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■ Volume 26 – Number 09 ■ 10 March 2022 ■ 7 Adar II 5782

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Israel offers hope on a wing and a prayer

TALI FEINBERG

As an endless column of humanity streams across Ukraine's border with Poland, there are countless aid agencies and Polish citizens waiting to meet them. Among them, one Israeli minister stands tall, quietly contemplating how Jewish people once were refugees here too, but now have a state that can play a role in ending the suffering.

"As a people who have known suffering and hardship, right here on the frozen soil of Europe, I cannot help but speak as an Israeli, as a Jew and as a human being," said Israel's minister of diaspora affairs, Nachman Shai, on a visit to the Medyka border crossing between Poland and Ukraine on Tuesday, 8 March 2022.

His was the first public visit by an Israeli minister to Eastern Europe since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The state of the Jewish people cannot close its gates at such a time. As a minister of the Israeli government, I will continue to fight to keep the gates of the state of Israel open to refugees from this terrible war," he said.

The minister said his trip was made to send "an unequivocal message" of unity to the Jews of Ukraine. "We're with you," he said. "From far and even from near, here on the ground, at any time of need. The Jewish people and Israel are supporting you and we're full of hope that this terrible war will swiftly come to an end."

Lior Hayat, the spokesperson for Israel's ministry of foreign affairs, has also been at the Polish border and seen the river of

humanity streaming across it. "There are many women with lots of kids. Ukrainian men who can fight aren't allowed out. They stand for hours on the border. It's a terrifying and sad situation. I told my wife that I feel the pain of this image in my DNA, in my collective memory. Because our people have been there. It's part of our past. We have to do something, we cannot look the other way," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

As the region faces its greatest mass exodus of refugees since World War II, Israel is stepping in to help anyone who needs it. One of the country's most meaningful links to Ukraine is that its only female prime minister, Golda Meir, was born in Kyiv. Now that link is being strengthened as the Jewish state is naming its Ukrainian field hospital Kochav Meir (the star of [Golda] Meir), shining a light of hope in the darkest of hours.

"The advanced team is crossing the border from Poland to Ukraine as we speak," Hayat told the *SA Jewish Report* on Tuesday morning. Though thousands upon thousands of people are fleeing war and devastation, the Israelis are heading in the opposite direction, setting up this one-of-a-kind field hospital on Ukrainian soil. It will focus on the needs of women and children. There will be a paediatric centre, a maternity centre and all aspects of care for refugees moving to the West, says Hayat.

Hayat says Israel has approached the situation with five different forms of outreach. The first is that since the invasion began, it has sent in 100 tons of humanitarian aid. This includes medical supplies, tents, blankets, sleeping bags,

winter clothes and water desalination units that can provide fresh water to more than 200 000 people.

The second is "mega-generators" sent by Israel that will be able to keep the power on in hospitals and other crucial institutions. Third, Israel is sending 20 to 40 tons of medical supplies every week. "We'll send it until they don't need it anymore. It's all based on their needs," says Hayat.

Then, Israel has opened refugee centres at five border crossings: Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. There, it provides refugees with support and resources, especially warm clothes. "We noticed that many are leaving Ukraine with very little and they have so many children. So, we're focusing on helping them with the winter clothes they need.

Finally, there's the field hospital, which will give refugees the care they need before they cross the border.

And then there's Israel's efforts to help Jews make aliya. Rebbetzin Grunie Lipskar Uminer grew up in Johannesburg and is one of Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzin Mashi Lipskar's nine children. Now living in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, she prayed from afar as her husband's cousin, Chani Segal, fled from Ukraine with her 12 children – the youngest being only two months old.

Segal and her husband were Chabad *shluchim* (emissaries) in the city of Kharkiv, Ukraine. They lived a fulfilling and holy life serving a thriving community. But it all came crashing down when Putin invaded. The Segals spent their first Shabbat of the invasion sleeping in a bunker surrounded by their own children and others' youngsters.



Israeli Diaspora Affairs Minister Nachman Shai at the border between Poland and Ukraine where refugees are crossing to safety

They spent their second Shabbat travelling West to save their lives. After 72 hours of a harrowing journey, they became among the hundreds of Jews rescued by Israel.

In an emotional video, you can see Segal arriving at Ben Gurion Airport, holding her baby in her arms. Young men sing in celebration as she and her family are welcomed to safety. The moment is bittersweet as joy and sadness are reflected in her eyes.

This is a time when the reason for a Jewish state has become crystal clear. According to official numbers from Israel

released on 9 March 2022, three flights carrying a total of 220 olim, along with an additional 100 orphans, arrived in Israel on Sunday, 6 March. Another 250 are expected to arrive on Wednesday [9 March].

At least 2000 Jews have arrived at aliya processing centres run by the Jewish Agency and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ) in countries bordering Ukraine. At least 4,130 beds have been rented in hotels and other facilities in neighbouring countries along the Ukraine border to accommodate

Continued on page 4 >>



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Jewish Ukrainians gear up for fierce Russia fight

DINAH SPRITZER - JTA

Konstantyn Batozsky believes he's on a list of so-called "neo-Nazis" to be rounded up "Gestapo-style" and "exterminated" by Russian forces seeking to enter Kyiv.

Batozsky, a Jew from eastern Ukraine, said he was informed about the "bounty on his head" by Ukrainian intelligence sources. But as a long-time and avowed Ukrainian nationalist who has collaborated with a paramilitary group that has a reputation for including extremists, he knows that it's people like him that Russian President Vladimir Putin was talking about when he cited a need for "denazification" as a pretext for invading his country.

"I have been staying underground away from my apartment where the Russians will try to find me," Batozsky said from a makeshift bunker preparing for what appears to be an imminent invasion as bombs rained down outside the city centre.

"I'm happy that I'm alive," he said, as he coordinated efforts to get much-needed supplies to the Ukrainian army. "It now feels like every day could be the last."

Initially cheerful in the early days of the war as the Ukrainians were surprisingly resilient against the much bigger Russian army, Batozsky now sounded more worried. And angry.

"The Russians are advancing and the West isn't helping. Just words aren't enough," he said. Batozsky pleaded for Western countries to intervene militarily.

Among those taking up arms for the first time as volunteers for the civilian army include Jews like Batozsky, who was passionately



Konstantyn Batozsky smiles in front of a military vehicle in Donetsk, Ukraine, in 2014

Photo courtesy of Batozsky

devoted to the Ukrainian national cause in his native Donetsk years before Russia decided to wage war on the entire country. He was a former adviser to the governor of Donetsk, Serhiy Taruta, now a member of the Ukrainian parliament.

Donetsk is one of two eastern regions where pro-Russian separatists, supported by the Russian military, clashed with the Ukrainian forces from 2014 to 2015. The simmering conflict was the precursor for the current Russian invasion as Donetsk and Luhansk declared independence, which isn't recognised by Ukraine.

It might seem perplexing to observers in the United States and beyond that Jews would embrace Ukrainian nationalism, which some of its opponents – including Putin – say is tinged with antisemitism.

"There was definitely a Jewish memory of anti-Jewish pogroms conducted by Ukrainians," said Sergiy Petukhov, Ukraine's former deputy minister of European

integration, whose mother and grandfather live in Israel. Also a native of Donetsk, Petukhov describes himself as a Ukrainian with Jewish ancestry, "like our current president," he said, referring to Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Ukraine's history of antisemitism goes far beyond pogroms. In its efforts to exterminate Jews, the Nazis were significantly aided by Ukrainians during World War II, according to several historians.

More recently, some of the initial paramilitary fighters against the Russian-backed takeover in Ukraine's east, such as the Azov Battalion, were extremists and ultranationalists who displayed Nazi symbols.

"I know it's hard for Jews abroad to understand, but these actions were intended as anti-Russian, not anti-Jewish," Petukov said. "And when it comes to those supporting Ukrainian sovereignty and culture, this is really a tiny element."

Now part of the national guard, the battalion

Continued on page 12>>

Torah Thought

Amalek and other invasions

This Shabbos, we take out two Torah scrolls. From the second, we read, "Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindmost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted..." (Devarim 25:17-18).

This portion of Zachor is always read this Shabbos, the Shabbos before Purim, as the villain of the Purim story, Haman, was a direct descendant of Agag, an Amalek king. We are enjoined to remember that the Amalekite threat is a constant one.

Although the Amalekite nation assimilated into the surrounding nations over time, and, as such, are no longer an identifiable people, nevertheless, as we read on Purim day, "G-d is at war with Amalek for all generations." (Exodus 17:16) There's a perpetual war against Amalek. The war isn't a conventional one; it's a war against the Amalekite values, which still pervade.

So, what are the Amalekite values that we must constantly battle?

Rashi explains the words, "Asker karcha baderech" (that he - Amalek - happened upon you on the way) to mean that Amalek "cooled us off" before the eyes of the nations of the world (*kar* is the Hebrew word for cold). After the exodus from Egypt, the nations were in awe of the Israelites and its G-d. They dared not attack the Israelites. Then, along came the nation of Amalek and waged war against the Israelites. In so doing, Amalek demonstrated to the world that Israel wasn't "too hot to handle". Rashi brings a parable of a boiling hot bathtub that no one will step into. A good-for-nothing comes and steps into it. Although he's scalded, he makes it appear cool to others.

By attacking the nation of G-d, Amalek shows

indifference both to the nation and its G-d. Perception is changed, and beliefs are questioned – perhaps for the nation of Israel as well. Has Amalek cooled the enthusiasm and diminished the faith of the nation on its journey to receive the Torah? Has Amalek created doubt?

As we gather this Shabbos to read and hear of the attack of Amalek millennia ago (please remember this is a biblical obligation for men and women), let's truly feel the pain and suffering of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world. Let's show that we're not indifferent to their plight. Let's pray with more

fervour, recite *tehillim* with increased dedication and let's enthusiastically and passionately commit to the observance of additional *mitzvot* (especially around kindness) in their merit.

Let's ensure that our faith is resolute. Just as Hashem ensured that "to the Jews there was light and joy, gladness and honour" (Megillat Esther 8:16), He will certainly ensure that such conditions prevail now and forever.

Wishing you all a wonderful Shabbos and a very happy Purim!

Rabbi Rodney Richard,
Emmarentia Shul



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If a woman doesn't have a practice, she should say the bracha before lighting.

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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.



Standing up to Putin as Jews and South Africans

TALI FEINBERG

Instead of taking her four kids to the park or the beach on Sunday, 6 March 2022, Alana Baranov and her husband, Gary, took them to the Durban promenade to join a peaceful march in protest against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“Russia is turning Ukraine, a sovereign nation with developed political, economic, and public institutions and a population of more than 43 million, into ruins.”

“I was asked by journalists why I decided to bring young children and I said it was because I’m a proud South African and a proudly Jewish South African. Because of our South African past and my community’s history, it’s important not to be bystanders when atrocities happen. When there’s injustice somewhere in the world, it’s incumbent upon us to speak out and to make sure we learn from the lessons of the past,” she says.

“What we’re seeing in Ukraine is a war crime and indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians, women, children and the elderly. This is something that goes against our principles as Jews and as South Africans, as enshrined in our Constitution and our Bill of Rights.

“It was important for me to show my children that we each have the responsibility to speak out and that we can use our voice. What we do matters. We need to ensure we’re on the right side of history. They really took to it. It was a meaningful day. The main message of the march was for South Africa to take a stand and condemn the violence.”

For Baranov, it was even more personal, as her sister-in-law, Vita Valinka Pugh-Jones, is Ukrainian. “She is from a village in the mountain area of Ukraine towards the centre of the country,” says Baranov. “Her mother, brother, extended family and friends are there. It’s been an incredibly stressful time for her and she’s very worried about them. Her mother and brother are safe for the moment, but they are surrounded by conflict and bombing. The train station closest to them, the airport two hours away and all of the means of transport and infrastructure have already been bombed.

“They are running low on provisions and are worried about losing electricity and data connection. Her friends in Kyiv have fled for their lives and she hears from them

only every few days. They are trying to get out of the country to safety. Vita lives in Durban and has been in South Africa for about 12 years. She is pregnant, due in May. It’s her first child and they planned for her mom to come out for the birth, but now they don’t know when they will see her next.”

Pugh-Jones was one of the main organisers of the march, which was arranged by the Ukrainian Association of South Africa, a non-profit organisation that unites South Africans and Ukrainians and aims to build dialogue between the two countries.

In its press release announcing the march, it said it was a “peaceful protest against the procrastination of the South African government in condemning Russia’s invasion in Ukraine”. Addressing the minister of international relations and co-operation (Dirco), Dr Naledi Pandor, the organisation noted that the late struggle icon, Steve Biko, once said, “There’s no freedom in silence.”

They called on the South African government to condemn immediately and unequivocally Russia’s invasion of Ukraine “and to call on Putin to stop this inhumane, violent, murderous attack on the free people of Ukraine”.

“We’re ashamed that on 2 March, South Africa abstained from the United Nations General Assembly vote to condemn the illegal and illegitimate Russian invasion of Ukraine. We call on the Republic of South Africa to make its voice heard and

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reaffirm the values of human rights, respect for international law and the principles of sovereignty and democracy, which are the cornerstones of South Africa’s Constitution.”

The statement noted that “Russia is turning Ukraine, a sovereign nation with developed political, economic and public institutions and a population of more than 43 million inhabitants, into ruins. In just six days of war so far, Russia’s attack

South African citizens] have been turned into refugees overnight. As you read this, civilians are being murdered and their homes and country are being destroyed.”

It said the Russian invasion would have a vast impact not only on Ukraine; it would “hit the most vulnerable people in South Africa by petrol-price hikes, food shortages, financial instability and the reduction of funds for developmental causes”.

“South Africa’s history of the fight for self-determination and democracy to free its people from the oppressive apartheid government calls on the current democratic government to condemn this invasion as an attack on sovereignty, freedom, democracy, the civil population and the institutions of a free country.”

It also called on South Africa to allow visa-free entrance into the country for those Ukrainians whose family members were temporarily or permanently living here. Baranov emphasises this point. “A lot of South African Ukrainians and Ukrainians living in South Africa for many years on valid permits have been desperately



Alana Baranov and her family protesting against the war in Ukraine on the weekend

trying to contact the department of home affairs and Dirco to ask if there’s any way that they can bring out their immediate family members who literally fear for their lives. They have been stonewalled at every turn. So, the organisers want to put pressure on the government to accept these refugees and be a home for Ukrainians fleeing the violence.”

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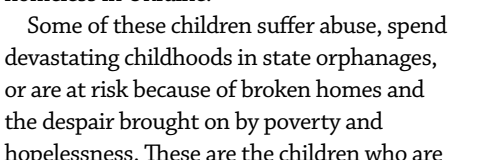
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TALI FEINBERG

“At first we thought we would hunker down in Odesa. But when bombs landed very close to

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“The children have been through a tremendous amount of trauma,” Kruskal says. “At the same time, it’s amazing how resilient they are. When I saw on Friday night, after 30 hours of driving from Ukraine to Romania and waiting at the border and the cold and the difficulties, the kids suddenly singing songs of Shabbat, it was such a moving and emotional moment. *Am Yisrael Chai* – these kids have the power to fight everything. They have strength to be resilient. They’ve been through so much in life, so much abandonment, so many difficulties, so much hardship. And now the way they help one another, the way they help us; it’s an unbelievable outpouring of strength, which gives me strength. I’m proud to be associated with these wonderful kids.”

The Jewish Agency is also working alongside local organisations to find additional lodging for these refugees. Call centres direct refugees within Ukraine, informing them how they can receive rescue services from the Jewish Agency, IFCJ and other local organisations. Forty volunteers staff these call centres, which are operated with the support of the ministry of

He would also like doctors with combat experience to assist military hospitals and for Israel to organise a group of Shaldag special-unit commandos to evacuate Jewish refugees from the most dangerous areas of Ukraine.

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Are there similarities between Russia and Israel?

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



I know I'm sticking my neck out by writing this and I know a lot of readers will disagree. So let me be quite clear at the outset. I'm not comparing Russia's actions in the Ukraine with Israel's actions against Palestinians. I strongly believe these are incomparable for a number of reasons.

First, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a dispute over territory by two peoples who both have historic claims and connections to it. Russian President Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, justifies his military operation in Ukraine as a "last resort" after warning the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) for years not to encroach on his doorstep.

For Putin, Ukraine becoming a member of Nato is a red line - just like, he argues, it was for the United States when the Soviet Union wanted to install nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba, less than 150km from its borders in 1962.

Putin also claims he's coming to the rescue of pro-Russian Ukrainians who have been fighting the Ukrainian military in the east of the country since 2014 in an effort to break away and declare independence from Ukraine.

Here, too, Putin calls out the West for its double standards in supporting the province of Kosovo's breakaway and subsequent declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008, that went against the wishes of Belgrade, backed by Moscow.

The Russian-Ukrainian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts are very different. Israel's enemies are groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, which are recognised as terror organisations and listed as such by many countries in the world; a far cry from the Ukrainian forces fighting Russian soldiers.

Although, as an aside, it should be noted that there are tens of thousands of Azov and Aidar battalion members fighting with the Ukrainian army. These are far-right militia with connections to neo-Nazism who have called in the past on Ukraine to get rid of Jews and other "inferior races".

I understand that many people reflexively sympathise with the underdog. Russia is seen as the stronger side in this war, like Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians, but that

doesn't mean the stronger side is automatically in the wrong.

So, what am I sticking my neck out to say? The world is quick to condemn Russia's actions without understanding the context of what's happening. This is the similarity I draw with Israel. Again, I'm not defending Russia's actions, but I'm questioning the lack of effort countries and people have made to try to understand how Putin, who is still supported by many in Russia, got to this point.

I'm suggesting that the international community a) chooses which conflicts it wishes to draw attention to and b) is quick to make up its mind about who it supports often without understanding the very complicated historical context.

In 25 years of covering conflict, the only time I received hate mail is when I report stories that present the Russian or Israeli point of view

The charge of double-standards against the West is nothing new. Two months ago, I was in Ethiopia reporting from the Tigray region about the conflict there that started in 2020 and, to date, has caused thousands of casualties and displaced an estimated two million people. There was nowhere near the same kind of media attention or international outcry that there is now over Russia's actions in Ukraine.

In Yemen, millions are frightened and starving in a war that started eight years ago and triggered what, until now at least, humanitarian organisations dubbed "the world's worst humanitarian crisis". As many as a quarter of a million people have been ruthlessly killed and yet this story rarely - if ever - makes the front pages.

I'm not saying the horrific violence in Ukraine shouldn't be reported on. Of course, it should. I condemn all acts of aggression, massive human displacement and loss of life, and any media attention that can hopefully bring about the end to such conflicts is to be applauded.

However, what's glaringly noticeable is how many in

the world are quick to condemn Israel and Russia and turn a blind eye to other violence. For example, Washington supports the Saudi effort in the war in Yemen against the Houthis rebels. Saudi warplanes, backed by the US, have repeatedly carpet-bombed the country, fuelling the humanitarian crisis there. Where's the media attention? Where's the outcry against not only Saudi Arabia but, more importantly, the US?

Russians are divided over this war, but many I talk to agree that there's a certain Russophobia that was so quick to come to the fore when Putin's army invaded Ukraine and it seems like it was there all the time.

Yes, the arguments against Russia invading a sovereign country are valid and I'm not making light of them. I'm just noting that in 25 years of being a journalist and covering conflict, the only time I received hate mail is when I report stories that present the Russian or Israeli point of view in a conflict.

It often does seem, to me at least, that people are so quick to criticise every action of the Israeli army without even giving it the benefit of the doubt that there is a valid case to be made for anti-Israel sentiment equalling antisemitism. Could the same be said of Russia?

When the Cold War ended in December 1989, Russians wanted to be part of the Western world, "but the West never wanted us", is a popular refrain I hear.

"And now, with the quick condemnation of what we are doing in Ukraine, without actually being open to what led to it and why we are doing it, smacks of Russiophobia - and we're not surprised," a Russian colleague told me. "No one wants to hear our side of the story. Reports of Russian soldiers raping women? Believe me, there are enough women in Russia. It's nonsense. No one's even open to the idea that maybe there are thugs fighting on the Ukrainian side using civilians as human shields. There's just a raw hatred towards us that dates back long before this war."

It reminds me of a sad joke I was once told. The worst

identity in the world is to be a Russian Jew - you are hated twice.

Enter Israel into the fray.

With Jewish communities in Ukraine and Russia, Jerusalem finds itself wedged between the two countries during this crisis. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy asked Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on 25 February to open a diplomatic channel with Moscow.

Since then, Bennett has spoken numerous times to Zelenskyy and Putin over the phone, and this past Saturday, broke his observance of Shabbat to fly into Moscow for a meeting at the Kremlin.

There's a lot of excitement in Israel and the Jewish world about the possible mediator role Israel can play in this conflict. I don't share in that excitement. Of course, success in getting the sides to compromise would elevate Bennett to an international statesman and boost Israel's standing. However, Bennett is largely untested on the world stage and has now positioned Israel in an uncomfortable middle ground.

Critics of Putin even suggest that the Russian president might be involving Bennett as a means to buy time for tactical regrouping and legitimacy; the latter achieved by sharing the stage with a democratically elected leader.

Israel needs Russia more than Russia needs Israel, particularly regarding the Russian military presence in Syria. Israel's continued operations across her northern border rely on Moscow not shooting down Israeli jets when they attack Iranian and Syrian military targets there. Any wrong move by Bennett could sour relations with Russia.

Mediation efforts by France and Turkey - much bigger players internationally - have so far failed to avert the conflict. Bennett is taking a huge risk, not only for himself as a politician but for the state of Israel and its security.

• Paula Slieber is the Middle East bureau chief of RT, the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media International and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

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The war in Ukraine through Israeli eyes

OPINION

ZVIKA ARRAN



Almost a million Israelis are former citizens of the Soviet Union, most of whom arrived in the 1990s. However, in Israel, they are still considered *olim hadashim* (new immigrants). A third of this million originally came from Ukraine and a little less from present-day Russia.

I assume no country in the world has so many newly formed and large communities (relative to its population) of immigrants from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Therefore, everything related to “Mother Russia” remains a sensitive topic on the Israeli agenda, particularly when hundreds of thousands of Russian olim have family and descendants still living in the former Soviet Union.

Then there’s the open wound of Israel’s neighbouring country – Syria. The unpleasant struggle between Israel and Syria goes back more than a decade. It started as a civil war in Syria and an uprising against the Assad regime, which was stabilised after the intervention of Russia and Iran in support of the current administration.

Then, there’s Iran, which uses Syrian soil to build bases close to Israel’s northern border and to ship arms to its proxies in Lebanon. Because of this, Israel is attacking Iranian forces there on a daily basis. These attacks are most likely co-ordinated with the Russians.

In Syria, the Russians support the Assad regime on the one hand and, on the other, they give Israel space to keep the Iranians at bay.

It hasn’t been simple to convince Israel to support the aggressive sanctions that the West has imposed swiftly and decisively on the Russian economy.

According to senior foreign ministry officials, Israel preferred to be invisible or unnoticed and continue to sit on the fence as long as it could. However, the government chose to support the United Nations’ vote to condemn Russia’s decision, but still refrained from cancelling flights or cutting economic ties.

Israel hoped the West would understand the complexity of its situation and be satisfied with the UN declarations and the extensive Israeli humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

I must admit, public sentiment in Israel also reflects some support for the Russian

aggression towards reclaiming “lost homeland” districts.

The same sentiment reminds us of the history of the Jews in Ukraine, which is full of horrifying tales of pogroms perpetrated by the evil and brutal Cossacks who attacked Jews, raped women and pillaged villages. This was all part of the Ukrainian antisemitism for generations, which included the Babyn Yar massacre. Because of this, it’s not inconceivable that some Israelis prefer the Russian side – or rather any side that’s not Ukrainian.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a charismatic Jew who leads the Ukrainian opposition, seems less impressive to some Israelis because of their historic anti-Ukrainian sentiments.

Another issue whispered among Israelis and is that Israel needs to be cautious in supporting sanctions against Russia for occupying territory. They fear that by supporting this, the world might later turn on Israel on issues relating to the West Bank. They might think it justifies sanctions against Israel.

The bottom line: “It’s complicated,” government officials in Jerusalem are telling the Israeli public and the world.

In the meantime, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is surprisingly attempting to mediate between President Vladimir Putin and Zelenskyy. This is an extreme bungee jump for a hopeless negotiation that’s suitable only to a young, hungry leader who believes he has nothing to lose. He’s clearly still innocent enough to believe his job is to stop the horrors, even if the chances are very slim.

This diplomatic intervention gives Israel a few more days of grace regarding its artificial neutrality. Even as Switzerland and Finland, as well as Ikea and Netflix, choose sides, Israel still procrastinates.

The war in Ukraine, however, is a total shock and is horrifying to us, much more than the battles in Ethiopia, the Russian invasion of Georgia or the Crimea at the time. All over the world, civilians are suffering and there are still wars. But governments, the masses and subsequently businesses and companies all look at this crisis differently.

A superpower country with an authoritarian leader, Putin, taking over a democratic state

that hasn’t threatened anyone sounds familiar. It’s like the *anschluss*, the annexation of the Sudetenland, and Hitler’s desire to revive the historic Reich.

The heroic stance of the Ukrainians, at least on social media, stirs in us memories of what unifies and separates us once again, splitting good and evil - freedom; liberty; liberal democracy; sovereignty; and self-determination. We stand behind Ukraine because this invasion threatens once again our clear vision of how we want to live.

Meanwhile, a renewed nuclear agreement is being reached between Iran and world powers. This creates anxiety for Israel as it reminds itself that it has no one but itself on which to rely.

In the same way that the West abandoned Ukraine (as opposed to the commitment to protect its borders after giving up nuclear weapons), so, in the event of Iran’s nuclear arms or G-d forbid a war with Israel, Israel will be completely alone - with many messages of support and solidarity on social media, flags on buildings around the world, but alone at the front.

Following Bennett’s negotiations, with the destruction that Russia continues to reap and the humanitarian catastrophes of sieges and refugees, Israel must be on the right side of history.

Furthermore, Israel must be on the side of those who consistently support us. We aren’t alone, after all.

Only a few countries arm Israel, vote for Israel, protect Israel and fund Israel generously.

Israel should be there fully – and the sooner the better.

Russia won’t remember our twists and turns. The United States and its allies will bear in mind this infidelity and human morality will remind us of it forever in history.

It’s done. The world has changed again. It has gone backward. There are good guys and bad. Even if the Ukraine crisis is resolved quickly, Putin compromises, and the war ends, caution from Russia will continue to grow.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) and the European Union will be strengthened and it’s clear which side Israel has to be on.

• *Advocate Zvika (Biko) Arran is a social entrepreneur. He lives in South Africa with his wife, Liat, the Jewish Agency representative in South Africa, and their children.*

Russia won't remember our twists and turns. The United States and its allies will bear in mind this infidelity

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3. If you find out that your ancestor fled Lithuania before 1918, it doesn't necessarily

mean a dead end for you. Ask around in your family if perhaps you have an alternative ancestral line, and explore it;

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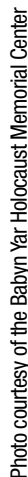
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CNAAN LIPSHIZ - JTA

"He's using the Jewish angle – and it's absolutely

In a 2019 interview with Bernard-Henri Levy, a French-Jewish philosopher, Zelenskyy declined to

"On the first day of the war, Uman was brutally bombed where hundreds of thousands of Jews come every year to pray," he said in the appeal, referring to the Hasidic pilgrimage site in central Ukraine. "Then Babyn Yar, where hundreds of thousands of Jews were executed."



• Dan Karpman contributed to this article.

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TALI FEINBERG

She is surprisingly



"The drama of Omicron wasn't that long ago, but things were quietening down," she says. Within the first hours of Russia attacking Ukraine, Kur stepped back into the fray and used her well-worn networking skills to create a web of support around the globe. South Africans in Ukraine were quickly put on to online chat groups and their details logged and tracked. Every time Kur and her team

She barely sleeps anyway and says: "My husband

Finally, she says: "If a child fell into a pool next to you, you wouldn't say, 'I don't want to get my dress wet.' You would jump in. If a lot of kids were drowning, I wouldn't be able to save everyone, but I sure as hell would try to save as many as I could."



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Former foes form unlikely friendship

NICOLA MILTZ

An unlikely yet beautiful friendship has formed after 40 years between a former schoolyard bully and his defenceless victim, which carries a message of reconciliation and forgiveness.

When acclaimed musical director Bryan Schimmel of *A Handful of Keys*, *Chicago* and *Jersey Boys* fame was a teenager, he dreaded going to school most days. It was mortifying coming face to face with one of his tormentors, Clinton Fein, in the corridors of King David High School Linksfield during the early eighties.

Heart-warmingly the two have recently become friends after confronting their past and putting it behind them.

Fein was part of a pack of butch rugby buggers who relentlessly picked on and tyrannised Schimmel - the quintessential nerd of the time who played the piano, wore glasses, and had a debilitating stutter. He was the despised “young gay boy” in a tortured time of cultural homophobia. He was ripe for the picking for the strapping, popular, rugby-playing Fein, who had a secret of his own: he, too, was gay.

Fein, who has lived in the United States for 38 years, was obsessed with hiding his burgeoning homosexuality from his peers and Schimmel became his obvious scapegoat. It was a time of exhausting torment for both for different reasons, as they navigated their path out of adolescence into early adulthood.

Before moving to King David, Fein was at Highlands North Boys High School, where he learnt how to hide his identity for his own self-preservation and craftily “honed his skills in deflection” for fear of being outed. It was there he learnt how to “butch it up” and embrace an all-pervasive toxic masculinity. When he got to King David “Bryan was the perfect decoy”, said Fein in an extract from his memoir, a work-in-progress, which he posted on Facebook last week to elicit feedback.

“I didn’t just join in the bullying, though, I would also initiate it,” he wrote.

“I remember punching him – physically inflicting pain – as a deflection, foolishly deluded into believing that my bullying made me more of a man, not less.

“So long as [it was on] Bryan, who was mercilessly mocked and branded with every anti-gay epithet under the sun, it wasn’t on me.”

While he doesn’t recall every incident, he said the few he did recall made him feel “viscerally repulsed”.

“I vividly remember seeing the hurt and anguish on Bryan’s face. In his eyes. It’s ingrained.”



New friends, talented musician Bryan Schimmel and artist Clinton Fein at a Johannesburg eatery this week

After school, they moved on. Skip 40 years and, as odd as it seems, the two have recently forged a unique friendship, even if it took them four decades to shake on it.

“I REMEMBER PUNCHING HIM – PHYSICALLY INFLECTING PAIN – AS A DEFLECTION, FOOLISHLY DELUDED INTO BELIEVING THAT MY BULLYING MADE ME MORE OF A MAN, NOT LESS...”

In the ensuing years after school, both went on to carve successful artistic careers, the one becoming a well-known and much-loved musician, musical arranger, performer and educator; the other a controversial artist and photographer in the US. Unbeknown to them, they moved in similar circles in the US and always had a lot in common in terms of religion, sexuality, creativity, substance abuse and addiction. Ironically, there were many times when their lives could so easily have intersected, but they never did. That is, until a mutual friend, Alain Soriano, in the same class of ’82, gently encouraged them to meet in a bid to let bygones be bygones.

Soriano set up a meeting two years ago at tashas eatery in Morningside as a sort of starting point for truth and reconciliation.

Fein knew he owed Schimmel an apology. However, he had no idea how deeply his horrid behaviour had affected Schimmel.

Schimmel agreed to meet Fein, seeing it as an opportunity to confront him and let go of the past.

Fein wondered if Schimmel would even remember him as a bully. This was immediately erased when Schimmel greeted him with the words, “I recognise you from your resting bitch face”.

The meeting was revealing and heartfelt. “I realised that Clinton was curating an image back then, hiding in plain sight. This must have been tiring and taken a lot of work,” Schimel told the *SA Jewish Report*.

In forgiving Fein, he said, “There’s a funny thing about forgiveness – the lightness you feel afterwards. By letting someone off the hook, it’s also about letting yourself off the hook.”

They both walked away with a feeling of freedom, Fein said this week. It has been healing.

“I detested any role I played in causing so much damage,” said Fein.

“Bryan got the opportunity to confront me on his terms. I got to apologise. We have become friends. He’s my people,” said Fein.

Their friendship is an example of what’s possible when two people come together and reconcile.

Though they haven’t seen a lot of each other since that first meeting, they met this week to discuss a future artistic collaboration aimed at educating people about bullying, tolerance, forgiveness

and reconciliation.

“It’s not about rehashing the past, ours is a cautionary tale that teaches tolerance and respect for people’s differences,” said Schimmel.

“Parents run the risk of being out of touch with their children. We want our story to encourage them to ask the tough questions, to take a hard look at their children and ask if they are the tormentor, the tormented or neither,” he said.

“Ours is a warm, friendly relationship which we are leveraging to try to make something powerful in an attempt to have a meaningful impact in a tough time of cyber bullying,” said Schimmel, who gives motivational talks on bullying, addiction and his story.

“Being a bully doesn’t take away what you’re scared of it just hides it and, in the end, you’re worse off for it,” said Fein this week.

He regrets losing out on what he know knows would have been a great friendship.

“My actions cost me dearly. The worst for me was that I was unkind. Bullies are remembered as the loser in the end. It’s so much better to be remembered for being kind and compassionate.”

Fein marvels at how Schimmel was able to translate his pain into art in “the most remarkable way”.

“As much as I dislike bullies, I understand

they come from a place of fear. In our day, it was very tactile and happened in real time. Today, it happens on social media, which is a whole different ball game, but the fundamentals are the same,” said Fein.

In hindsight, he realises that the best way for him to have asserted his

masculinity would have been as Bryan’s protector not tormentor.

Schimmel’s musical titled: *Bryan Schimmel: More than a Handful - everyone has a story of their own*, opens at Theatre On The Square on 31 March. Fein will no doubt be in the front row.

“There’s a funny thing about forgiveness - the lightness you feel afterwards.”

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SAUL KAMIONSKY

As much of the world unites in support of Ukraine, many in our community are looking for ways to assist those still in the Eastern European country and others who have fled to neighbouring countries.

“South African Jewry are distraught by the suffering in Ukraine,” says Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). “The SAJBD has partnered with the [American Jewish] Joint Distribution Committee [JDC] to help.”

Since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the New York City-based JDC has worked in Ukraine and across the former Soviet Union.

“JDC is providing humanitarian relief on the ground,” says Kahn. “We have worked with the JDC for many [years] and recognise its immense experience in dealing with crises of this nature. Being so far away from Ukraine makes it difficult for us to provide direct support on the ground. Therefore, it’s reassuring that we’re able to use the JDC as a conduit to make a meaningful contribution to relief [efforts].”

The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to four other aid organisations to see what they are doing.



World Jewish Relief (WJR)

WJR has launched a Ukraine crisis appeal, through which people can donate money to those in Ukraine.

Based in London, WJR is responding to the most urgent humanitarian needs as they arise, prioritising food, cash, medical, material and psychological support for the worst affected, whether fleeing their homes or unable to escape.

According to Emily Dean, the marketing manager at WJR, the organisation is helping its partners in Ukraine to access hygiene equipment and food, as well as provide home care and psychological support. “Where possible, we’re helping to fund evacuations, currently from Odesa and Zaporizhia,” says Dean.

She says WJR is helping partners in Poland and Moldova to expand capability to support refugees arriving from Ukraine. WJR’s partners have trained carers and counsellors who are either visiting vulnerable people in their homes or engaging with them through online support groups.

Donations through the WJR website are only in pound sterling, but you can donate in any currency via its JustGiving page, [justgiving.com/wjr](https://www.justgiving.com/wjr).

Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNFSA)

Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael-Jewish



National Fund (KKL-JNF) recently received about 100 orphaned children from the Chabad Alumim orphanage in the Ukrainian city of Zhytomyr.

Donations towards JNFSA will be sent to Israel and used by KKL-JNF. As the children are now in Israel, the money will cover the costs of all their needs such as food, accommodation, healthcare and entertainment.

“The children will have some trauma counselling, but KKL-JNF want to make it as fun as possible for them,” says Beverley Schneider, JNF national director. “An education aspect will be included as well.”

Asked about the long-term plan for these children, Schneider says, “KKL-JNF is going to keep them in Israel for the duration of the war. Then a decision will be made about whether they will make aliya or go back to Ukraine, if circumstances allow.”

Donate to jnfsa.co.za; Standard Bank; account number 300465270; ref: your name/Ukrainian Appeal



We Are South Africans (Wasa)

Gilbert Martin, the founder of Wasa, says, “Wasa and its charitable arm, the People of South Africa Foundation NPC [PSAF], have been assisting Kim Kur and Lorraine Blauw for 10 of the 13 days that South Africans have been subjected to the ordeal of the department of international relations and co-operation’s bad international responses, policies and outbursts.”

Members of Wasa have embarked on a campaign to gather funds to help as many people as it can to “come home” to South Africa. “We have also offered to help students when they’re back home to ensure their

studies aren’t interrupted,” says Martin.

“Once we get people to South Africa, we’ll have to reassess what the family’s needs are before assisting and stabilising their lives as quickly as possible.”

Many trauma councillors have reached out to the two organisations. “We welcome anyone to join us on our outreach or provide aid directly to the people affected by this tragedy,” says Martin.

To donate to Wasa, go to wearesouthafricans.com/donate

Nova Ukraine

This Ukraine-based non-profit organisation has partnered with organisations and volunteers in Poland and



Romania. Some of them work with the Red Cross, some evaluate the needs of recently arrived refugees, others prepare logistics for additional volunteers.

“In Ukraine, we co-ordinate transportation, so aid delivery in the eastern direction is combined with people evacuation in the western direction,” says Igor Markov, a director at Nova.

South Africans can donate money to Nova through wire transfers, PayPal and Facebook fundraisers. The organisation is also seeking medical supplies, particularly tactical and trauma supplies, for those in Ukraine and Poland.

“Many fake Twitter accounts impersonate Nova Ukraine and collect donations. We don’t have a Twitter account,” says Markov. “Our Facebook page has a blue badge of authenticity.” Go to novaukraine.org.

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Klamberjass site comes up trumps

SAUL KAMIONSKY

COVID-19 brought a halt to face-to-face interaction in many fields, but not the game of klamberjass, which participants are playing more frequently than ever and challenging people across the globe.

Many in the community are so passionate about the game, that not playing it during lockdown seemed absurd. Darren Levy came to the rescue, creating a private klamberjass site, which he runs from his computer. It features the Jewish version of the game.

Instead of playing once a week in person, the approximately 50 users of the site can now play the trick-taking card game every day. People from South Africa, Israel, Australia and England have played on the site.

Klamberjass, pronounced “Clubbius” by those who spoke to the *SA Jewish Report*, means “the jack of clubs”. It probably originated in the Dutch and Belgian “low countries” before spreading through central and Eastern Europe, where it became a particular favourite among Jewish communities. The game includes Yiddish-like terms for cards and plays.

Jewish klamberjass possibly arrived in South Africa at the turn of the previous century by Ashkenazi immigrants. One expression probably unique to Jewish circles is “on the bimah”, which refers to having the final opportunity to call a suit for trumps.

The main version of the game is played four-handed, either in teams of two or with individual players competing. Usually, players score points by winning tricks with high-value cards.

“It’s poor man’s bridge, with 70% luck and 30% skill,” says Lesley Cowan, who has loved klamberjass since learning to play it as an eight-year-old.

This game has been a constant in Levy’s family, with his dad and late uncle being klamberjass players. Levy has played it since he was 10. He has won a tournament and a series, in which he amassed 1 000 points and the opponent got zero. “I just love the game,” he says.

For many years, this software developer wanted to

create a klamberjass site. Knowing the available online versions didn’t include the rules South Africans followed, Levy eventually knuckled down and created a site customised to how he and his compatriots play the game.

“I finished it during the lockdown,” he says. “My friend was nagging me for it.” He and the other 15 or so regulars play klamberjass on his site almost every night.

As a thank you for creating it, they gave Levy a gift of a framed, signed picture of Manchester United legend Eric Cantona. He even expedited the iPad klamberjass version so that Cape Town-based octogenarian Selwyn Furman could play it while in hospital last year.

“My dad’s been ill,” says Furman’s son, Mark. “The pandemic isolated him. Suddenly, there was no klamberjass, no interaction. It’s remarkable how the online game has brought him into contact with other people regularly, having fun. It saved him.”

Mark, a consultant paediatric gastroenterologist, says, “We’ve met so many friends online. There’s a great klamberjass community now. They’re reaching out to wish my dad better. I can’t even explain how close the connection is with everyone online from across the generations. They love ‘zeida’. That’s the nickname they gave my dad.”

Having played klamberjass during his youth in Lithuania, Selwyn’s dad immigrated to South Africa in 1903. “I learnt the game from my father and brothers,” he says. “I started playing 70 years ago, long before varsity.”

In the 1970s, Selwyn competed in a fours tournament to raise money for Maccabi. “Unfortunately, we were only runners-up,” says the retired accountant who was the first person to have a second Barmitzvah at Wynberg Shul. “In the last hand, I drew too many trumps. They got an extra point.”

For 30 years before the pandemic hit, Selwyn played klamberjass with a group every Tuesday night. “We used to have tea and a spread,” he says. “We would go from house to house, except when it was yom tov.”

His son, who lives in London, says, “Whenever we got together, we spent until the early hours in the morning



Mark Furman, left, and his dad Selwyn playing klamberjass in Vilnius, Lithuania

having a whisky and playing klamberjass.”

Mark learnt klamberjass intensely during the months leading up to Habonim camp in 1983 after being told, “You have to learn the game to come on machaneh.”

David Zeidel, on the other hand, learnt klamberjass at Betar machaneh. He’s been playing it with friends since his university days about 30 years ago.

“For about 10 years, four of us used to meet on a Sunday morning at a restaurant, have breakfast and play there,” says Zeidel, who lectures at different business schools in South Africa. “Now, we meet to play it once a week online. Even people in their 70s and 80s are enjoying it online. Some of them used to meet at clubs to play bridge.”

Zeidel has not entered any competition, calling himself “a complete social player who plays just for fun”.

Similarly, Cowan’s desire to play only for fun meant she did not play the game at university, where it was the gamblers who played klamberjass.

She learnt the game when she was about eight years old. “My late dad taught me klamberjass,” she says. “We used to play singles every night for about 10 or so years. That was my social life.”

After university, she was introduced to a klamberjass school. “There, I started playing with a guy called David Rogers,” says Cowan. “He introduced me to his friends. We have been playing together in the same school since my son was born 27 years ago.”

The first time she played following the passing of her dad 17 years ago, she got her best cards. “It was like he was actually there giving me these brilliant cards.”

For the past eight years, she has been playing in a new school. “Then Darren Levy produced this online site, which is absolutely phenomenal.”

Being able to talk to fellow players on the site is something that Cowan and Mark enjoy. “You can discuss the hands,” says Mark. “There’s the banter, the inevitable criticism questioning why you did something. If it wasn’t for the audio capability, it wouldn’t be that much fun. If you want, you can create a video and you can see one another playing.”

Mark’s dad relishes the brainstorming, tactical and social elements of klamberjass. “I thought I was a fantastic player,” he says. “As you meet more players, you learn more and realise you’re not so fantastic.”

He describes Levy’s site as “a real godsend”. “You can play more than you would play in person. Every day I play.”

Says Cowan, “In contrast to bridge, you can play klamberjass without studying. If you haven’t played it for 20 years, you can pick it up immediately. It’s simple to learn.”

“It’s just a way of spending time with friends,” Zeidel says.

Says Levy, “I’m a person who loves strategy and thinking games. You can play with a partner and discuss tactics. You can come up with new ideas.”

• The site hasn’t been launched publicly yet. Anyone who wants to play can contact Levy, who will add them to the Klamberjass WhatsApp group.

Jewish Ukrainians gear up for fierce Russia fight

>>>Continued from page 2

of 900 to 1 500 members publicly claims to eschew all Nazi ideology.

Batozsky said he worked closely with the Azov Battalion during the 2014-2015 conflict behind the scenes as a political consultant in Donetsk. It’s this work, and his outspoken defence of Ukrainian efforts to defeat the separatists, that he said put him on the Russian hit list – and also makes him confident that Russian charges of neo-Nazis in Ukraine are inaccurate.

“They were soccer hooligans and wanted attention, so yeah, I was shocked when I saw guys with swastika tattoos,” he said about the Azov members he got to know. “But I talked to them all the time about being Jewish and they had nothing negative to say. They had no anti-Jewish ideology.”

He insists that the image of Ukraine as a hotbed of antisemitism is absurd.

“I don’t practice, but still everyone knows I’m Jewish – I have such a Jewish face! And I never experienced antisemitism from Ukrainians,” he insisted. “The military guys I’m working with now really don’t care that I’m a Jew.”

He doesn’t have similar feelings towards his Russian neighbours. “I did have a Jew-hating Russian first-grade teacher who mockingly called my long hair *payos*,” said Batozky. And he heard more slurs against Jews from Russia’s Moscow State University, which he attended in the 1990s, than he ever heard back home.

Daniel Kovzhun, a Jew from Kyiv who ran logistics during the war in Donetsk for paramilitary units, described a similar experience.

“There were orthodox Jews in Azov,” he said. “I know because I was there on the battle lines. No one cared who was Jewish, we cared about keeping our country together.”

Like Batozsky, Kovzhun, who lived and studied in Israel before returning to Kyiv, has joined the newly formed civilian army in Kyiv, the Territorial Defense Forces – an

overnight volunteer force that has attracted Jewish fighters across the country and even from abroad.

A director of advertising commercials who said he had easily transitioned into directing “war communications”, Kovzhun believes many of the Jews in Ukraine are actively supporting the country’s defence.

“The Russians are committing atrocities here and Ukrainian Jews aren’t silent when injustice is going on. This is what being Jewish is all about,” he said.

Last week, the Ukrainian government provided more than 20 000 guns of varying size and shape to ordinary civilians in the capital who have never fired a shot.

Among them is Batozsky, who has acquired a Kalashnikov, although he admits that he has “no experience in shooting, assembling or disassembling a gun”.

In recent days, as Kyiv has come under siege, Batozsky has been working around the clock. “Together with friends we created a volunteer depot in a basement where we collect everything the soldiers need and distribute it,” he said.

As with many other Ukrainians interviewed by JTA in cities awaiting siege, Batozsky said public morale was high.

“In terms of human relations, it’s extraordinary. People are really caring towards one another. We all share whatever we have.”

He said the situation at shops reminded him of his Soviet childhood. “The stores are open, but the shelves are mostly empty.”

But, as in Soviet times, residents’ ingenuity is providing succor.

“Women are mixing molotov cocktails and then they bake piroshki, small pies that can last a long time, and bring them to the soldiers. Small businesses deliver drinking water, pharmaceutical businesses are giving us medicine,” Batozsky said. “No one is sitting and doing nothing. The scariest place in Kyiv right now is at home with [a] laptop.”

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What I learnt from 32 brave Jewish women

BATYA BRICKER

“Life expands and contracts in proportion to one’s courage. That makes building your bravery, flexing your courage muscle, a sure path to self-growth and personal development.” Anais Nin

The idea of exploring a book about phenomenal Jewish women for young girls to read and be inspired by was something I really wanted to explore. About six years ago, *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls* became a phenomenon, spawning a new genre in non-fiction for kids.

I loved this book and it inspired me to explore a Jewish version, which amazingly had not yet been done. So I began my journey of creating *Goodnight Golda – a handbook for brave Jewish girls (and their mighty friends)*. This book is a compilation of 32 stories of amazing Jewish women from all parts of the world and timeframes, who changed their world and, in so doing, changed ours.

This three-year project was a magic carpet-ride for me through space and time, through the full Jewish experience and its highs and its lows. Each of these women changed our course and stepped into their light, no matter their circumstances.

In exploring her story, each woman invited me to ask questions about where I stand, what I believe, and what I want, because “to travel is to take a journey into yourself”.

In selecting which women to feature, we made sure to touch on seminal moments in Jewish history – the Bible, the Inquisition, the Holocaust, the state of Israel. The result was a curated list of women which included the expected characters - Golda Meir and Hannah Senesh, Anne Frank and Queen Esther. Their sense of calling and sacrifice made them unmissable

It was with this in mind that book publisher-come-author Batya Bricker began her journey to write the newly published *Goodnight Golda: a handbook for brave Jewish girls (and their mighty friends)*.

The book, co-written with Ilana Stein, is a celebration of 32 brave Jewish women, from different social backgrounds, historical periods and cultures. It provides short and entertaining snippets of the stories of these women, accompanied by gorgeous illustrations by Mary-Anne van der Byl and Ronel Pienaar.

The launch took place last Sunday, 6 March, at Exclusive Books in Hyde Park. The bookstore was abuzz with the sound of clinking glasses and energetic chatter. The event featured a variety of delicious food and cocktails, each relating to a different character in the book - Judith Kerr’s scones and cream paired perfectly with Donna Karan’s whisky smash.

In conversation with award-winning journalist Mandy Weiner, Bricker said the book was about “authenticity, courage and owning your crown”.

It was born out of a spark of inspiration following the publishing of a book within the same genre. “[Writing a Jewish version] is a minefield of religion, race, politics. It’s a very delicate area in which

in the roll call of Jewish heroines.

Sadly, the Jewish narrative is flooded with painful, hard-to-hear or read stories. But we cannot be fed a diet of tragedy and sacrifice alone. What can we learn from Hannah Senesh, the poet and paratrooper, who at the age of 23, faced torture and the firing squad for her daring rescue-missions?



What’s relevant in Anne Frank’s story – the girl who came to represent the Holocaust in the eyes of a young girl by hiding in an attic but then dying of typhoid in Bergen-Belsen just months before liberation?

The nature of sacrifice? Certainly. The power of martyrdom to fight evil? Definitely. But we asked the next question. How can this woman’s life be a role model for us today? How can this story inspire a 21st century woman and girl? It was writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichí’s words that gave guidance, for “we are not one story”.

So, we set out to find the multiple narratives in each woman’s life.

That Anne, despite her dire, depressing circumstances, never gives up on human kindness and love, is something we can all aspire to. “In the long run,” she wrote, “the sharpest weapon of all is a kind and gentle spirit.”

Though she must have been terrified, looking down on enemy territory, about to leap from the plane, dry mouth and heart pounding in her ears, Hannah jumped anyway. This is a lesson I can keep close to me every day.

But it was discovering stories we didn’t know, meeting women we hadn’t heard of and finding unexpected heroines in unexpected places, which offered the points of sheer delight on this journey.

Belle Levy was one of them – the first Jewish private investigator in New York. Think a Jewish, girly Sherlock Holmes, that was Belle.

Another was Ester Victoria Abraham. Pramila, as she came to be known, was the first Bollywood star – and she was Jewish! Her rise to fame began with a quirk of cultural fate. As Indian cinema began to take off, it wasn’t deemed appropriate by traditional Muslim and Hindu families for their daughters to appear on stage. Jewish families were more liberal and so Pramila became the entertainment during intermission while the reels were being changed. She went on to eschew convention, to become a stage icon, winning Miss India while pregnant with her fifth child and even doing her own stunts.

These women defied the convention of how they should behave. They didn’t care what anyone else thought. They carried on regardless. As we know, well-behaved women rarely make history.

And speaking of “badly behaved”, making Golda Meir the leading lady of the book was in itself a contentious choice. Notorious for her nicotine and caffeine addiction – no less that 12 cups of coffee a day - slandered by some and revered by others, Golda wasn’t a flawless hero who made no mistakes. But isn’t that the point?

When did we start believing the Disneyesque view of the world that told us our heroes need to be superhuman to be admired? It certainly doesn’t

serve us. Life isn’t perfect and neither are people. Leadership is nuanced, heroism can be messy, humanity is flawed.

Admitting this imperfection makes aspiring to these heroes’ level of achievement all the more attainable for mere mortals like you and me. Perfection is impossible. Courage, fortitude and triumph, no matter the circumstances, now that’s doable.



And the road to actualisation isn’t always straight and smooth. Think of Bobbie Rosenfeld, “Canada’s best athlete of the first half-century (1900-1950)”. Bobbie was such a superb all-rounder, one commentator remarked:

“The most efficient way to summarise Bobbie Rosenfeld’s career ... is to say she wasn’t good at swimming.” But then, in 1933, she suffered a severe attack of arthritis, leaving her sports career in tatters. No

matter, Bobbie reinvented herself as a coach, sports commentator and writer, helping to topple traditional barriers against women’s participation in sport. Bobbie pivoted long before we invented the word.

Queen Esther is one of my favourites. The story of the innocent young woman who gets chosen to be queen to a foolish and misguided king. Forced into the machinations of a harem, with evil looming over her people, she endures physical exposure, fearful that her true identity will be uncovered, in an environment decidedly unsuitable for any “nice Jewish girl”. Perhaps she had no choice. But hundreds of years later, Auschwitz survivor and thriver of life, Edith Eger, another *Goodnight Golda* girl, would remind us – you always have a choice. Ester steps up and steps into her light. She breaks the law, she exposes an evil plot, she becomes a whistle-blower about the king’s closest adviser ...

For me, of all these things, the bravest thing she did was to insist, after all was said and done, that her story was written down for posterity. In so doing, she didn’t just rescue the Jewish people from genocide in her lifetime, she left her story behind. She saw herself worthy of being a legacy, so she became one.

We all can and should do that. We must. Leave a story behind that matters. It matters not whether it’s a small tale of detail or a grand epic – make it your own and become your own heroine. The world will be a poorer place if you don’t.

• *Batya Bricker is the author of ‘Goodnight Golda – a handbook for brave Jewish girls (and their mighty friends)’; available in South Africa at Exclusive Books, www.exclusivebooks.com, and internationally at www.bookdepository.com. Visit www.goodnightgolda.com*

Women, cocktails and crowns

DANI SACK

“The message of this book is to use the things you’ve been given - or the things you haven’t - to make your contribution and step into your light.”

It was with this in mind that book publisher-come-author Batya Bricker began her journey to write the newly published *Goodnight Golda: a handbook for brave Jewish girls (and their mighty friends)*.

The book, co-written with Ilana Stein, is a celebration of 32 brave Jewish women, from different social backgrounds, historical periods and cultures. It provides short and entertaining snippets of the stories of these women, accompanied by gorgeous illustrations by Mary-Anne van der Byl and Ronel Pienaar.

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In conversation with award-winning journalist Mandy Weiner, Bricker said the book was about “authenticity, courage and owning your crown”.

It was born out of a spark of inspiration following the publishing of a book within the same genre. “[Writing a Jewish version] is a minefield of religion, race, politics. It’s a very delicate area in which

to tread,” Bricker said.

However, once COVID-19 lockdown was in full effect, Bricker escaped by writing the book. “It took me to exotic lands, where I spent time with amazing women who did amazing things.”

She described how, during that time of darkness and isolation,



Mandy Weiner and Batya Bricker at the launch of *Goodnight Golda: a handbook for brave jewish girls* last Sunday

we all yearned for the ordinary. However, these women and their stories of courage and bravery showed Bricker the possibility of the extraordinary.

“[The book] took three years because we debated what bravery

looked like. We decided it was being courageous and affecting change.” Indeed, the book is filled with familiar faces, such as Golda Meir and Anne Frank, but it also showcases many personalities whom we have probably never met, such as Asenath Barzani, an Iraqi poet, and Pramila, a Bollywood star. “Diversity was very important to us; we tried to touch on all locations, on people who all had different vocations and contributions.”

Golda Meir, the first and only female Israeli prime minister, is the title figure of the book. “Golda wasn’t the perfect role model. Perhaps [that’s because] the phrase ‘role model’ itself is flawed; humans are flawed, our contributions are flawed. She started small, but she acknowledged the gifts she was given and harnessed them for change and impact.”

If young readers are able to recognise this message, Bricker says, then the job of the book is done. “It’s not always about the grand gesture,” she says. In line with this, the closing pages of the book have been left blank so that readers can fill in their own personal Jewish heroines. “It can be mothers, sisters, grandmothers - the people who touched you in a very ordinary way, but showed bravery and courage in those ordinary acts.”

It takes as much bravery to make small contributions as it does large ones and Bricker consistently emphasised her own major takeout from her writing experience: “Women fixing other women’s crowns.”

This book is an inspiring call to action for women of all ages wishing to effect change. Bricker closed the evening with words of advice to women wishing to do so: “Start by thinking about what the worlds needs and what you have - where those two intersect is the sweet spot where your contribution is likely to be. And when it’s authentic - when you truly own it and it’s yours - blessings will come.”

Don't hide the truth of war from kids

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Between images of bombed buildings, desperate refugees and injured soldiers and civilians, it's easy to see why our children may be distressed by the war in Ukraine. Though our instinct is to protect them, it's by having those tough but age-appropriate conversations that we can really help our children process what's happening.

Regardless of your child's age, when it comes to addressing questions about the war in Ukraine, honesty is vital, says Pam Tudin, clinical psychologist and co-founder of Klikd, which provides an app and solutions for parents, teens and tweens to use social media safely and responsibly.

For example, if you promise your child who has been involved in a hijacking that it will never happen again and it does, the trust they have in you is undermined. "It's hard to undo that. If children have our honesty and they feel our authenticity, it actually creates a greater degree of safety than hiding the truth."

Megan Kelly Botha, a mother of a four and eight-year-old, agrees. She and her husband have been as upfront about the war as possible with their children, especially since a close family friend was forced to leave Kyiv just last week. "He plays Fortnite with my kids, he has been there on our best and worst days, so you can imagine our fears," she says.

"What I have learnt though – through the pandemic and now the war – is that there's no use in lying to our kids. We've always tried to be as honest as possible and make them understand that it's okay to be scared, angry, hurt and frustrated. Those feelings need space and trying to reassure them that everything is okay leads them to believe that we've got to act like it's okay when, really, we're falling apart. It has meant my kids feel safe enough to tell me they're scared, which has then prompted conversations about those fears. I don't pretend to have all the answers – the pandemic was proof of that – but I can remind them that we're in this together."

However old they are, our children will probably be exposed to the war in some way, so it's impossible and ill-advised to try to shelter them completely. "Our job isn't to protect them from everything, our job is to engage them about everything," says Tudin. "They will come upon dangers in the world all the time. If we're engaged parents who are in dialogue with our kids, then their biggest safety net is our degree of open communication with them."

That's why Tali Barnett, the mother of seven-year-old twins decided to pre-empt her sons' questions. "My kids have always been interested in geography, so when Russia invaded, I knew they would pick up on it quickly," she says. "Instead of waiting for them to ask, I decided to avoid any confusion by telling them about it in a gentle way. I told them Russia had invaded Ukraine, which means that Russia is like a child saying they want more and just taking what they want."

"I've tried to balance reality without them getting too scared. So, I've told them people had to leave their homes, but they have been welcomed in other countries. It's better that they're informed in a way parents feel comfortable with than if they come across information by chance."

If our children get scared and fixate on the war, we need to get to the root of their anxiety, says Tudin. "Sometimes kids will see an image or hear about something that they try to make sense of. Try to find the trigger. If we help them by talking through it, really listening to what they saw and putting it into context by explaining how Ukraine is many miles away and, while it's tragic and painful, our job is to keep them safe and right now, we are safe, that should be enough to undo the imagery. If more extreme symptoms like separation anxiety arise and persist, then seek out professional input because then other issues are possibly being triggered."

When it comes to teenagers, mass exposure to information, whether it be through memes, TikTok videos, or other forms of social media, is inevitable. It's important to understand how they react to this. "Developmentally, adolescents are creating their own identities, values and opinions," says educational psychologist Lee-Anne Lewis. "Create open dialogue with your teenagers about the war in order for them to cultivate their own perceptions and opinions. Reflect on their emotions that may include anything from anger to frustration."

With teens, it's vital to address the issue of propaganda and fake news, says Tudin. Open a conversation about



propaganda, which is rife on both sides during times of war. "Ask what they think the agenda of both sides is, and how they're managing to discern truth from fake news. Klikd provides many resources here. Those forms of engagement are far more helpful than trying to put blinkers on our teens, who invariably don't want blinkers. They want to try and understand their world."

Mother Lee Herridge feels that parents should explain media bias to younger children too, albeit at an age-appropriate level. "My nine-year-old daughter came home from school, and it seemed that the message she was getting there was that Russia is the big bad wolf," she says. "For me, it was important to explain that it's a bit more complicated than that, it's not black and white, even though the media paints it that way because it's a compelling narrative. There are different perspectives, and not all Russians are bad or supporting the invasion – a lot of Russians are protesting the war."

"On the flipside, though, when you're trying to explain the complexities of war, young kids tend to switch off and change the subject – it's a bit too much for them. As long as they understand that it's not as clear as bad versus good, that's enough."

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Bombs, borders, bonfires – SA teacher escapes Ukraine

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African teacher Johan Nel had a draining and dangerous journey to escape war-torn Ukraine. He recounted his experience at a *SA Jewish Report* webinar on 3 March 2022 titled, “Ukraine in crisis – firsthand accounts of the war”.

Nel teaches English at a Mexican school. In October last year, he decided to travel the world for a bit because he works online.

While in Turkey, he applied for a Mexican work visa at the Mexican consulate in Istanbul. When his visa was rejected due to communication errors, he reapplied for it at the Mexican embassy in Kyiv. Bombs started falling on 24 February 2022, the day he had to collect his visa.

“That morning, at half-past four, I woke up because of bomb sirens,” he said. “I immediately knew what was going on. The tension was there four or five weeks before the invasion.”

He decided to stay in his apartment. “I

couldn’t get any sleep. Every two hours, you heard a bomb fall. The next day, a British Pakistani national named Mutasa Hamid contacted me. He was from the Telegram group called Foreigners Staying in Kyiv. He told me, ‘Bro, I’m alone, you’re alone, we need to get together. Evacuating a war zone alone isn’t going to work.’ On the third day, I told Mutasa, ‘We have to try to get out of here.’”

They met at a metro station in the centre of Kyiv. “The trains were packed,” Nel said. “It was chaos, with people throwing others off the train just to get in. It was like scenes out of World War II.”



The duo pursued Plan B. One of the Turkish taxi drivers on the Telegram group would drive them – an eight-hour journey – to the Polish border. The traffic on the way meant the drive took 22 hours.

“There was a 30km queue of cars waiting to enter the border,” Nel said. “We guessed it would take 70 to 90 hours.”

They couldn’t wait that long as they had handed out all their food and water to those who walked about 200km to get to the border. So, they decided to walk the last 30km.

“I threw away 50% of my clothes to make my bag lighter,” said Nel. “It took me about 15 hours. Once I got to the Polish border, it was absolute chaos, with bonfires everywhere. I heard warning shots from Ukrainian border guards. The people said they had been waiting there for three days.”

Having lost Mutasa in the crowd, Nel stood with two South African women in the queue. Many people were pushing to get to the front, so people couldn’t help but cross the line indicating the border. When one South African woman accidentally crossed it, a Ukrainian border guard kicked her.

“I’m like, ‘Man, you cannot do this,’” recounted Nel. “After a few hours, myself and a few South African girls got through the first border checkpoint. We thought it was the border. After a 2km walk, we got to the actual border. There were thousands and thousands of people, Moroccans, Arabs, Nigerians. They started fighting.”

With the border guards prioritising women and children, the South African women went through without Nel. He ended up standing there for seven hours.

Nel decided to walk back (into Ukraine). “Luckily, a van drove past me and picked me up.”

With his feet bleeding and a pulled hamstring, Nel eventually arrived in the Ukrainian city of Lviv. There, he stayed in a hotel, getting eight hours of sleep for the first time in three days. The next day, he and a South African named Johnny travelled by bus to Uzhhorod. “Military checkpoints were everywhere,” said Nel. “Ukraine officers would come into the bus. They screamed and shouted at me because I look Russian. At Uzhgorod, a Ukrainian girl said, ‘Go to the Slovakian border.’”

Once they entered the Slovakian side of the border, they were accepted with open arms. Food, free SIM cards, jackets and blankets were handed out. “Once we arrived at a city in Slovakia called Košice, we took a train straight to Budapest, where we now live with a fellow South African who is married to Hungarian woman.”

Kim Kur, who has been helping South Africans escape from Ukraine, said that

what she was seeing on the WhatsApp group was completely different to what was being shown on TV.

People were trapped in their homes, hiding from Russian snipers. “People are fearing for their lives, afraid to go out to get food, afraid to get in their vehicles and make a run for it,” said Kur. (See page 9.)

Paula Slier, the Middle East bureau chief of Russia Today, said the invasion of Ukraine surprised her, her colleagues and even the Russian leadership. (See page 5.)

She said part of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s motivation was his belief that he needed to demilitarise the whole of Ukraine. He’s also objecting to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s (Nato’s) expansion into former Soviet Union areas.

She said the West was dealing lightly with Putin. In Russia,



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TRAIN JUST TO GET IN.
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OF WORLD WAR II.”

Putin putting his nuclear armaments on high alert was largely perceived as a reaction to threats from the West.

Steven Gruzd, who heads the Russia-Africa Project at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg, said, “In my view, this conflict isn’t about Putin trying to reverse the result of the Cold War.”

“Putin’s endgame is probably to create a land bridge to Crimea,” said Gruzd, adding that “Putin is probably wanting to install a puppet government in Ukraine.” He said Israel had been suggested as a possible mediator. (See page 6.)

Dzvinka Kachur of the Centre for Sustainability Transitions at Stellenbosch University believes Putin wants economic control of Ukraine.

In the conflict between eastern Ukraine and Russian separatists, about 14 000 to 15 000 Ukrainians were shot between 2014 and 2022, said Kachur.

“South Africa is getting money from Putin,” she said, “so we understand why the message from the South African government isn’t clear.”

Putin needs to be brought before the International Criminal Court, said Kachur, citing his responsibility for many deaths and for destroying Ukraine.

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Please email your CV to I.gavin@yeshivacollege.co.za by 30 March 2022

YESHIVA COLLEGE

The Torah School of Excellence

Much ado about Maus banning

At King David Victory Park High School, we study Maus in Grade 9. It was with great interest that I read the recent article regarding the banning of Maus by a school board in Tennessee. As I'm teaching transactional writing to Grade 10s, I gave them the task of writing a letter to the editor about whether, after studying the novel, they believed it should be banned. Here are three of the top letters, with differing opinions. - Ronel Klatzkin, English teacher

Maus tells it like it is

On January 10, members of the McMinn County School Board of Tennessee voted to ban Maus from the school's syllabus. Their decision was based on its violent depictions, nudity and profanity. Yes, the book does contain extreme scenes, a few swear words and nudity, but that's not a valid excuse to stop educating the youth about Maus. The intense depictions are important to avoid "sugar coating" this topic and approaching it in a true and real sense.

The beauty of Maus lies in its honesty. In book II, Art Spiegelman includes a conversation with his father in which Vladek, his father, uses a derogatory, outdated term. Spiegelmandidn't have to add in this conversation, which shows his father in a negative light, but he did. The swearing and brief nudity are factors of this honesty and add authenticity.

It's infuriating that the board acted as if Maus was the only source of profanity and violence in children's lives. The internet has explicit content and many schoolbooks in the US contain racial slurs. How can it ban this book, which uses intense language and imagery to educate people about the reality of the Holocaust and survivors' personal stories? The board should re-evaluate its decision and consider the overwhelming number of positives that children can gain from Maus.

– Dina Scop

Too young to appreciate Maus

Maus is a good example of how we learn about the Holocaust far too young. Though the book was undeniably brilliant, it stayed with me after completing it - and not in the way it should have. I wouldn't call myself naïve, I've had many encounters with swearing, sexual connotations and suicide, and they never really had an effect on me, but when such themes were depicted in Maus, they refused to leave my mind.

The language and sexual innuendo of Maus never really bothered me; what did was the raw and unfiltered depiction of death. It was something I wish I could've experienced at an older age.

I distinctly remember the day we read the chapter on the suicide of Anya (the author's mother) . The gruelling image of her body strewn across the floor occupied my thoughts for weeks. As I said, I was exposed to the subject of suicide prior to reading Maus, but the manner in which it was shown, the way it was drawn, I wish I hadn't had to experience at the age of 14/15. I think my peers would agree.

Over time, while reading the novel, I noticed that many of my classmates started to become ambivalent about the events in the story, although if they were trying to masquerade their true feelings with indifference or were actually bored, we'll never know. I think it was the former and we should've digested such harrowing material at an age in which we would have acknowledged the story more than merely fixating on death and becoming desensitised as a result.

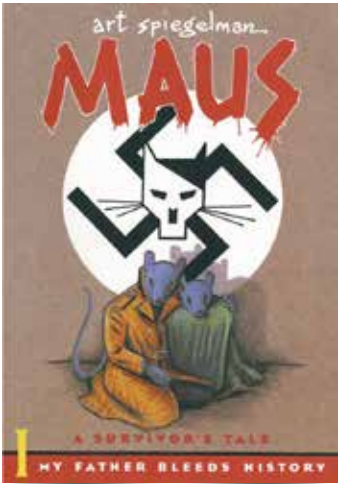
Maus shouldn't be banned, rather it should be postponed for children of a more mature age.

– Zara Abramsohn

Censorship all about mind control

The Tennessee school board decided to ban Maus because it contained profanity, nudity and "the killing of children", but can't it see that this is real? We shouldn't shelter schoolchildren and feed them a false narrative of global harmony and inclusiveness. The Holocaust is a perfect example that this was - and still is - certainly not the case.

As someone who has studied Maus in detail throughout my Grade 9 year, I can tell you that it isn't about the profanity and nudity that the school board has singled it out for; rather it's because it explains the



complex relationship between a father and his son and explores the horrors of what the author's father, Vladek Spiegelman, experienced in the Holocaust. Ignoring the real message of a book and replacing it with something so minuscule won't work. We can clearly see through the smoke and mirrors. They want to ban the book because it educates us about reality not a fabled world in which some might wish to live.

So, the next time we hear about censorship of a piece of valuable historic Jewish information,

remember that minuscule details aren't always the real reason. It could just be some suited board members trying to create a false narrative for the youth which they educate – and, to an extent, control.

– Daniel Kapelushnik

Letters

STOP ASKING WHERE HUMANITARIANS ARE, AND START HELPING

I'm not irritated at Mr Stern for having an opinion in the letters column (SA Jewish Report, 3 March 2022), neither am I irritated about him expressing his opinion for, as Voltaire once penned, "Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers."

The truth of the matter is Mr Stern had only one question: where are the humanitarians? My irritation is at the sheer gall in implying that South Africans and South African organisations have done nothing to help Ukraine. This is demoralising for those who have helped and a slap in the face for all those who have donated time and money to assist suffering Ukrainians.

I submit that your question is trite, sir, and that instead of standing on a soap box yelling, "Where are the humanitarians?", would your time not better be served in using the ink to call for people to donate to assist.

Speaking of which, anybody wishing to donate to the people of the Ukraine can go to: Unicef.org; Savethechildren.org; or UNHRC.org

– Joshua Trapido, Johannesburg


UJW HORRIFIED BY UKRAINE TRAGEDY

The president, executive committee and members of the Union of Jewish Women South Africa express their deepest dismay and horror at the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine.


Hundreds of thousands of citizens, the majority of them women and children, have been forced to abandon their homes and seek refuge in countries across the border, including Poland and Hungary.

We join the world chorus in calling on Russia to end this illegal and cruel action and to desist from further incursions and unprovoked attacks on the country and its innocent citizens.

We pray for the safety of all those whose lives have been irrevocably altered and, in many cases, destroyed.



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Your Voice in Israel

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Ordinary Jews, extraordinary stories

When Nelson Mandela delivered the keynote address at the 1993 South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) national conference, he commented on how many anti-apartheid activists had come from the Jewish community. Since then, all the country’s presidents and many senior government representatives have spoken at the board’s conferences, and almost invariably, they have also pointed to our community’s impressive record in this regard. Those whose names regularly come up tend to be well-known figures in the annals of the anti-apartheid struggle, people like Joe Slovo, Helen Suzman, Isie Maisels and Ray Alexander. However, the road to nonracial democracy wasn’t the work of just a few prominent individuals. Just as important - if not more so - were the changes brought about by “ordinary” South Africans on the ground, people from all walks of life and backgrounds who in innumerable practical, hands-on ways that seldom find their way into the history books were involved in the fight for justice and equality. Here, too, a strikingly disproportionate number were Jewish.

A few years ago, the board embarked on a groundbreaking project to document the stories of some of these unsung heroes. In addition to preserving an important and hitherto neglected part of our community’s heritage, it would put on record and bring to wider notice the extent to which Jews were involved in South Africa’s transformation to democracy. We were fortunate to have on board acclaimed author and journalist Jonathan Ancer who, with the input and assistance of our professional staff, was engaged to conduct the primary research and write it up. These efforts bore fruit late last year with the publication of a compelling new book,

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

aply titled *Mensches in the Trenches*. It features a wide array of personalities from a diversity of backgrounds and professions, from teaching and academia, the media, law, the theatre, trade unions, student activism and even archaeology. We’re in the process of organising multiple launches of the book, as well as other events around it, and I look forward to writing more about it closer to the time.

Celebrating a well-earned victory

For nearly 13 years, the Bongani Masuku hate speech case was a perennial item on the agenda of the board’s national and regional committee meetings. Virtually every meeting featured at least an update on where the matter stood as it slowly made its way through the system all the way up to the Constitutional Court. It came up again at last Sunday’s national executive committee meeting, but only to discuss how it had finally been brought to a successful conclusion. To mark the occasion, we took the unusual step of opening a bottle of champagne and having a *l’chaim*. There remain many difficult issues that the board has to deal with, and there will no doubt be many more in the future, but it was fitting on this occasion for us to take a moment to look back on and celebrate what has been one of the landmark achievements in the organisation’s 119-year history.

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

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

A tantalising taste for breaking the law

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

I’m a rebel. Finally. After 53 boring years, I have now become a lawbreaker. And it makes me feel alive. Until it kills me. And then it won’t. Obviously. Although I’m now triple vaccinated and once had COVID-19, I find myself on the wrong side of the law by choosing not to wear a mask when I’m told that legally, I’m obliged to do so.

Truth be told, it does make me feel wicked and naughty and like one of the cool kids, which I really am not and have never been. But I now know what it must like for those who skate on thin ice, for those who sail close to the wind and those who live on the edge. Now, I finally get what it means to feel the adrenaline surge through your system and the euphoria of getting away with the impossible.

Now I know what it feels like not to pay your TV licence. And not even get an SMS. Better still, now I finally understand the unfathomable courage of those who flagrantly delete the messages warning of impending prosecution when that licence isn’t paid. And the bravery of those fighters on the front line of lawbreakers who don’t make that payment, even in the face of the by-line that it’s “the right thing to do”.

In a sense, I’m becoming a freedom fighter. For my face. Each man has his cause. And I might well have found mine.

It’s not a midlife crisis. I don’t think. This time I’m serious. For now, in any event. It’s a fight for our faces. And I stand bravely on the front lines. Admittedly, I should have attended to the Botox before ripping off my

mask, but not doing so is testimony to my commitment. I have a sense that I’m the Zelenskyy of faces. With the caveat that I’m unable to wear that fatigues-green colour he chooses as it makes me look like I have typhoid. In which case, I would probably want to put the mask straight back on.

As proactive and as on point as the government has been regarding the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic until now, there’s a clear sense that it ran out of steam and lost interest somewhere back in January. There’s a sense that it has accepted that it’s all over but has forgotten to tell us that we can start to live our lives again. So much so that I can picture them, lying on a beach somewhere on a well-deserved holiday, saying to each other, “I know I’ve forgotten to do something, I just wish I could remember what it was.”

Around the world, regulations have changed. Ours, unfortunately, are a step behind. With fewer than 800 new cases in the country on some days, it’s time for laws to change in line with the rest of the world. Not doing so will have no impact on law adherence but will serve only to give the most boring among us a tantalising taste for breaking the law.

Brag bracelets remind kids how awesome they can be

Mina Lopato Nursery School in Johannesburg has introduced brag bracelets to reinforce the behaviour the school wants to encourage. Children wear the bracelets home to show what they did during their day that was awesome. It gives parents the opportunity to ask questions about their child’s day that are relevant and engaging and the bracelets act as a reminder to children about a positive, proud moment in their day.

Each teacher chooses values appropriate to the class’ age group, behaviour that has come up in class and discussions based on themes. Some of the bracelets say: “I am a kind friend”; “I had fun today”; “I am a star listener”; “I was responsible for myself and my things”; “I helped tidy up”; “I used kind words”; “I have great manners”; “I am a helpful class member”; “I did not give up”; and “I am a terrific leader”.

Kyler Singer tells her 3-4 year old class what Brag Bracelets are and how they can get one for themselves

Yeshiva Girls’ Shabbaton like no other

Yeshiva Girls’ High School’s Shabbaton at Sarabi Lodge was a weekend like no other. Starting with uplifting davening and hallel for Rosh Chodesh Adar last Friday morning, the programme, themed “Wonderful you in 22”, included a session with Jittery Citizens, during which the girls bonded together in laughter and happiness.

They had a beautiful Shabbos of unity, dining, learning, chilling and having loads of fun.

On Saturday, they danced together in a silent disco, *tisched*, and enjoyed the fun that Shabbaton embraces. It’s been a long time since the school has been able to hold a “normal” Shabbaton and the weekend strengthened the girls’ sense of themselves and their outlook on the world. They showed us how much power and happiness they have to share with one another.

Torah Academy Grade 2s embody concept of giving

Torah Academy Grade 2 boys last week helped Yad Aharon & Michael to pack food parcels for those in need. The boys assisted the food fund as part of the school’s *chesed* programme, which instils the concept of giving.

Torah Academy Grade 2s Menachem Asseraf and Meir Avtzon help to pack food parcels for those in need

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“Teaching was a passion and a pleasure,” says KD icon Jeffrey Wolf

DANI SACK

It was the sudden death of his twin and fellow educator at the end of last year that made Jeffrey Wolf decide to retire from teaching after 64 years in the field.

The twin headmasters, Jeffrey and Elliot Wolf, are legends in the Johannesburg Jewish community.

The inseparable twin brothers were the headmasters of King David High Schools Linksfield and Victory Park respectively for more than 50 years, and committed educators throughout their professional careers.

Elliot's sudden death at the end of last year sent shockwaves through the Jewish community, and left Jeffrey heartbroken. "We were wombmates, then we were roommates, and then we were soulmates," he said.

The passing of his brother was a stark reminder to Jeffrey that time waits for no man. "I'm 86 years old," he said. "My teaching career lasted 64 years. I began to feel that, as time moved on, I needed to take advantage of the years I still had and be able to make independent decisions." Thus, at the end of 2021, Jeffrey Wolf retired from his legendary career as an educator.

Both his and his late brother's educational careers had a rocky start. "[Our parents] found life quite difficult in South Africa, having fled from Germany in 1934. They sought to ensure that both their sons went into lucrative professions, but Elliot and I were set on becoming teachers."

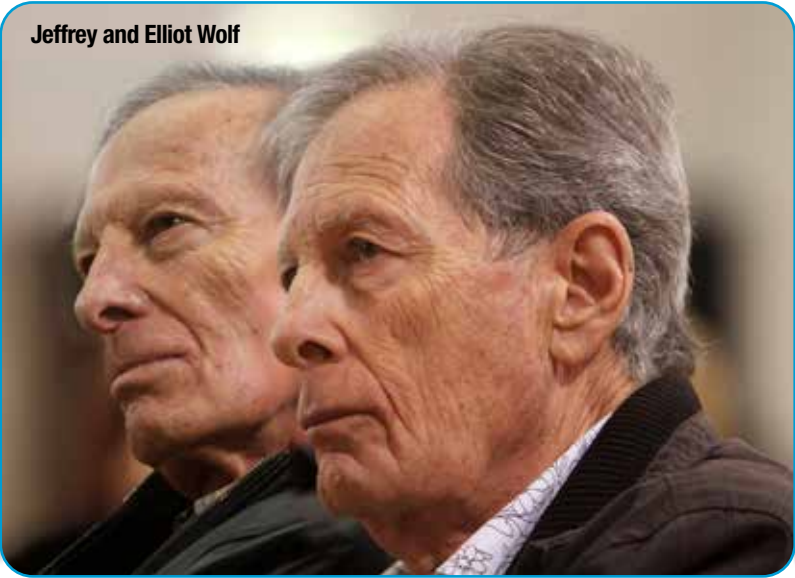
Jeffrey describes fondly how, as teenagers, he and Elliot would tutor the neighbourhood children from their garage at home. The two brothers were determined to teach, but, in order to placate their parents, studied a Bachelor of Arts degree for three years. It was their parents' hope that, as the years passed in university, the twins would "come to their senses" and pursue another career.

However, studying only made them more

determined. Once they had received their undergraduate diplomas, they both did a one-year teaching course, and the rest is history. "We majored in the same subjects - English, Latin, and Hebrew - and began our careers at different government high schools, Elliot at Parktown Boys, and I at my alma mater, Highlands North Boys High," Jeffrey said.

It was in 1968 that Norman Sandler, the former headmaster of King David Linksfield, caught wind of the Wolf brothers, and managed to lure them onto his staff - Elliot as head of Latin, and Jeffrey as head of English.

Jeffrey became headmaster of King David Victory Park in 1975, a year after Elliot assumed the position of headmaster at King David Linksfield. Jeffrey describes how "it was a shared experience. We counselled each



Jeffrey and Elliot Wolf

other - if we had a problem, we would discuss it and try to resolve it together. It was never a rivalry."

Jeffrey said that throughout his 26 years of headmastership, he had one major escape from the

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office - teaching senior Latin, a seemingly dead language. However, Jeffrey was able to keep this deeply rich and historical language alive in the classroom.

"[Latin] has given the world so much in terms of poetry and outstanding rhetoric, and all of it is wonderfully interesting to teach. Most of English is Latin-derived, and it gave students a tremendously sharp insight into linguistics." Indeed, Jeffrey's last teaching position was a 22-year stint at St Mary's School, teaching Latin to the girls, something he describes as "a remarkably happy time".

His longstanding career means that Mr Wolf has watched education evolve and has had to evolve with it. "Everybody has to become more technologically educated now," he said. "You have to make changes in your system and methodology. In many

ways, teaching can be considerably enhanced by these new creative developments." Over these past two years, Jeffrey moved to teaching entirely online.

"It was a realistic decision [to retire], although, of course, I miss it," he said. "Teaching was never a chore - it was a passion, a pleasure, from which I gained great fulfilment."

Jeffrey also worked with his wife, Barbara, for a number of years. "We handled it very well," he said. "She had already proved herself eminently as an outstanding teacher and leader. There was never a feeling of me showing favouritism to her." Barbara has recently finished writing a history of King David High Schools, a project that Jeffrey describes as having been done with "tremendous care and expertise. It's the most beautiful tribute to our years there."

Jeffrey's parting advice to educators and leaders everywhere is, "Teachers have to move with the changes and deal with new pressures that adolescents deal with these days. If you're an expert in your own subjects, and can invest passion [into your teaching], your students will thrive. They will share in that experience." We wish Mr Wolf much luck and success upon his retirement, and thank him for his many years of service to the Johannesburg Jewish community.

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First they lost their parents,
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Though Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created multiple political and economic problems across the world, including forcing families to flee their homes, arguably the most devastating impact has been on vulnerable Jewish orphans whose lives were fragile before but now face a terrifying and unfamiliar future.

When the KKL-JNF Field and Forest Education Centre (FFEC) in Ness Harim learned of the plight of these children from the Chabad "Alumim" orphanage in the Ukrainian city of Zhytomyr, and that they were being brought to Israel with the help of the Friendship Foundation, the staff made immediate plans to welcome and house them. After the 100 orphans aged between two and 12, together with staff members of the orphanage, landed at Ben Gurion airport, they were taken to the centre, where they were welcomed with warmth, cheers, and great excitement – they had come home.

The children will stay there for about a month, during which they will have activities, educational workshops, and tours around the country, and they will thrive under the tender care of the FFEC staff. There's no doubt that they will take time to adjust to their new surroundings, having left not only the security which enveloped them when circumstances dictated that they move into the orphanage, but also having their world turned upside down by the brutality of war. Our hearts and those of everyone involved ache for them, but we're confident that being in Israel will help them to regain trust and faith in adults.

Once again the KKL-JNF acted in the true spirit of tikkun olam, exemplified by the words of Avraham Duvdevani, the chairperson of KKL-JNF, "We're happy to have welcomed the lovely children from Ukraine. At this difficult time, the Jewish people are uniting and helping every Jew in distress."

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