOT?"

refrigerated, the hope is that the trials will show that they are stable at room temperature. They will also be cheaper to produce than shots.

In addition, tablets would lead to less bio-hazardous waste. "As the world meets at the climate summit, it's worth noting that an oral vaccine cuts the need for syringes and other waste," he says. "Importantly, Oravax's vaccine targets three SARS-CoV-2 virus surface proteins, including proteins less susceptible to

mutation, making our vaccine a better candidate to provide protection even against emerging mutated viruses. And since it's not an injection, it should have fewer side effects."

The vaccine pill could also minimise the cost of training and mobilising healthcare personnel, and eliminate occupational needle-stick injuries. It could even be used as a booster, and could potentially enable people to administer the vaccine themselves at home. Following this phase-1 trial, their intention is to move forward with a phase 2/3 trial for emergency use approval in relevant countries.

No South African media outlet has yet mentioned Oravax's Israeli connection. Responding to this, Kidron says, "Oravax is actually not an Israeli company although Oramed, the majority stakeholder of Oravax, is a proud Israeli-American company. Our technology was developed in Israel and our offices are in Jerusalem. We are proud to be part of the thriving Israeli innovation ecosystem." He says that they haven't received any backlash from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement in South Africa.

"We're very excited to begin clinical trials in South Africa," Kidron says. "We believe that the Oravax vaccine has many advantages, both in terms of ease of use and distribution, but also in being effective against variants and having fewer side effects than injections. An effective, safe, and easy to distribute vaccine could be a game-changer for emerging from the pandemic."

Israel used as 'political football' in local elections

TALI FEINBERG

Local elections are about the nitty-gritty of daily life: fixing potholes, water, and electricity, maintaining infrastructure, and service delivery. But a number of political parties, individuals, and media outlets thought that bringing a faraway conflict into the picture would sway people's votes.

“A vote for the DA [Democratic Alliance] is a vote for Israel!” screamed the headlines of the October 2021 edition of local community newspaper *Muslim Matters*.

"Al Jama-Ah or DA. Shame on you. It's your choice. Vote Al Jama-Ah, end occupation and Zionist prayers in Al-Aqsa mosque," read a pamphlet from political party Al Jama-Ah.

Paul Jacobson, who stood for the Freedom Front Plus in Ward 54 in Cape Town, shared the opposite viewpoint in a Facebook post on 28 October: “Whilst the DA have turned their backs on our Jewish population and community, showing partiality towards Palestine rather than Israel, myself and FF Plus remain loyal and dedicated to the legitimacy and protection of Israel,” he wrote. “The DA could have remained silent and impartial, but rather they chose to favour Palestine. This was reaffirmed to me by Alderman JP Smith, in a private conversation, where he believes that he has studied both the Israeli and Palestinian arguments, and again finds favour with the Palestinian cause.”

Responding to the Al Jama-Ah pamphlet in particular, the Institute of Race Relations' Sara Gon says, "It's intriguing that Al Jama-Ah should use the Israel/Palestinian conflict to promote its candidates in a local election which is a bread-and-butter election about issues that affect people's daily lives and the environment that they live in.

“The antisemitism and falsehoods [Zionist prayers in the Al-Aqsa mosque] says a lot about Al Jama-Ah,” she says. “The fact that it should even choose a topic that has nothing to do with South Africa locally or nationally means that the party’s obsession with the conflict is disturbing. It shouldn’t matter in this election whatsoever, except in the potential renaming of streets.

“Whether it plays into the constituencies it’s aiming at one doesn’t know,” she says. “If it

Crack teamwork leads to arrests following parking-lot heist

TALI FEINBERG

The Johannesburg Jewish community was shaken when four armed suspects entered a parking lot next to Jewish primary and pre-primary school Sandton Sinai on 18 October 2021. But just more than two weeks later, three suspects have been arrested.

During the incident, the suspects assaulted two security guards, robbed them, and took a firearm. They also assaulted a teacher at the school.

CAP's team responded to the incident, and it hasn't let up since, resulting in the arrests. In conjunction with the Serious and Violent Crimes (SVC) Gauteng unit, it gathered information and worked to assist a multidisciplinary team in the investigation.

On 2 November, SVC Gauteng located the suspects with the assistance of CAP and other role players. They were using the same vehicle used in the incident outside the school. The team apprehended three suspects. The vehicle was searched and house-breaking implements as well as two unlicensed firearms were found. The one firearm was confirmed to be from the October incident, and the suspects' motor vehicle was confirmed to have been hijacked.

The suspects are believed to have been involved in a number of other armed robberies in Johannesburg.

does, it's saying that there are Muslim voters who will place emotions above needs in a local election. Those voters who do want to see

change in their immediate lives are none the wiser about what Al Jama-Ah's candidates can do for them. I would



hope that at best for them these pamphlets could be ignored, and at worst, they may turn voters against them for raising a frankly irrelevant issue. It's in bad taste, but to each political party its own."

Local political analyst Ralph Mathekga told the *SA Jewish Report* that bringing Israel into local elections showed just how dysfunctional politics had become in South Africa. “The problem [in these cases] is that local government elections become less about local issues and service delivery. They become highly politicised, to the point where the issues that are supposed to be the most prominent aren’t actually being attended to.”

He says this isn't a new dynamic in South African politics, even at local level. "Remember one of the MECs in Tshwane had to apologise for her position regarding Israel at local government level. And the EFF [Economic Freedom Fighters] at some point threatened to

SAPS Gauteng SVC unit. Through this partnership, we are able to prevail and positively alter the trajectory of crime in our communities," says CAP Chief Operating Officer Sean Jammy. "This arrest is significant as these suspects have been linked to multiple armed robberies, and apprehending them prevents hundreds of potential occurrences in future.

"CAP believes that crime can be beaten through a determined, professional approach," he said. "We encourage all communities and institutions to ensure they have the best possible security in place and are available to work with those that require our assistance to build an initiative."

Community Security Organisation head of operations in Gauteng, Jevon Greenblatt, says, "This victory shows that with the right resources and determination, criminals can be brought to book. Hopefully, a strong message will be sent to others with similar nefarious intentions. Well done to everyone involved."

"We are grateful that CAP reacted so quickly and apprehended the suspects," says Sandton Sinai nursery and playschool principal, Shira Finkel. "We have all grown from this experience in a positive way, and will continue to strive to offer the best security at our school. Our teachers are strong, our learners are great, and we continue to stay in a unit that's moving forward."

walk out of the coalition with the DA because of its position in relation to Israel – and all of these have been in the local government theatre.”

However, just because it's been done before doesn't mean it's healthy for anyone – especially in South Africa's current political climate. "It shows you how highly politicised our politicians are – at times to the point of dysfunction, because this just brings unnecessary tension to an area that is already stressed," says Mathekgwa. "The issue belongs nowhere near local government, but it's being brought to bear."

Meanwhile, DA MP and shadow minister of international relations and cooperation, Darren Bergman, didn't mince his words in response to the references to Israel. "This is disgusting and

once again, another prime example of how voters in South Africa have their emotions abused for the convenience of politicians. It's exploitative and seems to be targeted at the DA – a peace-loving and secular party that's a warm house to all faiths and religions. The DA has been calling for a two state-solution consistently not just during elections or intifadas.”

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn notes that in past elections, “We have frequently seen the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being brought into political fray as a way to appeal to voters. This is particularly prevalent during national elections. We don’t see

this as much during local government elections
where the focus is on aspects closer to home

such as water, electricity, service delivery, and potholes. And this is how it should be. A conflict on a different continent should have no bearing on the election of councillors in a ward in Johannesburg or Bloemfontein.

“Fortunately, in this election, there have been few attempts to harness voters using anti-Israel campaigns,” she says. “One instance has been the African National Congress [ANC] and Africa4Palestine Boycott Divestment Sanctions-branded billboards. It’s reprehensible to exploit a conflict that elicits strong emotions as a way to manipulate votes. These campaigns bring unnecessary divisive and polarising dynamics into an already fraught political landscape.”

Says South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Rowan Polovin, "It has become common practice in South African political discourse for political parties to use Israel as a 'wedge issue' in a cheap and dirty attempt to drive away or gain votes. In the current election cycle, we have seen the ANC, EFF, and other smaller parties use this pitiful tactic to claim other parties are 'Zionist' or to make for-show solidarity speeches about the Palestinians.

“Invariably, this technique fails because voters aren’t so easily duped and are more interested in local service delivery issues such as water, sanitation, and electricity than foreign affairs. Of course, the irony isn’t lost that Israeli technology could solve many of our country’s service delivery problems and that political parties should focus on partnering with Israel to deliver on the needs of South African citizens instead of engaging in petty anti-Israel electioneering games.”

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A map of Israel with a large blue Star of David overlaid. Various cities are marked with red dots and labeled: Netanya, Ra'anana, Tel Aviv, Bat Yam, Jaffa, Haifa, Caesarea, Or Akiva, Harish, Kfar Yona, Ramat Gan, Modi'in, Ben Gurion Airport, Jerusalem, Ramat Beit Shemesh, and Florentine, Tel Aviv. Each city label is accompanied by a small circular inset image showing a residential building. The map also includes several numbered circles (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 77, 79) indicating specific project areas.

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For the man who gave all for our education

Running a tribute on the front page of the *SA Jewish Report* isn't something I've done before, especially when the person in question died of natural causes.

But until now, there hasn't been someone who touched and influenced quite so many lives as Elliot Wolf.

Mr Wolf, as we all knew him and most of us King David High School Linksfield alumni still refer to him as such so many years later, was an educator extraordinaire.

Throughout his career, he made sure that, as far as was possible, no Jewish child would be turned away from a King David school. He wanted to make sure that every one of us and our children got the best education possible from the top teachers. In his later years, it was about making sure that people could afford it, and before that, it was about finding ways for pupils to get the best education could offer.

Mr Wolf understood teenagers far better than parents did, and I would go as far as to say, better than most teens understood themselves. He got them, in every generation on whose lives he had an impact. He understood that when youngsters are disruptive, it doesn't necessarily mean they are troublemakers but that they are probably calling for help.

Where some saw naughtiness, he saw potential. When others saw insolence, he saw strength and determination.

He understood that if you were battling at school, it didn't mean there was something wrong with you. It meant you needed help. And he believed in going the extra mile to help – that is, if the child was willing to work hard to get there.

And, he so often managed to get through to teens in a way that others couldn't, and turn their lives around. He helped them to believe in themselves and see their possibilities.

So, it's no wonder that so many people are totally gutted by his death this week. He was a patriarch to most of those who passed through the portals of King David High School Linksfield and a mentor to so many.

However, he was certainly human and fallible. Mr Wolf didn't impress every youngster and not everyone loved him. Some have said that those he liked would get away with anything, but those he didn't wouldn't.

I cannot comment on that. Suffice to say, there are few people who don't have a 'Mr Wolf' story or two up their sleeve – and they were often humorous and sometimes outrageous. And the outpouring of sadness at his passing this week has been testimony to that.

He had an impact on so many people's lives first as a King David High School Linksfield teacher, then principal for many years, and finally as director of the King David Schools Foundation. His impact is felt around the world wherever former King David Linksfield alumni now live. And there are a lot of us, considering when I was there – and I am talking a few years back – there were almost 3 000 pupils in the high school alone.

I always marvelled at the fact that no matter how many people went through the portals of King David High, Mr Wolf seemed to remembered their names as well as who their parents were and other bits of information. That's such a wonderful skill, and one that always makes people feel seen.

Mr Wolf – and I was never able to call him Elliot – was always so well dressed, softly-spoken, and easy to chat to, in spite of the deep respect he engendered in most of us. He had a wry sense of humour, but was so incredibly knowledgeable. His commitment to education, and particularly Jewish education, was his biggest gift to us all.

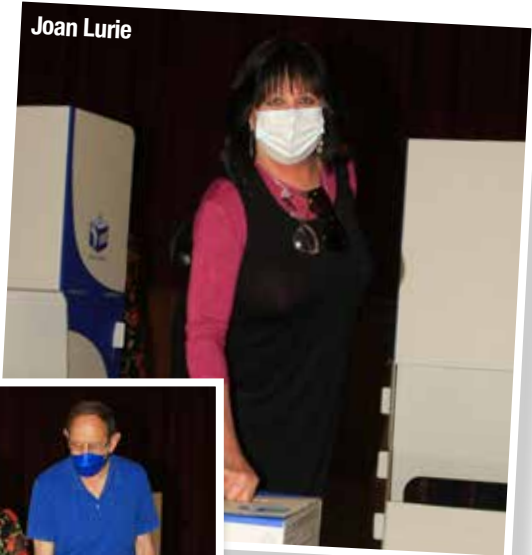
Since we heard of his death, hundreds and hundreds of heartfelt messages have poured out on social media. In fact, within hours of his passing, a Facebook page called "In loving memory of Elliot Wolf" was created and had almost 1 000 members. Through this and other outlets came the flood of wonderful Mr Wolf stories. His impact will be felt forever through our stories and the influence he had on our lives.

The thing that always amazes me about someone like Mr Wolf is that I think he would be surprised at the outpouring of love for him. He was a genuinely humble man with a clear set of principles that had everything to do with education.

For him, like most of our parents, education was everything. And he believed it was vitally important to get a good education to set you up for life. He would echo the old adage of Jewish parents all over: "Education is the one thing that can never be taken from you."

As the sun sets on Mr Wolf's life, matriculants are geared up to write finals and all those high school pupils are getting stuck into their studies – or should be – before their end-of-year exams. I wish that each one of them could be inspired by what Mr Wolf represented for so many of us. It was much less about giving up everything to study and more about absorbing that education, building confidence, finding out what you really want to do with your life, and forging ahead.

May his memory continue to inspire all of us, and may he rest in peace!



Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Coalition and compromise as ANC dips below 50%

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



Low turnout was the biggest feature of South Africa's fifth local government elections since the country's democratic transition. Some blamed COVID-19, the weather, the inefficiency of the Independent Electoral Commission, or the long weekend created by a public holiday for voting on a Monday. But there are much deeper problems behind this apathy.

It was a low-key election in which the stakes were high. There were fewer posters on fewer lampposts than in previous elections. Personally, the only contact made with me was one flier in my post box. It was from the incumbent Democratic Alliance (DA) councillor, running this time as an independent candidate. No one knocked on my door or sent me an email or an SMS. I ignored political posts on social media. And when I entered the voting booth, there were only a handful of parties I recognised out of more than 30 listed.

Out of a population of 60 million, 42.6 million people were eligible to vote, but only 26 million had registered as voters. Only 12.2 million actually cast their ballots. This is just 20% of the total population, and 46% of registered voters. The biggest message was how frustrated citizens are with politicians and poor service delivery. Many have lost faith in the political system and the value of their vote. This will damage democracy and the legitimacy of those elected.

Although its leaders put on a brave face, there's no doubt that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) was the biggest loser in these polls. At the time of writing (on Wednesday morning) with 65% of the results tabulated, the ANC had dropped to 46.21% of the national vote. This is the first time it has dipped below 50% since 1994, and it continues its steady decline from previous polls.

The larger opposition parties, the DA

(22.35%) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) (10.23%) are still dwarfed by the ANC. They should have been able to capitalise on the profound disillusionment with the ANC's performance. Their results instead showed only marginal increases in the national picture, with regional variations of course, especially in the Western Cape where the DA remained entrenched. Many voters disappointed in the ANC simply didn't register or stayed at home, unwilling to vote for the party that brought liberation but also unwilling to vote against it.

There has also been a proliferation of smaller parties and independent candidates, as anyone who looked at the length of their ballot papers can confirm. The one that made the biggest splash was Herman Mashaba's ActionSA, which has become an important player in Johannesburg and Tshwane (Pretoria). He will be wooed by the larger parties for support in the municipal coalitions that will need to be formed. Mashaba is seen as a kingmaker with the votes he's gathered, a role many smaller parties may hold across the country (including the EFF in many metros).

Coalitions first became a major feature of local government politics in 2016 when the ANC lost outright control of several large cities (the metros). This trend has continued and deepened in this election, with a further erosion of the support for the ANC, and not only in cities.

These hung councils will require political horse-trading of a kind familiar to those who follow Israeli politics, with all its instability and compromise. History has also shown that municipal coalitions haven't always had the best interests of their voters in mind, and have crashed on the rocks of politics.

The contours of these complex coalition negotiations will emerge in coming days and weeks.

Zooming in on the metros and wards where the majority of South Africa's Jewish population resides, as in previous elections, the DA dominated. It will win Cape Town outright, and be a sizeable player in Johannesburg, Tshwane, and has made significant inroads in eThekweni (Durban). The final results of the individual wards where the Jewish community lives were unfortunately not yet available at the time of going to press.

If this election showed me anything, it's that though many are sick of the corruption, mismanagement, and poor service delivery by the ANC, they haven't found a viable, electable alternative. They have punished the ANC not by voting for the opposition, but by not voting at all. The shine of liberation is slowly but surely coming off the ruling party, but the opposition is splintered and political parties simply don't transmit the message that voters want to hear.

This will be an extremely challenging five-year term in local government for those chosen to serve. Will there be a party that speaks better to me and the millions in 2024?

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg.

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Coronavirus and the increase in terrorism

PAULA SLIER

From the moment COVID-19 started spreading across the world, extremist groups wasted no time in encouraging their supporters who tested positive for the virus to spread it amongst authorities and the police force. Neo Nazis and other white supremacist organisations urged their followers to transmit it specifically to Jews. They were directed to go into police stations, political offices, centres of worship, and to cough or lick a door handle.

It's now more than a year-and-a-half since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, but we still don't know the full effect it's had on all of us. One area in which more research is needed is on its impact on terrorism. Initial studies, most notably carried out by the United Nations (UN), have found that there is as yet limited evidence of any clear correlation between the pandemic and a change in the nature or intensity of extremist violence. But the suggestions are there, most likely because in many parts of the world, COVID-19 has increased the underlying drivers that are often conducive to terrorism.

The virus has caused unprecedented anxiety and uncertainty. Grievances people had before, and the untenable conditions in which many communities live, have intensified. This is true not only for camps housing refugees and internally displaced persons across Europe and the Middle East, but also in those places where the international community has been forced to redirect funds from pre-existing humanitarian priorities to COVID-19 responses. Experts agree that the impact on already vulnerable populations has made them the ideal breeding ground for radicalisation.

The good news is that border-control measures, such as restrictions on

international travel, have curtailed the physical movement of terrorists. But the downside is that because radicalised individuals have been forced to remain in their home states instead of travelling to conflict zones, the risk of increased local terrorist activity has risen. There's also some evidence to suggest that the reduction in passenger travel has led to a rise in illicit activities using parcel services and maritime cargo.

As international commercial aviation slowly returns to pre-pandemic levels, experts anticipate a potential increase in both terrorist travel and other illicit activities such as smuggling. But what has most people worried is what extremist organisations have been doing online during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The answer is clear. Many have used this time to plan, fundraise, and advance their agenda in cyberspace. Through virtual platforms, terrorist and violent extremist groups have sought to expose an increasingly online global population to their propaganda.

Many of these terror groups have also been forced to adjust their operational methods. There was already a trend pre-COVID-19 for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL also known as Daesh) to develop more decentralised, strategic, and tactical operation online. This has since intensified.

So far, efforts by large media platforms to prevent this have mostly failed, especially amongst those with less stringent content-moderation policies. They've struggled to handle the recent growth in traffic and in some instances their efforts have proven to be counterproductive. Often, after de-platforming (banning/removing) a group or individual, the culprit has simply moved to smaller platforms that are less capable of monitoring their activities. They've also been left feeling socially excluded, potentially making them more ripe to terrorist rhetoric and propaganda. Counter terrorism measures have also often encouraged individuals to shift to the dark web, creating additional monitoring challenges.

Economic hardship like rising unemployment, poverty, growing

inequality, and food insecurity in the wake of COVID-19 have left vulnerable communities more susceptible to online misinformation and disinformation. Terrorist groups (including ISIL and Al-Qaida) and extreme right-wing groups are using conspiracy theories to target such communities and exploit pre-existing social and communal tensions. Especially with regards to children, the pandemic has severely restricted access to education worldwide, aiding in the recruitment of youngsters by terrorist organisations. By using charities, providing food or monetary resources, groups have managed to cultivate authority and legitimacy, while expanding their recruitment and radicalisation tactics.

The rise in general online financial activities and transactions has also given more opportunities for terror groups to grow their fundraising capabilities. Financial institutions are struggling to conduct customer due diligence and detect potential financial anomalies because such a huge number of people have suddenly moved all their operations online. There's also a shortage of funds to deal with the problem. In some cases, countries have had to redirect funds from counter-terrorism projects to help their economies deal with the COVID-19 fallout.

Fuelling the situation has been attempts by various governments to lockdown their populations to stop the virus' growth. Often this has spurred violent protests that in many countries have brought together citizens who might be anti-government for other reasons. The most recent UN research shows that lockdowns diminished trust in authorities, especially amongst vulnerable populations, and created anger and fear.

Some violent extremist groups have sought to develop ties with anti-vaccination communities. In Somalia, for example, the Al-Shabaab terrorist group has issued statements warning local populations against the use of the vaccine, and blamed Somalia's enemies for distributing a harmful substance among the population.

Without equal access to vaccines, local and regional outbreaks of the virus will continue, perpetuating the threat posed by the pandemic. And even as long-heralded vaccines are rolled out around the world, persistent questions from the very beginning continue on the backburner. Was COVID-19 the fruit of a Chinese bioweapons programme developed in the Wuhan Institute of Virology? Whether yes or no, its devastating impact across the world is likely to inspire some terror groups to consider developing biological weapons for hostile purposes in the future. The pandemic has illustrated biology's potential to cause harm on a global scale and this, possibly more than anything else, has experts most worried.



Al-Shabaab fighters training in Somalia



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Electricity, water, crime, and grime – voters make their mark for change

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The running of South Africa's municipal election on 1 November has come in for some criticism, but voting stations in wards 72, 73, and 74 in Johannesburg appeared to be mostly smooth sailing on Monday.

A few families living in the same house discovered they were somehow voting in different stations, not too far apart. In one station, people were told to return later when they temporarily ran out of ballot papers and at another, there was a delay when ballot papers were also in short supply. At Jabula Recreation Centre, voting started late as ballot papers arrived late.

There was a generally positive atmosphere at the stations, with people chatting in the short queues as they waited their turn. IEC (Electoral Commission of South Africa) officials seemed to be running things fairly smoothly.

Volunteers for the Democratic Alliance (DA), the African National Congress (ANC), Economic Freedom Fighter (EFF) ward 73 candidate Fikile Msimango, and some voters marvelled at what appeared to be a large number of people going to the polls in these areas.

However, ActionSA volunteer Neville Kahn and election observer Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), hoped the turnout at Jabula would improve in the afternoon.

A United Independent Movement (UIM) volunteer in Orange Grove, who gave only his first name – Jacob – said, "Now people are coming two-by-two, but earlier this morning, there were too many people here."

Aki Kalliatakis, an avid *SA Jewish Report* reader voting at Linksfeld Primary School early in the morning, said, "The turnout doesn't represent our population. I mean, it might represent our suburb, but we'll have to wait and see. However, there's a sense of enthusiasm. I think people are saying, 'I have to do this'."

Independent candidate Dave Fisher and voter Joan Lurie didn't believe that



the turnout had been negatively impacted by the elections being held on a Monday, making it a long weekend.

"It's good they made it a public holiday and opened up the vaccination booths so that more people would go from voting to being vaccinated," said Lurie.

She said she hoped her vote would result in "no more power cuts, no more water shortages, good Wi-Fi, no more potholes, and peace for everybody".

Leah Fehler, too, voted for improved access to electricity and water. "We want to have the facilities that we need, and less crime," she said.

Eradicating crime is one of the campaign promises made by UIM ward 72 candidate Evette Chen. Her father, a volunteer at Jabula, said the one-year-old party was well represented in the Eastern Cape and Western Province. He suggested that the UIM didn't necessarily want to take votes from the DA, and was rather targeting voters from other parties.

Rosalee Bental was eager to see if her vote would enable "the DA to stay as the opposition, do its job properly, and keep the ANC on its toes".

"I'm also interested in the small splinter parties like Herman Mashaba's party, but I have to look where my vote will play best. That's why I'm going for the DA."

Allan Fehler also voted for the DA because he wants a better life, hopes for change, and feels he can rely on the party's ward 72 candidate, Daniel Schay.

He hopes that the DA, if elected, will give homes to people and remove the refuse. "It's terrible when you see paper, litter all over the show. The city has become a slum. It should be cleaned up," says Fehler.

An IEC official told the *SA Jewish Report* that he also voted for the DA because he believes "all streets must be perfect with no potholes and, at night, everything must be cleaned up".

A number of voters told the *SA Jewish Report* that they voted for ActionSA because they know Colin Morris, the party's candidate for ward 72.

A female volunteer for ward 74 candidate Dave Fischer, said she was putting her support behind the man who had been serving as the DA councillor in the area for the past five years. "He did a great job during that time," she said.

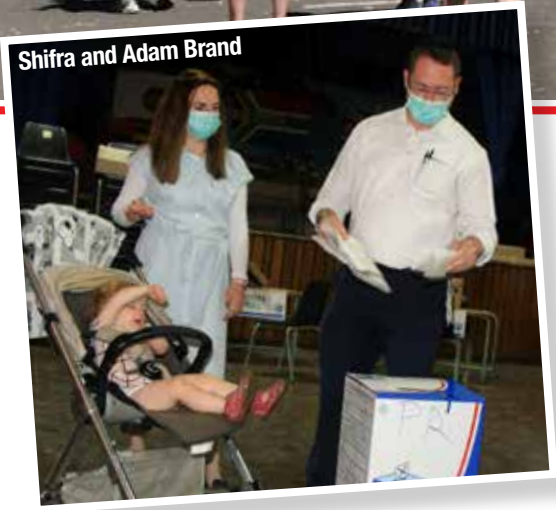
Others, such as voter Kara Gordan, this year changed who they normally voted for in the election. "I believe that the next generation is going to bring a bit of a change," said Gordan. "My aim is to try and help implement that change, so I'm voting for a party I wouldn't normally vote for."

She believes you can't complain and ask for change if you don't vote. "Hopefully, some of our complaints are going to be heard," she said.

Kalliatakis encouraged voters to vote for any party other than the ANC. "We shouldn't let any politician have a sense of 'this is mine'. It's really about keeping them honest. The ANC at the moment is extremely comfortable, it has been so for three decades, and it's now time for it to either wake up or be removed. I don't necessarily think that any party is going to make too much of a difference, but at



Voting at Jabula Recreation Centre in Sandringham, Johannesburg



least it's those little things that make a difference."

Fikile Msimango, the EFF's ward 73 candidate, said, "A lot of things are going to change around here" if she is elected.

An activist since the age of 16, Msimango started with the ANC before joining the EFF. "There's a lot of opportunities in the EFF. We're being trained to work the ground and help people. I've got a warm welcome when it comes to the EFF. I'm happy there."

She plans to clean the parks in her ward and bring children, especially African children, who wander around Louis Botha to the Paterson Park Recreation Centre.

"I also want to clean up the streets and provide education and jobs for those sleeping on the streets," said Msimango. "For those who are matriculating this year, I'm sending them a link to job opportunities. I've got my own soup kitchen, which I'm going to start operating maybe next month."

According to Msimango – who also served as party agent on the day – and several volunteers, their main role was to answer questions and check the voters' roll to inform people if they were registered.

Election observers, meanwhile, served as an independent eye to ensure that the elections were fair and flowing smoothly.

The SAJBD's multicultural and multifaith observer team was present across the country.

Started about two decades ago, it's registered with the IEC and reports any issues it notices to South Africa's election management body.

Neville Kahn hoped that ActionSA would get good results in the election even though it's a new party. "It hasn't really had a chance to establish. I think once it can prove what it can do, it can only grow," Kahn said.

Freedom Front Plus volunteer Glen Chatz said he thought the party's chances were "very good".

"If you read its charter, you will see that it's pro-Jewish, pro-everybody actually. It's not a white or black party. I think it's definitely a party for a future."

Jacob, a UIM volunteer at ward 72, and William Moloi, a life-long ANC supporter volunteering at ward 73, were both confident that their party would win their respective ward.

The winners – and losers – in the elections

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Newly elected Democratic Alliance (DA) ward counsellor Daniel Schay feels "absolutely privileged" to be voted into ward 72. And in Sea Point, the DA's Nicola Jowell feels "extremely grateful" to be reappointed councillor after Monday's municipal elections.



Having moved up the ranks at the DA since joining the party in 2016, Schay is now councillor for Linksfeld, Sydenham, and Glenhazel.

According to *TimesLive's* local government elections database, by 11:49 on 3 November, the DA had won the ward with 76.8%. The African National Congress came second with 9%, while ActionSA, whose ward candidate was Colin Morris, finished third with 7.10%.

Justin Kruger, the ward candidate for the Civic Movement of South, and Sidney Anolik, the ward candidate for the Freedom Front Plus (FFP), had their parties placed fifth and sixth respectively.

Shay, a qualified civil engineer, said he was honoured that the community of ward 72 chose him to represent it in council and assist it in making the ward better. "It's nerve wracking because the task ahead is great," he says. "But at the same time, I'm happy to be involved."

His first plan is to contact and start establishing relationships with all city officials responsible for the ward. "I will also start communicating with residents on a regular basis. After that, I will be looking at the means of ensuring that we can hold officials to account and make sure the word works. I've got many, many plans that I've come up with, and look forward to implementing them."

Jowell won the Cape Town-based ward 54, which includes Camps Bay, Clifton, and Sea Point. Jowell, who joined the DA in 2011, and Paul Jacobson, the FFP's candidate for the ward, both

confirmed she had won the ward even though the official vote count for the ward hadn't been released at the time of going to print.

Jowell is thankful for the support of the community of the Atlantic Seaboard, which she sees as a resounding endorsement of the work she has done as ward councillor over the past two years.

"There's so much more to do. I'm eager for the electoral process to be concluded, to be sworn in again, and for the council to be reconstituted so we can get up and running at full steam," she said. "It has been a gruelling election period, and I encourage the many candidates who took part in the election to join forces and work in partnership with existing organisations in the ward for the benefit of everyone."

She will start her new term by doing an audit of the basics that need attention in the ward. "I start each year this way. It's important to do this again as we refocus."

Jowell plans to meet the new mayoral committee member for community services to address the concern about the number of homeless people in the area.

"Amplifying interventions to create options off the streets and long-term solutions is urgent," she says. "This conversation needs to include the provincial political leadership. We will also restart our social development forum and need to ensure that we are sitting around the table with all role-players working towards assisting the homeless off the streets."

Jowell says it's essential to ensure that

adequate safety plans are in place for the upcoming festive season, but just as crucial is to meet law enforcement chiefs to push for additional resources in the area.

"We also need to galvanise the community to comment and have their voices heard in respect of the public-participation process around changing the off-street parking requirements for new developments in the area."

She identifies that as a pivotal issue in the ward, and believes the community must make its voice heard.

"There is much to be done, and we have built many bridges over the past two years between the community, ratepayers association and organisations, and this needs to continue. Partnering and amplifying the public-private partnership is key to addressing many of the long-term concerns of residents."

On his Facebook page, Jacobson congratulated Jowell and said he had given everything he could over the past six years. "I need to now start giving a bit of time to my family and business which I have neglected in favour of community work," he said. "So, with respect, it reached a pinnacle during this election time and there was never a possibility that I could win the ward, but what I could do was get proportional representation in council where people can affect change realistically."

On his Twitter page, Tyrell Meyers of the DA thanked voters for electing him as councillor for ward 23 in Johannesburg.

The *TimesLive* database also published the results of two other Jewish candidates. Dave Fischer, who had been the DA councillor for ward 74 in Johannesburg over the past five years, ran as an independent candidate this year and came second with 26.9% of votes for the ward. The DA's Belinda Kayser Echeozonjoku won that ward.



Thanks for Making Us Count

Make Us Count is the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' election education, awareness and mobilisation campaign.

At its core, **Make Us Count** mobilises an interfaith election observer team that works closely with the IEC to ensure the elections are free and fair.

The supporting campaign comprises educating the community on the importance of voting, social media, election debates between various political parties and discussion forums with leading political analysts to understand the issues at stake in the election.

The 2021 '**Make Us Count**' campaign, in the lead-up to and during the 2021 local government elections, included:

1 A REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN AND OUTREACH to schools and youth movements.



2 EDUCATIONAL WEBINARS for the Cape's election campaign:

- **Direct Election Bill 2020 Webinar** with Stuart Diamond, Michael Louis, Dawn Nathan, Tzvi Brivik, Raymond Schkolne, David Samuels, Lester Hoffman, Li Boiskin and John Lombard.
- **Ready Steady Vote Webinar** with two ex-councillors, Jacques Weber and Stuart Diamond



3 EDUCATIONAL BROCHURE

Local Government Election 2021 Educational Brochure explaining what local government is, how it functions, how to get involved with it and how to cast your vote on voting day.



4 #VOTESMATTER

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN with weekly polls and educational content around the local elections.



5 ELECTION DEBATE WC

with eNCA news and representatives of the front-running political parties in the Western Cape. Sally Burdett held a robust discussion between Brett Herron (GOOD mayoral candidate), Cameron Dugmore (ANC provincial election head), Geordin Hill-Lewis (DA mayoral candidate), Adv Lennit Max (VF Plus mayoral candidate) and Ferlon Christians (ACDP), where they got a chance to present their "game plans".

6 ELECTION DEBATE KZN

hosted by Howard Sackstein with panellists from the UIM, ActionSA, EFF, DA, ACDP and IFP.



7 THE GREAT DEBATE JHB

hosted by Mandy Wiener a robust debate with Executive Mayor Mpho Moerane (ANC), Mpho Phalatse (DA Mayoral Candidate), Herman Mashaba (President ActionSA), Mkhuleko Hlengwa (IFP National Spokesperson), Clr Franco De Lange (FF+) and Clr Norman Mkhonza from the ACDP.



8 NAVIGATE THE ELECTIONS WEBINAR

with journalist, news presenter and writer Stephen Grootes in conversation with Wayne Sussman, Daily Maverick election analyst; Nompumelelo Runji, thought leader, author and founder and CEO of Critical ThinkAR, a research and stakeholder management consultancy; and Dr Ralph Mathekga, political analyst, acclaimed author and News24 columnist. This was a chance for South African citizens to understand the issues, challenges and implications of the elections and how to make their votes count.



TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT 'Make Us Count'

'Like' us on or follow us on

– @SAJBD

You can also join our mailing list to stay up to date with all our events and initiatives

– makeuscountsa@gmail.com

Thank you to the Make Us Count election observer team!



Artworks provide fertile ground for gift of life

NICOLA MILTZ

For as long as artist Hayley Gecelter can remember, she always wanted to be a mother, but the seemingly impossible road to get there wasn't something she envisaged as a young woman when she and her husband started trying for a child.

After what can only be described as a torturous, emotionally fraught fertility journey filled with indescribable loss, pain, and anguish, the couple finally realised their dream.

But it took them down a path of loneliness and isolation and several failed in-vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments and numerous gamete intrafallopian transfer (Gift) attempts to get there. Add to this the devastating loss of triplets at 23 weeks, and insurmountable disappointments following multiple miscarriages.

This week, the couple experienced pure joy as they celebrated their youngest daughter's Batmitzvah, rejoicing in her coming of age as a woman.

There was a stage when doctors told Gecelter the prospect of having biological children was bleak. She suffered from numerous gynaecological issues including polycystic ovaries, endometriosis, and early ovarian ageing. Her eggs were of poor quality, her cervix was problematic – biologically, things were more than challenging.

But this didn't deter the couple from trying everything possible.

"It wasn't easy," she said. There were times when Gecelter felt that her world was falling apart. The couple put their lives on hold and made enormous financial sacrifices.

"I was unplayable," she told the *SA Jewish Report*. "It was a very lonely journey as many

of my friends were starting their families and I was struggling. It was difficult to attend births, *brit milah*, and birthday parties," she said.

When she finally fell pregnant with triplets after fertility treatment, the couple was ecstatic. Their joy was short lived, however, when her membranes ruptured

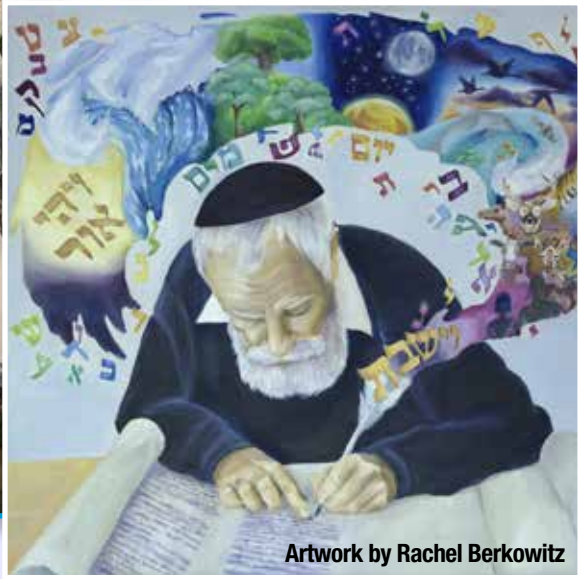


at 21 weeks. After a few weeks in hospital, further complications set in, and she was forced to terminate and deliver by caesarean section after she developed a life threatening infection.

"We were broken," she said. Their long path to parenthood took them on a spiritual journey in which they twice visited Israel to pray at the Kotel and at the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai on Lag B'Omer.

Finally, their dream came true and their first daughter, Raquel, 14, was born after a difficult pregnancy. Their second daughter, Natania, 12, miraculously followed, again after a torturous fertility battle. She was born at 28 weeks after her twin died in utero.

To this day, Gecelter is overwhelmed by the emotional support she received from Suzanne Sackstein, one of the founders of the Malka Ella Fertility Fund, and fertility specialist Dr Lawrence Gobetz of Vitalab, who both went beyond the call of



duty to make sure that the couple made it through years of trying.

Sadly, Gecelter and her husband are one of many couples in the community who have struggled to become parents. Many battle to meet the crippling financial demands of fertility treatments, while others like the Gecelters rely on the organisation for emotional support.

The Malka Ella Fertility Fund was started 20 years ago to provide Jewish couples with financial assistance and emotional support. To date, the fund has financed and supported numerous fertility and adoption procedures, which have resulted in more than 240 babies being born or adopted.

This week, Gecelter's artwork forms part of an online art exhibition and auction to raise money for the fund. "Painting and art was my life saving distraction during those hard years," she said.

One of the organisers of the auction, Kate Gershuni, said 60 Jewish female artists had generously donated their work for the

secondary infertility and went through a number of IVF treatments, experiencing a number of painful miscarriages. "It was a very sad, lonely time. In the beginning, you think it will be ok, but after a few miscarriages, you spend a lot of emotional energy hoping and praying every month and then facing the utter disappointment every 30 odd days. It's not a fight you're prepared to give up on, but it's extremely emotionally demanding."

Said Sackstein, "We wanted to do something that celebrates women, and this exhibition has become a huge expression of talent by some of our South African Jewish women artists."

Fellow auction organiser and exhibiting artist, Nicole Hoffmann said she became involved with Malka Ella about 20 years ago on the creative-development side. "Ironically, my work for the fund became that much more meaningful when I experienced my own heart breaking fertility problems when I couldn't fall pregnant with my second child," said the graphic designer and businesswoman.

She experienced a strange case of



secondary infertility and went through a number of IVF treatments, experiencing a number of painful miscarriages.

"It was a very sad, lonely time. In the beginning, you think it will be ok, but after a few miscarriages, you spend a lot of emotional energy hoping and praying every month and then facing the utter disappointment every 30 odd days. It's not a fight you're prepared to give up on, but it's extremely emotionally demanding."

Said Sackstein, "We wanted to do something that celebrates women, and this exhibition has become a huge expression of talent by some of our South African Jewish women artists."

Malka Ella isn't just about funding treatments, Sackstein said, the organisation stretches to many areas involving the parenthood journey, including anything from infertility counselling, halachic supervision, genetic medical counselling, pregnancy loss support, and providing hope to singles and couples.

The exhibition is aptly titled "Creation". Visit www.malkaella.co.za/auction to view the artworks. Bidding closes at midnight on Tuesday, 30 November.

End of an era as Bulawayo Jewish aged home closes its doors

TALI FEINBERG

The Zimbabwe Jewish community is tiny, but it's still functioning. So an announcement last week that Jewish retirement home Savyon Lodge in Bulawayo is closing down was greeted with shock, sadness, and a sense that this is truly the end of an era for this former centre of Jewish life in Southern Africa.

Described in old newspaper clippings as "the apple of the community's eye", Savyon Lodge was more than a retirement establishment. It was a gathering place, a welcoming haven, a home away from home, and a "touchstone" symbolising what was once a thriving and close-knit community.

"I'm pleased my grandparents aren't around to see that [Savyon Lodge is closing down]. How devastating after all these years and so much effort! For those it served, it was a blessing," wrote Joanne Simon Verster on the Zimbabwe Jewish Community Facebook group.

"My late grandparents, Ellie and Millie Zacks, were the ones who started Savyon Lodge," she said. "There's a plaque on the wall at the entrance with my grandfather's name on it. They spent so much time and effort on Savyon, often moving in there for *chaggim* or if there was no matron around. Without them, there would never have been Savyon Lodge. They were the most generous and loving souls who worked tirelessly for the elderly."

"I hoped to spend my final days there back home where I belong," said Jennie Greenspan-Sher. Describing the deep sense of loss, Vicky Codron Koblenz wrote, "I don't know how to react. Everything I grew up with is gone ... this new world I really don't belong."

"In the past, my parents were devoted to maintaining

the wonderful place it was. My uncle Leizer lived there for many years until he passed at the age of 108," wrote Hylton Reiff. According to Theresa Bengis, Leizer Abrahamson still davened at the home's shul service every day at the age of 105. There was a shul service every morning and evening, with a *minyan*, which continued until recently. There was accommodation for visitors and the residents enjoyed hosting family so that



they could enjoy a *yom tov* with guests as they did when they had their own homes.

Ilan Wiesenbacher, who still lives in Zimbabwe, wrote, "A very sad day indeed. In saying that, there also needs to be special mention of the people who kept it going all these years through extremely tough times. I'm not going to mention names, but I know many people who have given of their time and resources and to you, I say *kol hakavod*! Thank you."

Ronnie Elkaim agreed, saying, "*Kol hakavod* to all the wonderful people who contributed so much of their love and time to all the residents and staff of this amazing place. My brother, Jack Furmanovsky, together

with Leanora Granger, designed the building. There is a charcoal drawing by the late Dave Golub's sister. The picture was hung in the dining room. This artist was murdered in Vilna by the Nazis. I think the late Edith Golub donated the picture to Savyon Lodge at some stage."

Another member of the community said that the charcoal drawing was "still hanging in pride of place in the lounge when I last looked".

According to community members, Savyon Lodge's last resident is now living at the BS Leon retirement home in Harare, and has settled well.

So why was Savyon Lodge such an icon of the once-thriving Zimbabwean Jewish community? "Savyon was an oasis of peace, calm, and support for so many for many years. It was one of the last Jewish-owned and run institutions in Bulawayo and a symbol of the once proud community that cared for the young and the aged," says Dave Bloom, a former resident of Zimbabwe and the administrator of the Zimbabwe Jewish Community Facebook group.

"The beautiful shul burned down in 2003. The Carmel School is still running as a Jewish primary school but I'm not sure if there are any Jewish kids in the school," he says. "It's hard to say this, but this is another significant phase in the demise of the Bulawayo Jewish community, which today numbers about 50 to 60 souls from its peak of about 3 000 in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Of course, this isn't unique to the Zimbabwe Jewish community but a trend throughout the smaller communities of Southern Africa."

Paul Bernstein shared photos of the *Bulawayo Jewish Community Centennial Magazine* published in 1994, which included information about how the home was founded. "At a public meeting in the Jewish Guild Hall in December 1960, it was decided to establish a home

for elderly residents. The overall plan provided for 30 residents. When Savyon Lodge opened its doors in July 1967, it could accommodate only 13 people. The third and final stage was reached in 1976, when room was made for a further 26 people. By 1976, it had risen to 45 people."

Residents had their own private rooms, received three kosher meals a day, and care was provided by trained nurses and caregivers who knew the intricacies of Yiddishkeit. Receiving no government subsidy, the home was funded entirely by residents' charges, investments, and donations from the local community and abroad.

According to African Jewish Congress chief executive and spiritual leader Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, Bulawayo has always been a "warm and united" Jewish community, and Savyon Lodge had a special atmosphere. He says there are about 200 members of the Jewish community in Zimbabwe today, and the various congregations continue to observe Shabbat and *chaggim*.

"Savyon Lodge, the only Jewish old aged home in Zimbabwe, was a unique and wonderful institution. It served all the Jewish communities in what was Southern Rhodesia and then Zimbabwe. It upheld the Jewish traditions – Shabbat and *yom tovim* were celebrated, and there was a kosher kitchen. It was run by dedicated and caring staff and equally dedicated and caring members of the community. It was a gracious and beautifully maintained institution with tranquil, lovely gardens and excellent amenities.

"There was never a question that the physical, mental, and personal needs of the aged community weren't catered for, and there was a place for all who needed it," he says. "As the Jewish community declined in numbers, donations from all over the diaspora from ex-Zimbabweans and others and organisations such as ChaiSA, helped Savyon to maintain its traditions. There are so many wonderful memories of all the residents, staff, and community members who played their part in making Savyon Lodge such a special place in the fabric of a Jewish life in Bulawayo and Zimbabwe."

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Chance post brings closure for tragedy-hit SA family

STAFF REPORTER

When South African emigrant Lauren Dickason killed her three children in New Zealand on 16 September this year, it caused ripples that brought closure to a totally unrelated family.

Capetonian travel agent Vanessa Frankal, whose speciality is Australia, is all too aware of the toll emigration can take. Following the Dickason tragedy, Frankal posted a plea for compassion and less condemnation about the emigrant mom to her closed Vtravel Repatriation Facebook group. She reasoned that her own clients face 14 nights confined in quarantine, often experiencing depression while assimilating and adjusting to their new and different lives in Australia.

"Our mom committed suicide in 1979 after our emigration to Sydney," she posted as an opening to her note, "and we came back 10 months later minus our mother. No one can ever understand the torment and anguish someone goes through when plagued with a deep-seated mental illness or severe depression. I will never understand the absolute desperation someone must feel to take their own life or that of their children, so please don't judge, rather pray for their whole family."

A seemingly unrelated woman in Melbourne, Shareen Sedacca, came upon the post serendipitously. She gasped as she recognised Frankal's strong resemblance to the late Maureen Frankal, who had been her mother, Lana Jacobson's, close friend before committing suicide.

At the time of Maureen's death, Sedacca was 11 years old and living with her family in Sydney. After seeing the post, she immediately phoned her mother in Johannesburg and said, "I'm convinced that Vanessa is Maureen's daughter!"

Jacobson felt compelled to reach out to her late friend's daughter.

Frankal's response on Facebook Messenger was, "Sorry but what is this about Lana? I don't know you nor how you read my message as you aren't on my Vtravel group. It was private and not intended for public viewing."

Frankal could never have anticipated what came next. "I knew your mother. I was her best friend in Sydney, but you were too young to remember. My daughter, Shareen, passed on the post to me. I hope you don't mind me contacting you."

Later a shocked but excited Frankal called Jacobson and spoke to her for more than an hour and a half. The emotional connection was instant and after the call, she felt so much lighter!

"It felt like we had been friends forever," says Frankal. She messaged her



Vanessa Frankal, Lana Jacobson and Sharon Frankal

two sisters, Sharon and Emma, who were aged 10 and one year old respectively at the time of their mother's death. Jacobson had a long conversation with Sharon.

For most of their lives, this family tragedy was discussed only on the surface, and so Frankal kept telling Jacobson she felt like she'd just received the "biggest gift ever".

Suicide is so often shrouded in shame and secrecy. Mental-health issues tend to remain taboo. Frankal clearly remembers being in her 20s and discussing her emotional turmoil and the need for therapy with her grandmother, who responded, "What do you need therapy for? After your mother died, your grandpa and I simply never spoke about her again!"

Even the girls' beloved father, Cecil, who passed away last year would repeat, "I don't understand why you say you have issues; you had the most wonderful childhood."

"He believed that giving us love meant that life was wonderful. The trauma, however, remained ingrained on a cellular level," Frankal says.

"Growing up without a mother is lonely," she says. "Our mother disappeared overnight, which was hugely traumatic to us children." She laments the idea that if you don't talk about things, you won't be affected. "You can't sweep things under the carpet and expect them not to affect you."

Within weeks, Frankal and her sister, Sharon, made an emotional road trip to Johannesburg with two of Sharon's sons, Rael, 19 and Seth, 21.

Over tea and bagels in Jacobson's flat, their mother was discussed with much laughter and tears. School books, photos, and anecdotes were

exchanged, and so began the healing process. Jacobson answered questions that needed answering for almost 40 years. For the Frankal women, it was hugely cathartic.

Jacobson told them their mother wasn't just an attractive woman, but a loving, doting, involved mother who adored her husband.

"Maureen wrote of infant, Emma, 'Darling Emma-Kate is just the most beautiful, laughing baby I know'. Her passion for children was borne in her profession as a nursery school teacher. She was soft spoken and gentle with others but set a very high standard for herself. She was vigilant about healthy eating and exercised daily on the beachfront in Cape Town before emigrating to Australia.

"She was an excellent businesswoman who opened Educat – the first educational toy shop in Sea Point, which was a runaway success," Jacobson told her Australian visitors.

She believes that the trauma of immigration, being house bound without work, losing all that was familiar, and being unable to assimilate, ultimately led to the loss of her self-confidence and eventually her identity. She said her friend was unable to navigate her way out of a deep depression. "She was completely averse to medication – she spoke about this in her last letter which has now surfaced, and this aversion was potentially her ultimate demise."

Frankal's chance post on social media 40 years after their mother's death led to her family eventually attaining a sense of peace.

"It brings serenity and closure," she and Sharon say. "We've lived with pain and unanswered questions nearly all our lives."

Frankal is pushing for greater awareness of mental health, saying mental illness is so common, there shouldn't be any stigma attached to it.

Her work helping repatriates hasn't gone unnoticed, as she has been nominated for a 2021 Absa Jewish Achievers Entrepreneurship award.

"I now know our business acumen is inherited from our mother, Maureen," she says.

"My work helps me assist others emigrating to Australia. I have found my lifeblood and a whole new business from the very thing that caused my most tragic childhood beginning."



Vanessa, Maureen, and Sharon

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The David Lopatie Institute of Comparative Medicine

will be held digitally on **Wednesday, November 10, 2021, at 18:30** as part of the Annual General Meeting of the International Board of the Weizmann Institute of Science

Please contact: Yaelg@weizmann.ac.il should you wish to receive a link to view the festive occasion

Austria awards Nates for Holocaust work

STAFF REPORTER

Tali Nates, the founder and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, gives her all to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive, and educate people about genocide. It's generally a thankless task, but this week, Austrian Ambassador Dr Johann Brieger presented her with the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Award.



Tali Nates receiving the award from the Austrian Ambassador Dr Johann Brieger

Nates is the first South African to win this award and, as the daughter and niece of Holocaust survivors saved by Austro-Hungarian Oskar Schindler, it's particularly meaningful for her.

"I'm honoured to be the first South African to receive this award. However, it's not mine alone, it goes to all the members of the team at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre," she said.

In her acceptance speech, Nates spoke about the projects in which she has partnered with the Austrians, saying, "It's important for us in South Africa and the centre to interact with the particular history of Austria during and after World War II and its struggle, especially from the 1990s, to confront its difficult past and the progress, and meaningful steps taken to come to terms with it in the country today.

"I feel a particular kinship with this process as 27 years after the end of apartheid and the transition to democracy in South Africa, we also struggle to confront our own painful past, and to a large extent, it still shapes our country's present and future."

Brieger spoke of Austrians' responsibility to remember and obligation to act, describing "small steps" that Austrians had implemented to educate not only future generations but to engage in discussion with the older generation. "It's a responsibility and an obligation at the same time," he said.

"It was thus easy when I was asked during the selection process what I thought of honouring Tali with this award. I couldn't think of anyone better suited. This is what you do. You do it with vigour and passion, and in a very nice way," said Brieger.

Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, said, "In South Africa, no individual has done more to make the Holocaust meaningful, relatable, and urgent than Tali Nates."

As Nates had demonstrated again and again through her work, it's precisely because the Holocaust is so little known, so unfamiliar, and so distant from a simplistic South African way of seeing race as only black and white, that it's so powerful here, Mendelsohn said.

"Precisely because it's so distant from the lived experience of South Africans, it provides a particularly good tool to think with, a particularly productive way of speaking about our own problems in South Africa, and a particular challenge to the easy expectations and assumptions of a South African audience," Mendelsohn said.

"When taught by Tali, the Holocausts demands humanism and empathy. We

live in a society that doesn't empathise easily. Engaging with the Holocaust demands that we relate to one another as individuals, fragile and imperfect, fallible and susceptible, capable of great good but also callousness, indifference, and evil," said Mendelsohn.

He said Nates' work in Holocaust education here and abroad made a genuine difference. "Hers isn't the flashy and attention-seeking style that too often

passes for making a difference in our popular culture. This is the real thing: the patient and persistent work of nudging society, person by person, to be better, more understanding, to recognise our common humanity," Mendelsohn said.

"And to me, all that Tali does serves another quieter purpose too. We can never fully grasp the destruction of the Holocaust, and we can never derive redemptive meaning from it. But through the care, thought, and energy of Tali and others like her, the Holocaust can be used for good."

By doing what Nates does, he said, "We don't allow the victims of the Holocaust to be forgotten, a second death for the countless numbers who have none to mourn for them. Instead we honour the dead, and let their suffering and their lives speak in the present. Such noble and important work is worthy of our gratitude."

Eminent virologist highlights science's social responsibility

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Internationally renowned virologist and COVID-19 advisor, Professor Barry Schoub, has used a prestigious award to question whether science can play a greater values-driven social role.

Schoub, a household name since being called on to help the nation and the Jewish community in the COVID-19 fight in March 2020, was on 20 October awarded the Academy of Science of SA (ASSAf's) Science for Society Gold Medal for 2021. The award is for excellence in the application of outstanding scientific thinking in the service of society.

In his acceptance speech, he referred to the so-called "war on science" spurred by the pandemic, and



Professor Barry Schoub

asked what prompted such large tracts of society to lose their trust in science.

Since that fateful day in March last year when he was asked to delay his vacation to help the community deal with the pandemic, this emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and founder and former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) has brought expertise, information, and sanity to bear on the global pandemic.

He is the chairperson of South Africa's ministerial advisory committee (MAC) on coronavirus vaccines, which keeps the government abreast of all critical new developments, and has also played a crucial role in advising the Jewish community about COVID-19 as part of a panel of medical experts.

In its citation for the award, ASSAf said of Schoub, "He is undoubtedly a world-class scientist who has consistently used his energy, talents, and scientific prowess to combat diseases, build capacity, and promote health in South Africa, Africa, and globally, especially in relation to pandemic preparedness."

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, the former chairperson of the South African MAC on COVID-19, nominated Schoub. "There is no question in my mind that he's not only South Africa's leading virologist but also a world

leader in virology, vaccines, and pandemic preparedness," Karim said.

"He is an exceptional candidate for the ASSAf Science for Society Award who has had a truly impressive impact on viral diseases and vaccination in South Africa, Africa, and globally." Karim, is director of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in SA, and the pro-vice chancellor (research) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Schoub took the opportunity of the award to say, "Science has become extremely sophisticated, and it needs to restore the trust of the public. Communicating complexity is a challenge, but loss of trust results in a plethora of pseudo-science."

Science's ethical role and responsibility to society has become even more pertinent in the COVID-19 era, he said.

"It's specifically in the biomedical sciences where the trust of society is so intrinsically crucial, and where, in spite of the excellence of our science, we may be failing somewhat," Schoub said.

There are a number of issues at play, he said: the complexity of applied sciences and their dependency on political and financial interests for funding; the particular vulnerability of the health sciences to pseudo-science; general suspicion of scientists as an elite; distrust of privilege; and in SA, class and race distinctions.

"The 21st century has spawned a very significant, vocal, and often hostile lobby

Continued on page 16>>

Moving mountains – SA architect honoured with blue plaque

PERSONAL STORY

ADAM GORDON



Here's a true story, from when I was growing up. The year was 1969, and we had just moved into a glass and pine layered box pegged to the side of Linksfield Ridge. My father, Gerald Gordon, was the architect, and the house was featured in various newspapers at the time, front page of the *Sunday Times* property section, and so on.

Fast forward 52 years, and this same house now bears a Johannesburg Architectural Legacy blue plaque, reflecting on both the house and its designer. And the story is worth its retelling because opening your eyes and pushing back against the derivative and the ersatz matters. Well, it mattered to Gerald.

It was a different time, and objects of even acceptable imagination hardly existed in the South African shops of the era, so he made his own: light fittings, kitchen finishes, sofa frames, etc. Once he made a set of wine "glasses" by welding caramel cups to upturned bedsprings. Yeah, okay, not every idea worked.

Even as the fount of visual ingenuity was in full flow, for Gerald, design was never merely aesthetics. It was about finding the optimal solution. And what was the optimal solution to this house? There was a cliff-face, there was a patch of flat ground below it, and below that more falling mountainside.

That there was any flatland at all was due to the stone-wall topography of Linksfield Ridge left by Dr Hermann Kallenbach, a landscaper and stonemason of unparalleled ability, to say nothing of energy. Jewish too, by the way. And now also recognised with his own Johannesburg Heritage Society blue plaque.

Now, if you put your house on the flat, bang goes the garden and pool. How's that going to go down with the family? So, Gerald hung it on the mountain. With the front door, let me airily say, at roof level. You need brass *kahun* ... oh alright let's call it *chutzpah* to do this. I know this may seem odd to you – hell it is odd – we had koppie and mountain shrubs in our living room.

Gerald was born in Vryheid. How and why his Lithuanian parents got there is a story lost in time, but the family moved to Johannesburg specifically so his elder sisters could find



Gerald Gordon, holding the author, Adam Gordon, on a cliff face where the house's kitchen now stands

nice Jewish boys (which they did), and Gerald had a Barmitzvah in the Yeoville Shul. He was at the time also a Betarnik.

I'll leave it to you to work out whether this was more about ideology or the free summer holidays, but one way or another he progressed from that and Athlone Boys High to Wits School of Architecture, and graduated in 1955.

He would return to Wits Architecture in 1976 as a faculty member in design and construction, and get his PhD along the way. His core area was vernacular architecture, which was Gerald all over: that local is lekker, and good design is solution-led. The best architecture is that which most convincingly solves the simultaneous challenges of function, structure, climate, community, and cost.

By vernacular, he was of course doing "African style" a whole generation before it was cool, or at least before it was cool outside of Broederstroom. But Gerald never followed ideological or artsy fads, nor lived a self-conscious identity as a "creative".

He was allergic to fashion-led architecture, and punned that Post Modern was in fact "Most Plodden", whereupon our groans of pain would only encourage him to further "pun-ishment", for which he would observe: "that's pa for the

course." Begged to stop already, he might sign off with a winked apology: "To err is human. To forgive, daven."

Retirement from Wits slowed nothing. Gerald, who always maybe had a bit more tummy than was good for him, was by this time cruising around in coloured trouser-braces (which he made himself) devising and prototyping a completely new form of architectural construction, the "Thin-skin" method.

I won't bore you with the tech, but it's worth pausing to get how fundamentally different it is. Houses you know are built by putting lots of little brickies in tall rows and a tiled roof on the top. Thin-skin construction forms walls, floors, ceilings, roofs, etc, all in one, by way of a rebar-reinforced wire mesh framework, thinly daubed over with a concrete skin.

The skin encloses an air gap which provides zero-energy insulation (heat retention and passive cooling) and also serves as moisture barrier in the manner of cavity wall construction.

But it's not some urban-futuro fantasy. Surfaces are mortared and finished in the standard manner, so when all is said and done, it looks just like "normal". Various houses in Johannesburg and Cape Town have now been made this way, and you wouldn't know what's underneath.

It's low cost, uses locally sourced materials, and is buildable by unskilled labour, so perhaps you're thinking what a game-changer this is for housing South Africans and the wider world sustainably and affordably? You're right.

To this, Gerald was a man of inspiration not institutions. And he is of course no longer around. So that's where it stands. But the diagrams and technical specifications are all unpatented and free for use, available at <https://jmgeraldgordon.wordpress.com/> or via the archive at the Witwatersrand University Architecture and Built Environment Library.

• Adam Gordon is a professor at Aarhus University School of Management, Denmark

Dison takes literary dip into Joburg’s underworld

David Dison has brought out a second crime novel based in Johannesburg titled *The Good Nigerian*. The *SA Jewish Report* catches up with him to find out more.

What initially inspired you to write novels?

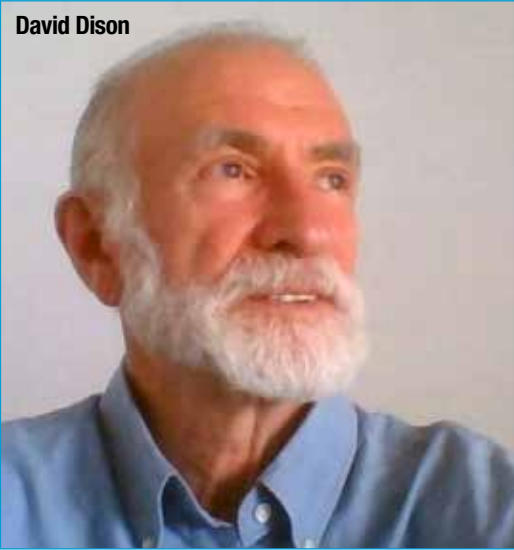
I was inspired by studying and reading great novels throughout my youth thanks to my late mother. From that time, I wanted to write.

How would you describe the world of *The Good Nigerian*?

An allegory set in Joburg shortly before the pandemic.

You have a deep understanding of media, entertainment, civil and human rights, and law, but your fiction isn’t about that. Why?

This is precisely why I like contemporary



fiction writing. It’s about an imaginary world with roots and resonances in our own world which the reader can relate to. My daily professional life wouldn’t hook readers.

Describe where and how you like to write?

Early mornings are best for me. Possibly two to three hours, depending on whether I’m writing actively.

It has been many years since your first Nossel

practicing law in Joburg which is the place described in my novels.

Are your characters based on anyone you or we might know and if so, who?

The characters are imaginary, but for those who know me, there are strong elements of similarity. Jerome Nossel is a fictional alter ego for me, and the imaginary characters in the book might have elements of people and places I have known in real life.

Jerome is decidedly Jewish and the book is dotted with fabulous Yiddish terms. Why?

Nossel is a Jew like one of the other characters in the book. This is a story that takes place in Johannesburg, which still has a vibrant Jewish community, so the book is reflective of that.

You bring Johannesburg to life in your stories. What’s your relationship with this city like? What does it mean to you?

I’m a fourth generation Johannesburger. My great grandfather is buried in Enoch Sontonga Park. This is the city in which we have lived for generations other than for a period in the early 20th century in Standerton, which I refer to in the book.

book. Why the hiatus?

I produced essays and short stories. One of them, *Louis Botha Avenue*, had characters which I developed.

How did you feel when you completed this book?

Fulfilled. I’m very happy with this book and what my publishers Jacana Media have done with it.

How did your family contribute to making it work?

My wife is a teacher and writer, so she understands.

Can we expect another Nossel book soon or are you planning something quite different?

There’s a third in the Nossel triptych on its way next year.

Is there anything you would like potential *SA Jewish Report* readers to know?

This book looks closely at Jews who have emigrated in the 19th, 20th, and 21st century to Africa through the medium of a detective story. It’s racy and provocative. Buy it, please.

Fedler throws the book at midlife

Acclaimed author and South African emigrant to Australia, **Joanne Fedler**, has brought out another book, *Unbecoming*. The *SA Jewish Report* catches up with her in South Africa to find out more.

Why did you write about a group of women in midlife who go out into the bush overnight to celebrate a friend’s 57th birthday?

Unbecoming is the third in the trilogy of books on motherhood which began with *Secret Mother’s Business* (2006), followed by *The Reunion* (2012). After I turned 50, I wanted to write a homage to midlife to explore menopause, the empty nest, and loss of libido and visibility, which most women dread and bemoan.

My experience has been so different – I’ve never felt more liberated now that the hard work of raising kids is over. I’ve become braver (I started open-water swimming a few years ago), am willing to take more risks, and have discovered the deepest love of my life – the ocean. Midlife is when we outgrow our ego, competitiveness, judgement of ourselves and others, and become custodians, elders with a deep responsibility to our children’s generation and to the earth.

Your writing pulls no punches, and reminds readers of the bare truth of this time of life, the aches and pains we experience. Was it based on personal experience?

All my books draw from my life experience – the ordinary stuff of being a mother, a woman, an immigrant. Writing is a way of wrestling to make meaning, universalised so readers see their lives reflected too. Motherhood, marriage, immigration, body image, and relationships are rich places to explore and question who we are as human beings. I try to get to the truth of my own experience, so I avoid romanticising, catastrophising, or stereotyping, and try to do justice to the complexity of women’s experiences.

Why is *Unbecoming* set in the wild, and is it an important aspect of the story?

I wanted to write a story that treats ordinary women in midlife as the heroes, and to disrupt the narrative of midlife as a downer. So, I had to take my characters out of their comfort zone, into nature to spend a night under the stars. In the wild, we are stripped bare. As part of the research for this book, I took a group of friends to a cave in the Blue Mountains for two nights. We made fires, chatted, and shared stories. One of the issues that came up was climate change and fear for our children’s futures. So nature felt like the perfect setting for *Unbecoming* as the women talk about change – in their bodies and relationships with partners and children.

Before you left South Africa, you were a women’s right’s lawyer for abused women and often their spokesperson. Why did you swap that for writing books?

When I emigrated to Australia, I had two law degrees and two kids under the age of four. I didn’t have the energy or

desire to requalify as a lawyer. For a few years, I was a full-time mother. Writing was just a hobby. After my first book, *The Dreamcloth* (2005) was published, I landed a book deal to write about early motherhood, and never looked back. Writing helps me to continue to give voice to women’s experiences. My novel, *Things Without A Name* (2008), is about gender violence, and it has been recently optioned for a six-part TV mini-series.

What does South Africa mean to you now?

I was a reluctant immigrant – we left after a terrible incident of violence affected my family. Still, to be an immigrant means to live in a shadowy place of internal exile, missing people, places, and even the problems you leave behind. I’ve just spent the past 10 weeks in South Africa. During this time, my mother passed away unexpectedly. South Africa is and will always be my first love. I will never outgrow the longing I have for it, nor do I want to – here is where I have laid my mother’s body to rest. But I’m also grateful for my life in Australia, my adopted home. It has given me the chance to know myself in new ways. I’ve been there for 20 years now. Being an immigrant is always to be partly in exile. Never fully gathered to oneself.

Joanne Fedler

Your books aren’t fiction as such, they’re based on fact and seemingly real characters. How do those who recognise themselves in your books respond?

I’m fascinated by real human stories, especially the lives of ordinary women. I like to get a range of perspectives so that many women’s voices and experiences are represented in my books. But if I ever want to use someone’s story, I always ask permission and acknowledge them even though I fictionalise and disguise the sources.

What do you hope women will get from *Unbecoming*?

I hope they see their lives as the stuff of literature, and they become excited about the prospect of midlife. Ageing is a privilege and a responsibility. Being “invisible” is an underrated superpower. I feel giddy at the prospect of what lies ahead.

For some, hitting menopause is hell, for others, it’s simply a change in the time of their lives. What was it for you?

Menopause has been a great relief, a wonderful transition into elderhood. It brought heat, anger, clarity, and freedom. Midlife is more than just menopause. It’s a time of celebration which includes the relief that I didn’t die young and got my children to young adulthood. I had never experienced real freedom until now.

Has releasing this book in the age of COVID-19 had any impact?

I literally had to rewrite the plot several times due to real-life circumstances (the bushfires, COVID-19). Of course, the launches have also been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.

Continued on page 16>>



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Otto Frank letter a rare find for Cape Holocaust centre

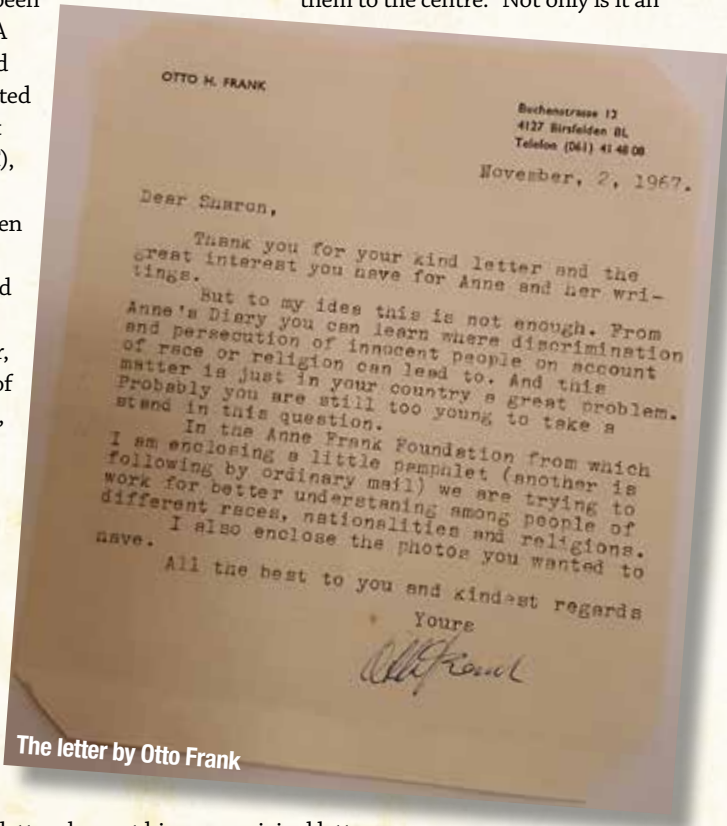
TALI FEINBERG

We all feel connected to Anne Frank in some way, but now an even closer connection has been made to her in Cape Town. A letter from Otto Frank dated 2 November 1967 was donated to the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre (CTHGC), along with photographs of Anne and Margot Frank taken before the war.

The collection was donated by Robin Sharon Papayanni earlier this year. In the letter, Frank talks about the aims of the Anne Frank Foundation, and goes on to say that apartheid in South Africa is a ‘great problem’ which can be solved using the principles in Anne’s writing.

CTHGC Head of Archives Dmitri Abrahams told the SA Jewish Report how the items came to the centre. “Robin Sharon Papayanni [who goes by Sharon] received this letter from Otto Frank in response to a letter she sent him. In her letter, she expressed her admiration for Anne and her writing, and asked him to send her photos of Margot and Anne. She kept the items in a drawer at home until she decided it was time to place them in a more secure location and for them to be available to researchers and

academics.” As an archivist and historian, Abrahams was “awestruck and humbled by these important historical items” when Papayanni presented them to the centre. “Not only is it an



The letter by Otto Frank

original letter signed by Otto Frank, but he also refers to the socio-political situation in South Africa at the time, which is a very rare find. I would even go so far as to say it’s one of a kind. Such a rare find is an important addition to our archive.”

The letter and photos will be reproduced and

used in an educational programme that the centre is developing for younger learners. “The originals will be wrapped in acid-free tissue paper, placed in acid-free archival grade boxes, and in permanent storage in a climate-controlled storage room at our partner institution, University of Cape Town [UCT] Special Collections,” he says. “Though our collections are kept at UCT, the CTHGC remains the custodian of all the material placed in the UCT archive.”

Abrahams says it’s extremely meaningful to have these items in this archive. “The items prove indisputably that people recognised early on that the lessons of the Holocaust could be used to teach about the effects of unchecked prejudice and discrimination. The letter also serves as proof that people recognised that apartheid was wrong. As such, it will be used to teach young people not only about the



Margot Frank



Anne Frank

Holocaust but also about apartheid.”

The public can see the letter and photographs over the upcoming summer holidays. “They will be on display at the centre from 1 November 2021 until 31 January 2022. Thereafter they will be digitised, placed in permanent storage, and made available online alongside our other collections,” says Abrahams.

“We urge people who have artefacts, documents, photographs, and items related to the Holocaust, World War I, World War II, Jewish life in Europe before, during, and after the Holocaust to consider donating these objects to our archive,” he says. “This will ensure that they are preserved for future generations and available to researchers and academics.”

The CTHGC archive is supported by the Claims Conference (Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against

Germany). The link to the centre’s digital finding aid is: <https://atom.lib.uct.ac.za/index.php/za-uct-bc1556-a>

Hero’s words found in lost Yiddish letters

TALI FEINBERG

Harry Lipschitz grew up knowing he was named after his heroic uncle, Tzvi (Harry) Lipschitz, who fell fighting in Israel’s War of Independence. But he was never told more about his life and death, which remained a mystery until he uncovered a trove of long-forgotten letters written by his late uncle in Yiddish to his family back in South Africa.

“When my parents passed away, all their documents were kept at my niece’s home. About two years ago, she was tidying the storage unit and uncovered 108 letters, all written in Yiddish, by Tzvi to his mother, Frume Alte Lipschitz, while he was in Israel,” says Lipschitz, whose Hebrew name is Tzvi.

“The newly discovered letters have unlocked parts of history for a family and a kibbutz in Israel,” says an emotional Lipschitz. “These letters are from a young man who wrote to his mother and family on a weekly basis. He emigrated from South Africa to assist in building the fledgling nation of Israel. In his dedication to seeing that the state of Israel became a reality, Tzvi paid the ultimate price when all 300 residents of the kibbutz were slaughtered, even those that tried to surrender. It is thought that this massacre was one of the factors that prompted Ben Gurion to make his declaration on the formation of the state of Israel the following day.

“The discovery of letters not seen for 75 years means we uncovered a link to our past that we never knew existed. As children growing up, we asked our *bobbas, zaidas*, parents, aunts, and uncles

to tell us the story of what happened to our uncle, Tzvi, but the subject was taboo. The adults clammed up, and all we were told was that Tzvi fell heroically in defence of Israel.

“The letters prompted me to begin in-depth research into what actually occurred at Kfar Etzion,” he says. “It revealed, to my horror, that when the kibbutz was overrun, all the inhabitants were killed and mutilated beyond recognition. Their bodies lay there for 18 months before being interred in a special burial ceremony at Mt Herzl. I realised why the story was hidden for all those years. The



Harry Lipschitz

letters have also revealed Tzvi’s deeply religious beliefs, and his talents as an orator, poet, and journalist.”

His uncle was born in 1921 in Kerson, Ukraine. “In 1925, the family moved to Jasvan, Lithuania, and 10 years later, they came to South Africa,” says Lipschitz.

“Tzvi’s formal education was at a yeshiva in Lithuania and he then attended school in South Africa. Tzvi’s outspoken belief in *Torah v’avodah* [Torah-labour ideology] soon had him speaking at all religious or Zionist functions, and no Barmitzvah or wedding was complete without a speech from Tzvi.

“He rose to the rank of vice-chairperson of Hapoel Hamizrachi [Bnei Akiva]. The Lipschitz family were members of the Bertrams Shul, where Tzvi conducted Torah reading classes every Shabbat.” In 1945, his uncle left South Africa to help build the state of Israel. On his arrival, he was offered the position of ambassador for the fledgling state in the United States to help raise funds and recruit people to come to Israel. In his determination to build up the country from the inside, he declined the offer.

“Tzvi was also asked to attend a seminary to become a rabbi, and after a long deliberation, also declined that offer. He decided to assist with the building of Kfar Etzion,” says Lipschitz.

Meanwhile back in South Africa, Lipschitz’ late father, Jack (Yankel) Lipschitz, singlehandedly kept the Bertrams Shul going for many years in honour of his brother. “He used to send taxis to all the aged homes to ensure that they could have a *minyán*.

My mom, Sarah, used to cater all the *brochas*. Eventually, members had either passed away or moved away, and the shul declined. In honour of his brother, Tzvi, my father organised that three of the Torahs were sent to the shul at Kfar Etzion, where they remain to this day.”

“THE DISCOVERY OF LETTERS NOT SEEN FOR 75 YEARS MEANS WE UNCOVERED A LINK TO OUR PAST THAT WE NEVER KNEW EXISTED.”

As for the letters, “We needed to translate them from Yiddish to English,” says Lipschitz. “I discussed this with my lifelong friend in Israel, Eileen [Zakheim] Fridman, who suggested that we scan a few letters and she would try to translate them. Her painstaking translations allowed us to uncover a treasure trove of information.”

The letters are filled with enquiries about home, family, and shul, discussions about the fledgling state of Israel, and animated stories. In one letter dated 7 June 1947, Lipschitz tells a wonderful anecdote that captures the highs and lows of that time, when Israel represented hope for the future. “This week, one of the bachelors got married, that is, one of the older boys of the kibbutz. He is a quiet and well-read person. There was something mysterious about him. Two years ago, he left Poland for *eretz* Israel. There, he left a bride. This wasn’t just a bride. This was a love. Maybe a childhood love. He arrived in *eretz*, and worked and waited for her arrival.

“A year passed and then two, three, and four years, and then the war broke out, she was lost, and he didn’t hear from her for a long time. Three years later, [after] he didn’t hear from her, and it became known what happened to Polish Jews, he received a letter from her from Siberia. Thank G-d she is alive! How do they get together, how do you get out of Russia?

His heart was burning full of love and hope. Something must happen so that they can end their lives together. Miracles really did happen. After 12 years of waiting, she arrived in *eretz* Israel and even legally. After a week of being with us, the kibbutz arranged a huge wedding and handed over their oldest member. The guests were dancing, singing, and blessing the couple with *mazal* and children because they are both in their fifth decade (mid-forties). Let’s hope for *simchas*.”

Fast forward to the present, and the Lipschitz family approached the museum at Kfar Etzion to see if it would be the custodian of the letters. “But it felt that the letters should be archived and displayed at the National Library of Israel. The head of archives, Matan Barzilai, saw their historic importance, and offered that the letters and their translations be placed on display at the National Library. Eileen has professionally and diligently managed to translate more than 80 of these letters to date. They have now been transferred to the National Library, and they may form a book in the future with the title, *Letters to my mother [A brievele tzu der mammen]*.”

The story comes full circle in an extraordinary way. “When my eldest son, Warren, went on *ulpan* to Israel, they were assigned to spend a few weeks on a kibbutz,” says Lipschitz. “On arriving at the kibbutz, Warren was asked how he was related to Tzvi Harry Lipschitz. Warren replied, ‘That’s my father.’ They said that that couldn’t be as this Tzvi Harry Lipschitz had fallen in defence of that kibbutz. They took him outside to show him the memorial to all the fallen. Warren ended up on the kibbutz where his great uncle, Tzvi, had fallen. Hashem works in wondrous ways.”

THREE BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN CYPRUS

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.” – Chinese Proverb

There's a perception that it's expensive and onerous to realise a Plan B in Europe. In Cyprus, an English-speaking, former British colony and full member of the European Union, this perception couldn't be further from the truth.

Cyprus is regarded as one of the safest countries in the world and year on year, property sales to overseas buyers have increased, especially in the western part of the island. Investment is pouring into the economy with all its infrastructural developments and enormous natural gas fields.

There's never been a better time to explore investing in Cyprus!

The three main benefits of investing in Cyprus are permanent residency through property investment to realise your Plan B, the lifestyle, and the peace of mind that Cyprus is a secure investment destination.

1. Your plan B

Securing permanent residency is a sought-after Plan B because it's effectively an insurance policy to be able to relocate to that country at any time without a visa and without having to go through the normal onerous immigration processes and procedures.

The permanent residency programme on offer in Cyprus has been voted the best in Europe because it automatically qualifies three generations in the same family line, including dependent children up to age 25 as well as both the parents and the parents-in-law of the main investor. Not only is the application process quick – it takes just two months for residency to be approved – but permanent residency status for the whole family is for life, the permit never expires nor needs to be renewed. And, you don't need to live in Cyprus to retain your



residency status. Cyprus permanent residents have the right to apply for citizenship following their physical presence in the country for a number of years.

2. The lifestyle on offer

Another huge benefit of investing in Cyprus is the fabulous lifestyle. Being an ex-British colony, there's no language barrier – everyone speaks English and all the documentation is in English. Cyprus has a relaxed, stress-free lifestyle offering an ideal family environment. Your children and grandchildren will benefit from excellent schools and tertiary education instructions (all Euro-accredited), and the healthcare

facilities and medical care is world-class. Cyprus is similar to South Africa. The golf courses are world-class, the countryside is breathtakingly beautiful, and Cyprus has 66 blue-flag status beaches, the cleanest seas in the Med, and a mountain range where it snows for three months. This is a country for enjoying and exploring.

3. A safe investment destination

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Cape board outlines geography of a connected community

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The future of Cape Town Jewry “continues to look remarkable”, Howard Sackstein said following a panel discussion on the issue at the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) 2021 Conference on 31 October. Sackstein, the non-executive chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report*, moderated the panel with Jos Horwitz, the head of early child development at United Herzlia Schools; Jaryd Raizon, the Africa director of the Knowledge Trust; and Lauren Joffe, the director behind *Simcha and Derech Eretz* on SABC 2.

The Cape SAJBD chose a kaleidoscope to represent the conference, reflecting the different colours, shapes, sizes, and facets of the Jewish community. The idea is that when all these elements merge, they form a harmonious and beautiful pattern.

“That’s why we’ve taken a small sample of intergenerational people in our panel today, each bringing a unique richness of experience, skills, talents, and choices, all of whom have contributed to South African society as well as our Jewish communal life,” said Cape SAJBD Deputy Chairperson Adrienne Jacobson.

United Herzlia Schools was frequently mentioned during the discussion because these Cape Town-based school have continued to upgrade and restructure their education for years, said Horwitz.

“Our students are no longer experiencing rote teaching and sitting in lessons or doing tests just to make sure they getting A’s,” said Horwitz. “It’s about working on projects, collaborating, team teaching, and learning how to make your own learning. In fact, we’ve just done a beautiful little thing. We asked the students, ‘What do you want to learn next week?’ They said, ‘Soccer’, So, we got into soccer.”

Horwitz said the Cape Town Jewish community should change the way it gives to charity. “Giving everything that we have in excess, or that we don’t want anymore, bringing *tzedakah* [charity] every Friday and raising money are the wrong ways to go about it. As young people, we need to collaborate more. When Herzlia invites a school to come and share resources, it should be about what can we share together.”

Although Herzlia has provided “an absolutely brilliant education” for her sons, Horwitz admitted that its students are limited to interacting with Jewish middle-class or upper-class friends. “As parents, you have to think how you can help them to engage in the greater community.”

Raizon said that though the Jewish community did do a lot of good, “the reality is that everyone in the country needs to do more to give to those who previously haven’t had opportunities. The unemployment rate in the Jewish community is very low. It’s 2%.”

Joffe agreed, saying, “We’re very fortunate that the majority of the Jewish community is middle to upper class. There’s a huge gap.”

That gap could be narrowed through partnership between schools, and not just for a sports day once a year. “I understand the Israel-Palestine issue, but if there’s a Muslim high school down the road, why can’t a Jewish school partner with it?”

She recalled how she learnt about the Quran at school to accommodate a Muslim student, by, for example, comparing the two religions during class.

Sackstein believes we can learn from the Muslim community. “When one thinks of the Muslim community, one organisation



Left to right: Howard Sackstein, Jos Horwitz, Lauren Joffe and Jaryd Raizon at the 2021 Cape SABJD conference

that comes to the mind is Gift of the Givers,” he said. “Now, there are probably 500 equivalent Jewish organisations from Afrika Tikkun to the Union of Jewish Women, but our community doesn’t have a common brand.”

As a trustee of Afrika Tikkun, Sackstein said he never heard anyone referring to this organisation as “a Jewish organisation”. For this reason, he said the Jewish community should be “branding the efforts that we do under one central brand, so people understand the contribution of our community to the broader society”.

“One thing that should be done differently in the schools, which can speak to the greater brand, is focused work on understanding

“I ATTEND SHUL SERVICES ALL OVER THE WORLD WHILE SITTING IN JOHANNESBURG. I WATCH RABBIS SPEAKING TO ME FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM OR AMERICA, AND I’M PARTICIPATING IN WORLD JEWISH EVENTS. WE’VE SEPARATED LOCATION AND COMMUNITY.”

the greater context in which we live,” Raizon said.

He believes the Mensch Network, an organisation of social entrepreneurs, does “incredible work” to bring together entrepreneurs, innovators, and individuals in the Jewish community who want to do impactful work in the greater community.

Sackstein spoke about his favourite Jewish community in the world, in Panama. It consists, he said, of 11 000 people all living in one single area of the country’s capital city.

“Almost 90% are *shomré* Shabbat, and many keep kosher at home because the community has decided on certain norms of what it means to be a community,” he

said. Sackstein said that we can learn a lesson from the pandemic, which is that technology means people no longer need to be in the same place.

“I attend shul services all over the world while sitting in Johannesburg,” he said. “I watch rabbis speaking to me from the United Kingdom or America, and I’m participating in world Jewish events. We’ve separated location and community.”

“What we should be doing is saying we’ve got an unbelievably thriving community with 12 000 people. Yet, we’ll have a thriving community with 1 000 and



Simon Freemantle during his talk at the 2021 Cape SAJBD conference

8 000 because technology has allowed us to extract the culture, the affiliation, and the commitment out of our community.

“We need to reimagine what community looks like in the new era. You’re in a privileged position here in Cape Town. You have things like water and electricity, which we sometimes don’t have in Joburg. More importantly, you have a commitment to the future of the city and South Africa. That’s so admirable.”

Eminent virologist highlights science’s social responsibility

>>Continued from page 12

of opponents to science. Nowhere has this phenomenon been more challenging than what has mushroomed in the COVID-19 pandemic,” he said, referring to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter users’ role in fuelling anti-vaccination, anti-masking, chloroquine, and Ivermectin.

Schoub believes better communication is a significant weapon in science’s armoury. “Scientists need training in communication – which they don’t have – and they should partner with professional communicators who can interpret complexity in a way the community can trust,” he said.

In his acceptance speech, Schoub questioned whether “our focus on productivity has perhaps attenuated our responsibilities and our obligations to society”. And he pointed to the “tragedy of global inequity driven by financial and political agendas”, with the starkest example being inequity in access to vaccines, and vaccine hoarding by high-income countries.

“World Health Organization Secretary-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus alarmingly warned us earlier this year that we could be facing a catastrophic moral failure. Is it an unrealistic dream that, for the future, mechanisms could be instituted to have vaccines not treated as commercial commodities in the global marketplace? How could science and scientists play a role in this quagmire of political, financial, and social interests?” Schoub asked.

“Whatever science we are doing, it needs to be predicated with the simple one-word question – why? Whatever scientific endeavour it is, it needs to be supplemented and enriched with a values quality, a quality of its meaningfulness to the society we serve. We can and we should lift science to be a virtuous as well as a utilitarian pursuit.”

Fedler throws the book at midlife

>>Continued from page 13

What kind of response have you had from women about the book?

Overwhelming gratitude that comes from being seen. Women in midlife are hardly ever represented in stories other than as old, desexualized characters who have no utility in mainstream society. To me, women in midlife and teenage girls are the most interesting people on the planet right now.

What aspects of motherhood did you want to explore in *Unbecoming*?

I explore what it means to be a mother to children who don’t want to be mothered anymore. What happens to the identity you’ve spent decades becoming when it’s no longer needed? The author, James Hollis, writes, “In midlife, what we have become is now our chief obstacle.” The roles we’ve perfected are now in our way. The hardest part of motherhood is learning to let go of our children, so I delve into divestiture and the blessings of emptying. What spaces open up? What do we fill our lives with now that we can’t feed off our children?

What can we expect next from you?

I’ve just helped my father, Dov Fedler, finish a book he’s been working on for 35 years called *Gagman*, about a man in the concentration camps who survives by telling jokes to the commandant. It’s a graphic novel with 50 astonishing illustrations. It’s coming out in Australia and South Africa in early 2022, and I will be doing most of the publicity and media. We hope it will be used in Holocaust education. www.gagmanmedia.com

For those in this community who haven’t yet read *Unbecoming*, what do you want them to know?

The journey of *Unbecoming* can be summarised by this quote which opens the book by Mario de Andrade, “We have two lives. And the second one begins when you realise you only have one.” When you realise time is running out, your sense of urgency about finding joy and making life meaningful becomes the central driving force of your life.

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Le Creuset and the hospitality of strangers

On Sunday afternoon, I was reminded what it is that I love about the South African Jewish community. It so happened that I was in a particularly good mood. My son had announced his engagement the evening before to a girl we adore, the weather was brilliant, the COVID-19 numbers were low, and together with our soon to be family, we hosted a tea to celebrate the hell out of the occasion.

Unbeknown to us, we weren't the only ones who had something worth celebrating. It so happened that a few doors down the same road, a similar event was taking place. And whereas I'm not clear exactly what they were celebrating, it was confusing enough to cause chaos. Confusing enough that the street security guard chose to get involved by ushering anyone with a gift into the home of the few-doors-down neighbour. A number of our guests initially thought they were about to be fleeced of their Le Creuset coffee mugs, only to realise that this was a street in party mode.

There were also many who were bamboozled enough to attend the wrong party. When a very busy Glenhazel granny bustled in without so much of a word of *mazal* past my son and his fiancé as they stood greeting guests, both assumed that she was a guest of the other. Only 10 minutes later, when she returned (still holding what looked like a set of Tupperware) did she explain that as much as she would like to, she wouldn't be staying. Because this wasn't the party she was hoping to be at.

Later on, we were told that a number of our guests had made themselves comfortable down the

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



road. And only (I assume) after sampling their catering did it dawn on them that they should have recognised more people than they had done. I genuinely have no idea how many of the neighbours' guests we fed, and how many of ours were watered down the road.

And it mattered not a bit. I don't know if they, too, encouraged our visitors to take food with them when they left (because we had enough left over for a nation in need of a diabetic coma), but I do know that some of our people, who eventually made it to the right function, seemed to have had a very decent time. Which was exactly what I would have wanted for them.

We've all heard stories of people arriving at the wrong house for the wrong event. Those stories are funny because they make us uncomfortable in a "there but for the grace of G-d go I" sort of way. Which is why Sunday was so special. Because that was absent. The neighbours' guests could just have easily spent the afternoon with us as ours could have with them. No one asked why they were there or made them feel uncomfortable. And everyone got fed.

There is something so unique about a community which invites strangers in simply on the basis that they are standing at the door. With a gift from Le Creuset.

Pork that isn't pork – but isn't kosher either

SAUL KAMIONSKY

You may recoil at the thought of eating pork. However, you might consider indulging in Impossible Pork. It looks like pork, tastes like pork, but isn't pork. In fact, it is a next-generation meat substitute made from plants.

Impossible Foods, a plant-based meat company headquartered in the United States, introduced this product in September this year specifically for vegetarians, but also for Jews and Muslims who don't eat pork. According to the company, its award-winning pork is healthier than 70/30 ground pork as, among other things, it contains 59% less total fat and 37% fewer calories.

The company claims that Impossible Pork tastes better than ground pork from pigs. In Hong Kong, a blind taste test resulted in 54% of the 200 participants preferring the product to ground pork.

Although every ingredient in the product is kosher, and nothing about its preparation conflicts with Jewish dietary laws, Kosher SA won't certify Impossible Pork.

"A product which is called pork wouldn't be certified due to possible confusion in our consumers," says Rabbi Dovi Goldstein, the managing director of the Beth Din's kosher department.

This is in line with the decision by the United States-based Orthodox Union (OU), the largest certifier of kosher products in the world, at the beginning of October listing "consumer sensitivities" as the reason for not giving the nod to a product that described itself as pork.

In May 2018, the OU certified a different

Impossible Foods product, the Impossible Burger, made from plants for people who love ground beef. Available in countries like the United States, Canada, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates, the product has given Jews the opportunity to indulge in cheese-topped chilli, greasy cheeseburgers,

and the quintessential American diner pairing: a hamburger with a milkshake.

"Impossible Burgers are unfortunately not yet available in South Africa," says Goldstein. "However, Beyond Burgers, which are produced in the United States [under certification of the OK Kosher Certification

agency], are available at Woolworths."

Kosher SA certifies tens of thousands of products that meet its kosher standards.

"We do have policies in place to ensure that consumers won't be confused by a product," says Goldstein. "We would certify 'pork flavoured' products in the same way we certify parev 'meat flavoured' crisps or 'cheese flavoured' meat burgers."

The OU certifies other products that might seem to conflict with Jewish dietary law, explaining on its website, "A fish sauce may display a picture of a non-kosher fish, the OU [label] may appear on artificial crab or pork, or there may be a recipe for a non-kosher food item on the label." It even certifies other products that aim to replicate the pork experience, such as the "spicy porkless plant-based snack rinds" sold by Trader Joe's, an American chain of neighbourhood grocery stores.

As the OU doesn't yet have the policy that all fake meat should be treated like real meat, a kosher restaurant can still serve plant-based cheeseburgers without fear that its license will be revoked.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Voting day from the frontlines

Along with several of my colleagues at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), I had the pleasure of being part of the observer team that assisted the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) during Monday's local government elections.

As the organisation mandated not only to organise the elections (itself a formidable task), but to ensure that they are free, fair, and above board, the IEC plays a critical part in safeguarding our hard-won democratic freedom. To help it fulfil its mission and enable members of our own and other communities to contribute to the democratic process beyond simply turning out to vote, the Board has since 2009, headed up a team of volunteers to monitor the voting and vote counting on polling day.

The team is fully accredited by the IEC. Prior to the elections, volunteers attend election observer briefings around the country, and channels of communication are set up so that any problems can be immediately reported to the team co-ordinator (a role Alana Baranov has performed with distinction from the outset) who then relays the information to the IEC. The team has grown with each succeeding election, so that in 2019, it comprised more than 200 observers stationed at polls across seven provinces.

In view of this year's election being for local government only, combined with the impact of COVID-19 and a delayed start due to the late confirmation of the election date, there was some uncertainty about whether organising a team would be possible this time round. Happily, we were able to put together a committed group of nearly 50 individuals from around the country. As in previous elections, we had Jewish community members from Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Cape Town, and smaller cities, as well as people of various nationalities and religions. It was gratifying

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



that in addition to first-time participants, our call for volunteers brought back many that had been part of previous teams. This is an amazing initiative by the SAJBD, as we continue to be active participants in our country's democracy.

I chose to be an observer at the polling station at Hyde Park High School. In spite of some technical snags, voting proceeded smoothly and efficiently. The IEC staff were unfailingly courteous and helpful, particularly the presiding officer, who did a sterling job of managing the process. For various reasons, voter turnout was low in these elections. This is a great pity, as the right to vote in South Africa was hard-won. I still bear with pride the purple mark on my thumb signifying that I have voted in a fully democratic election in South Africa. Like you, I'm now watching the results come in with enormous interest. The political shifts and how they are interpreted will no doubt provide food for thought for many Shabbos table discussions and debates over the next few weeks.

Tribute to John Moshal

We were saddened last week to learn of the passing of John Moshal, a doyen of the Jewish community of KwaZulu-Natal. Among other positions held, he was president (later honorary life president) of the council of KwaZulu-Natal Jewry, and served for more than 30 years on our national executive committee. Tributes poured in as a testament to his leadership and philanthropy, and we join in sending condolences to his family.

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

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TLEBNAZ

More than 100 Yeshiva College Boys High School pupils and parents celebrated a gala dinner *siyum* on Sunday, 31 October, to celebrate learning a collective 7 000 Mishnayot and 500 pages of Gemara before school and during night seders. The dinner also celebrated the school's excellent in-school Kodesh programme, all testament to the boys' passion for learning.



After an overwhelmingly positive response from parents, Hatzolah partnered with King David schools last week to vaccinate pupils against COVID-19 on site. The service, for students aged 12 to 17, was administered voluntarily,



King David Linksfield Grade 10 student Rachael Lipshitz receives her vaccine

Vaccination sites were set up at King David Primary School Sandton, King David Linksfield, and King David Victory Park. The sites were run by qualified, experienced nurses from Hatzolah, and King David

social workers were present to monitor the situation and given any necessary support.

A webinar for parents was also hosted, in which medical experts discussed the psychological and medical considerations in vaccinating children.

TRACING SA HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

It's more than 70 years since the end of World War II, and the Chaim Herzog Museum of the Jewish Soldier of World War II, in commemoration of South African Jewish war heroes, is appealing to the community to help it trace South African Jews who fought in the war or took part in the war effort.

About 10 000 South Africans took part in the war. To date, the museum has listed more than 1 000. If you have any information, contact Naomi Rapeport on nrapeport@global.co.za.

The link to the museum is
<http://www.jwmww2.org/en>
– **Naomi Rapeport**

Coming from a journalistic background, I don't usually write to newspapers or online media, but through recent observations, I thought I must air my views. Even though I'm Jewish, I don't keep kosher. This is just me. However, when I entertain family or friends who are, I go out of my way to accommodate them.

On one of my recent, but infrequent, visits to some of Joburg's finer kosher establishments, I was appalled and disappointed at the situation. No names mentioned here, but it seems to me that the owners of these establishments, and there are quite a number of them, just don't care about their captive market.

On entering a nondescript front entrance, the shops are usually dark, dingy, and unappetising to say the least. If one is expected to entice customers to come in and spend their hard-earned money, and believe

me, kosher food is NOT cheap, then at least brighten up and proudly display your wares.

Having a well-lit shop with brightly coloured walls, a clean floor, neatly displayed fridges and shelving is the least one can do to make it appealing. Take note of the major supermarket chains, big or small, where it's a pleasure to walk in and shop.

To put it mildly, some of these establishments are downright filthy, and who knows what goes on in the kitchens, mashqiach present or not.

If these mom-and-pop stores are to survive in our day and age with online shopping etc, then things had better start improving, otherwise they will go the way of some of our well-known kosher brands that have already disappeared.

Disappointed.

– Martin Brasq, Johannesburg

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