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ewish Report

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Ramaphosa reassures leaders about community's place in SA

NICOLA MILTZ

resident Cyril Ramaphosa has assured communal leadership that the South African Jewish community has an important place in society and a crucial role to play in nation building and making South Africa a better place for all.

The president met members of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) last week at his home in Sandhurst, Johannesburg.

It has been three and a half long years since the president first addressed the Jewish community at the Gardens Shul in Cape Town in September 2018 and again soon after at the Gauteng Conference of the SAJBD in November

His words at the time filled a jittery and nervous community with a sense of renewed hope and expectation.

However, a lot has transpired since his friendly posing for selfies with Jewish runners along the Sea Point promenade in 2018.

The ruling African National Congress and the government's foreign policy stance towards Israel during this time has kept South African Jewry on its toes.

The meeting last week gave communal leadership a chance to express how it felt.

"The single most pressing issue we have is the government's obscenely anti-Israel stance and the incessant Israel bashing where the Jewish state is the pariah and the Palestinians can do no wrong. This is where we diverge. In all other areas, from schools, shuls, to security, we're the most protected Jewish community in the world today,

Zev Krengel, the vice-president of the SAJBD told the SA Jewish Report this

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"It was the most important meeting to take place in a long time," he said.

"The president took time to listen and understand our concerns as a community, to hear that we're not running away, that we're here to stay, committed to making this country work for all," he said.

Krengel said the president "made it clear" that South African Jews were key stakeholders in the project of building this country and had an important role

Ramaphosa met a delegation of the Board including its National President Shaun Zagnoev, Krengel, National Director Wendy Kahn, and National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner. Ramaphosa was joined at the meeting by National Security Advisor Sydney Mufamadi.

"It was the first opportunity for our leadership to engage formally with the president since 2018, and some very difficult issues concerning antisemitism and Israel were raised and addressed in a relaxed and open way," Krengel said.

"It was the first time we've had this level of intensity with the president on these pressing issues, and he listened," said Krengel.

He said an array of issues were raised during the hour-and-a-halflong meeting which took place in the lounge of the president's home last Wednesday, 20 April.

"Though levels of antisemitism in South Africa are very low compared to the rest of the world, we explained with statistics that antisemitism in South

Africa rises when there is an uptick of violence in the Middle East, and that this is linked to the African National Congress and government's anti-Israel

"We agreed that South Africa had a role to play in any world conflict, but that when it came to the conflict in the Middle East, Ramaphosa had the Palestinian's ear and didn't have the trust of the Israeli government to be an honest peace broker because of its

stance," he said.

"We explained that as long as there was this anti-Israel stance, Israel wouldn't see South Africa as an honest broker and we couldn't add value to the peace process.

"It's clear that we both want a peaceful two-state solution to the problem, the difference lies in how we're going to get there," said Krengel.

He said a number of positive South African-focused initiatives were also discussed during the constructive meeting, including the Board's COVID-19 relief and KwaZulu-Natal flood-relief efforts, as well as efforts to help during the devastating riots last year.

"He was very interested to hear about our University of the Witwatersrand [Wits] funding initiative, which helped prevent protests from taking place

during the registration process at Wits earlier this year," said Krengel, adding that the president expressed his gratitude for it.

"We expressed the South African Jewish community's commitment to this country and the Jewish state. We told him we continued to be loyal partners in the endeavour to uplift and transform the country, and pledged our continued partnership with him in building this country."

Said Krengel, "I believe we're fortunate to have a president willing to engage with the South African Jewish community, to listen to our concerns.

"The president also continued to commit to protecting and securing South African Jewry and all minority communities, which is a massive thing considering other countries around the world.

"Our frustrations are about Israel and the conflict, and this remains a continuous debate, but engagement around it is vitally important and we will always push for dialogue."

Krengel said the meeting was an important opportunity to "discuss our differences and share our commonalities".

"At the end of the day, we hope there will be a certain amount of neutrality and understanding if South Africa wants to play a meaningful role in the Middle East conflict, and this is what we expressed

"Are we going to see any policy changes regarding Israel? I'm not going to hold my breath, but I do think debate and engagement is important. We all agree that we want South Africa to work. This is our main goal," he said.





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Elite chocolate products recalled worldwide

TALI FEINBERG

rring on the side of caution, the Strauss Group, one of Israel's largest food manufacturers, ■ announced on 27 April that it was recalling all Elite chocolate products worldwide due to concerns about salmonella contamination.

A letter from Michal Vice, the export director of Strauss Israel, assured Geffen Imports, which brings the chocolates to South Africa, that the exported items in the country were safe. The

letter was sent on 26 April. However, in a follow-up letter sent to Geffen's managing director, Fran Ungar, on 27 April, the company's

management team said it had decided to mitigate all risks, low as they may be, and remove all products

produced in the confectionary facility from shelves.

The recall is for products of the following brands: Elite Chocolate, Elite Cakes, Elite Wafers, Energy Grain Snacks, Energy Chocolate Rice Cakes, Gum and Toffee Candies, with all expiration dates. Consumers are asked not to consume these products.

"Strauss Israel will restart the confectionary production facility in Nof Hagalil, and will resume activity only when all faults are amended and the products are absolutely safe to consume. The company is voluntarily extending the recall policy to all the products produced in the facility," said the letter.

The company is closing production in the confectionary facility and will resume activity only after a complete restart. Recently received laboratory results show that there's preliminary concern about contamination (there are no final results yet) of salmonella in two single samples of chocolate out of 270 samples tested. These products were part of the products that were shipped to stores and were included in a recall that was instated at the beginning of the

Says Eyal Dror, the chief executive of Strauss Israel, "In light of our intent to ensure public safety, and in order to make sure there's no confusion as to which

product can be consumed and which not, we've decided this morning [27 April], along with the food authority in the Israeli Ministry of Health, to expand the collection and recall of products, although up to this point we don't have any solid indication of an issue in these products. We won't take any risk, as expected of us.

"This is undoubtedly a fundamental event for Strauss Israel, a producer and manufacturer of leading loved,

nostalgic, Israeli brands whose guiding principles are responsibility and transparency. The company's management would like to take this opportunity to apologise deeply to our consumers, customers, and partners for this grave incident."

Ungar emphasises that no salmonella has been found in finished products, and consumers shouldn't be worried if they have eaten them. She says it's unlikely that stock in South Africa is contaminated, as it was imported in December 2021, and asks that consumers keep any Elite products in a separate area in their home and wait for instructions on how to return them and receive credits or reimbursement in the next few days.

Says KosherWorld's Joel Back, "In light of the global recall, only on confectionary lines, we're waiting for guidance as to how the procedure for returns must be addressed. It's important to watch the press and not just return the goods until clear guidelines have been issued by Strauss, which we expect shortly."

Continued on page 4>>

Torah Thought

Rabbi Julia Margolis, Beit Luria Progressive Shul

Kedoshim and compassion for strangers

he Book of Leviticus covers a lot of territories - from the Yom Kippur offerings to banning adultery, from the most universal ethical aspirations to the rejection of paganism, from loving one's neighbour to rules about haircuts and beard trims. The early liturgists of reform Judaism chose Leviticus Chapter 19 as the scriptural centre of the Yom Kippur afternoon.

At the heart of the holiest day of the Jewish year, the text of kedoshim's holiness code demands that we bring compassion and justice to our world. Social justice isn't just a 21st-century concept; 2 500 years ago our ancestors taught that while ritual life matters, holiness requires economic justice, immigrant justice, environmental justice, and more.

"The Eternal spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your G-d, am holy." (Leviticus

Throughout the Torah, we are given rules and statutes that tell us what to do. Here, we are told what to be. Who is to be holy? The whole people are addressed. In Hebrew, it's kol adat b'nai Israel, (the entire Israelite community). Not just the priests or Levites, not only the men, but holiness is commanded

Among other commandments, the holiness code

- Leviticus 19:33: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him."
- Leviticus 19:34: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I the Lord am your G-d." Do these verses that instruct us to be holy still apply

in today's age? Are we doing what we should to treat the stranger who resides with us with decency? Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, a spiritual leader from

Latvia in the 20th century, suggests that the obligation to act with respect toward another person derives not from that person's nationality, but from his humanity. He writes, "The root of this obligation lies in our obligation toward a human being by virtue of his being a human being."

The usual translation of the word kedoshim into English is "holy", but it doesn't carry with it the nuance present in the original Hebrew. Kedoshim isn't exclusively meant to represent holiness in the common usage of the word, but encompasses dedication and devotion to a cause, an idea, to a faith itself.

Do we treat human beings who have

immigrated from one country to another with dignity and

respect? Or with indifference, suspicion, or contempt? Why, for instance, are we always so suspicious of people that want to join our community?

In this modern age, it can be difficult to value equality and fairness. Yet we must strive to follow this important commandment so that we may maintain our Jewish identity with a sense of pride. Give yourself the permission to be a better, kinder person. Treat strangers with the dignity, respect, and the kindness you would hope for yourself.

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Community rallies to help pick up pieces in KZN

TALI FEINBERG

"At my home we have power but no water. Luckily we have a small JoJo [rainwater collection] tank, but it's being used up quickly. Our ward has implemented water shedding overnight. Friends of ours just managed to escape from their home, passing their children out of windows into the arms of strangers, before their entire home washed away in Umdloti."

This is the reality of Umhlanga resident Alana Baranov, living in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in the wake of flooding that has been declared a natural disaster.

"The atmosphere is heavy," says Baranov. "eThekwini [the Durban metro] is only just recovering from the riots in July 2021. A lot of the infrastructure had only just been rebuilt, and this devastation is vast. So many have lost their homes and possessions. Livelihoods have been badly affected and scores of people are still missing. The mood is a lot more sombre than even after the riots. People feel like they've endured a lot, and just don't know where the resources will come from to rebuild all over again.

"Luckily, our community hasn't been as affected as others, but electricity in Umhlanga, Izinga, and Prestondale is still up and down and the water has entire boundary wall just below their house collapsed and there was a lot of damage," she says. "When we were at the airport coming home after Pesach, the air conditioner hadn't been working for days and there was no water. The whole of Pesach, we saw helicopters flying over, looking for missing people."

"As far as the greater [disadvantaged] community is concerned, they are really in bad shape, and it's going to take years to fix everything", says Susan Abro, the president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) KwaZulu-Natal Council.

"There's hope for recovery but right now, KZN is still reeling with the scale of the devastation," says Baranov. "There's a feeling that the province has had a few particularly hard blows recently, and it will take a lot of time and finances to rebuild. Of course, the lives lost are irreplaceable, and some livelihoods won't be recovered."

The flooding has also devastated the environment. "The sea off our coast has incredibly high levels of E.coli and pollution," she says. "Many are worried about chemicals from the UPL factory [which hasn't been fully dismantled since it was burnt during the July insurgency] being washed down into the sea and poisoning human, animal, and plant life in its wake."

The Jewish community has joined other communities and nongovernmental organisations to mobilise support. "The SAJBD is devastated by the suffering in

been off more than it's on," she says. "When it's about water quality. Those who can afford it are drinking bottled water. There have been warnings of water-borne diseases. Most of the search and rescue teams are on antibiotics because of the hours A taxi and a security vehicle on a collapsed road Capetonian Elana Sevel, her husband, and three young children planned to go to Durban for Pesach,

> KZN, the loss of life, the destruction of homes and infrastructure, and the humanitarian distress," says SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn. "The SAJBD has worked closely with The Angel Network [TAN]. TAN Durban, with its presence on the ground, was able to ensure that relief reached those most desperately

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affected. Our partnership with TAN allowed the SAJBD Relief Fund to provide aid."

"The Angel Network is working tirelessly on the ground," says TAN founder Glynne Wolman. "It's thanks to the generosity of individual donors, the SAJBD, Investec, and amazing volunteers, that TAN Durban has managed to shop, sort, load, and pack food and supplies.

"TAN Gauteng co-ordinated the mammoth task of getting a 16-ton truck to Durban filled with

10 000 litres of water, hundreds of toiletry packs, and thousands of buckets. This truckload was dropped at SA Harvest, which ensured that the heroes at the search and rescue station at Virginia Airport got everything to the worst affected areas," she says.

"Our biggest hurdle is in accessing communities where roads and bridges have been washed away. At the moment, residents have to walk around the washedaway bridges and collect and carry food relief. This is dangerous and unsustainable.

"Our immediate focus is to get food and water to communities. If people get desperate, they will start using dirty water, which poses a big threat, particularly for babies and children. We have just received purification solutions for people to purify river water for drinking What's most needed is toiletries, clothing [especially for children], blankets, and food parcels."

Working on the ground, Tanya Altshuler of TAN Durban says, "We visited an area called Molweni

last week, where many homes were completely destroyed. The one home's entire main bedroom [including the chest of drawers and wardrobe] was lying in a heap of rubble in the mud with a gaping hole where the bedroom used to

"We chatted to the neighbour whose house wasn't too badly affected but his car was washed away. The saddest part is that these homes aren't insured, neither are their cars, so they will battle to rebuild or replace. There's so much poverty in the area, and the soil is very porous, so I can't imagine

how they are ever going to be able to rebuild their homes. The most inspiring thing is how our special community of non-profit organisations in KZN rally in every crisis to help those in need and support each other to ensure the most effective impact."

Asked how she stays positive amongst so much devastation, Baranov responds: "As with the riots, no matter how stressful and dangerous the situation has been, the way in which ordinary people and



communities have come together to mobilise, assist each other, and work as a team is truly inspiring.

"Whether it be collecting and delivering aid, assisting search and rescue crews, or physically digging roads for emergency vehicle access, people have been incredibly resilient, kind, and resourceful. It's the best of the South Africa spirit."



Highway under water at the start of the floods on 12 April

they spend in dirty water."

on, it drips out the tap, and there are concerns

but as they waited for their flight, they were delayed

for five hours by the terrible storms. Sevel was

nervous, but they decided to proceed. They finally

managed to fly in and have a normal Pesach and

holiday, but all around them were signs of disaster.

"My brother-in-law's family had to move out of

their house in Izinga Estate for a night because the



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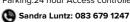
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Beit Eli Kay to welcome soldiers home

TALI FEINBERG

t's been almost six months since South African oleh Eli Kay was gunned down in cold blood by a terrorist. Now, his family and Telfed have joined hands to create "Beit Eli", a welcoming home for soldiers to stay while they are off base.

It's one of a number of projects that the Kay family has initiated to perpetuate the memory of Eli's bright light, extinguished

Kay was killed on 21 November 2021 at the age of 25. He was shot by a Hamas terrorist while walking through the Old City in Jerusalem on his way to work as a guide at the Kotel. He was a beloved son of the South African Jewish community, who attended yeshiva, made aliya, served as a squad commander in the paratroopers, was a kibbutz manager, and was building a beautiful life in Israel.

Though he wasn't able to finish building that life, his family has invested in building a home for his brothers in arms. "It will be available for any soldier who needs a place to stay for a chag, Shabbat, or while they aren't at their base," says Eli's father, Avi Kay.

"It came about when Rabbi Yosef

Yitzchak Cohen, a Chabad shaliach in Kfar Chabad [a Chabad-Lubavitch village in central Israel, near Tel Aviv], approached me saying he had assisted soldiers with finding places to stay, but the demand had increased dramatically during the pandemic," says Kay.

"He had found a place which he planned to fix up, and he was calling to ask if he could name it after Eli. He never expected us to get involved."

Yet Kay decided to do just that. "It resonated with me, because soldiers often want their own space and a familiar environment. I saw that with Eli." Soldiers will be able to have Shabbos and go to shul nearby if they would like to.

Kay's good friend, Dov Newmark, is a director at Nefesh B'Nefesh and he hosts a minyan every Shabbos mivarchim (every Shabbat before the new month). His place has a magnificent view. "It was a minyan that Eli was very comfortable attending," says Kay. "When he passed away, they renamed it the Eli Kay Rooftop Minyan. When Dov heard about the soldiers' house, he said, 'Let's make this an Eli Kay Rooftop Minyan initiative."

Kay, Newmark, and other South African



whole place up, got a builder in, and did repairs. Telfed generously came on board to sponsor all furniture and equipment. It's now a two-bedroom cottage with a bathroom, a kitchenette, a dining room, Astroturf outside, and everything someone would need for a short stay," Kay said.

He says he's "absolutely blown away by the generosity of people with time, money, and dedication. For example, today a friend is going over there to meet the damp expert. It's a 25-minute drive each way and he's a busy guy, but he has come to the party, like many other people. Another friend's grandfather had his second Barmitzvah and asked people to donate towards Beit Eli in lieu of gifts. Many private individuals have donated. It's been special.

"Eli would have been so excited that there's a place for soldiers to come to where they can be comfortable, and that it's there for soldiers unconditionally in a time of need. He would also have loved how it's brought communities together." This includes the South African Jewish community, and there will be a South African flag along with an Israeli flag on the plaque outside.

Telfed set up the Eli Kay Fund for Lone Soldiers soon after Kay was killed. "Telfed guided and assisted Eli during his pre-aliya planning, his absorption, and Israeli Defense Forces service as a lone soldier," says Chief Executive Dorron Kline. "Eli planned to study and was in the process of applying for a Telfed scholarship." The fund has already raised money that is being distributed to needy lone soldiers.

So when Kay approached Telfed to assist in furnishing Beit Eli, "it felt like a natural partnership", says Kline, pointing out that the organisation is closely connected to the entire Kay

Eli Kay

Telfed administers more than 100 trust funds, some set up as far back as the 1950s. One of these trust funds, the Goldberg Trust, was specifically set up to support victims of terror. "Eli was a victim of terror, so we approached the Goldberg Trust and it agreed to help fund the cost of the furniture, which was added to funds from Telfed's Eli Kay Fund."

Kline says Eli's birthday is on Shavuot, and this is when they will officially open the home. "We feel a connection to the Kay family not only through our grief, but through rebuilding," he says.

Meanwhile, the Kay family has set up a non-profit organisation called The Eli Kay Project, an umbrella for all the non-profit projects they plan to do to perpetuate his legacy.

"One we are launching now is a Sefer Torah in Eli's name," says Kay. "It will be unique in that it will be a travelling Torah. First, it will be written all over the world - in

where he went to yeshiva; in Israel, which he loved; the United Kingdom, where he has family; and in America, which he had a connection to. Then, it will be used by people when they travel and tour Israel. So if a group of guys are coming to hike in Israel for two weeks and they need a Torah, this one is perfect. It will have its own waterproof backpack, and will be small enough to carry. It will allow Eli's love of travelling in Israel to continue."

The recent spate of terror attacks in Israel was hard for the family, bringing back memories that are still fresh. "I knew what the victims' family would be going through. That's what hurt the most," says Devorah, Eli's mother. "We're proud of our eldest son, Kasriel. Together with his father in law, he visited many shiva houses."

Looking back on the past few months, Kay says, "It's been a lot harder than we expected. The reminders of our loss are constant." Some of these reminders are positive. Just the other day, before Pesach, he visited the place where Eli was killed.

There, an Arab man stopped him, asking if he was Eli's dad, saying they had been friends. Two young Jewish men then walked up, asking the same thing. One had a key ring with Eli's photo. "Within 200m to 300m, I met three people whom Eli had a positive impact on," says Kay. "So we continue to stay positive and are excited for projects that focus on the land, Israel, agriculture, and tourism. The ongoing support from the community in Modi'in, wider Israel, and South Africa continues to be a pillar of strength."







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Elite chocolate products recalled worldwide

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The Israeli health ministry said that as of Monday, it was unaware of Israelis who had been infected by salmonella bacteria as a result of consuming one of the products.

Typically, people with salmonella infection have no symptoms. Others develop diarrhoea, fever, and abdominal cramps within eight to 72 hours. Most healthy people recover within a few days. In some cases, the diarrhoea associated with salmonella infection can be so dehydrating, it needs medical attention. Life-threatening complications may also develop if the infection spreads beyond the intestines.

The Elite recall may be the largest food recall ever to take place in Israel, causing Strauss Group shares to fall by about 2.85%.

According to Israeli media, the company may face a public backlash after reports emerged that the food manufacturing conglomerate became aware of the health hazard last week (during Pesach), and waited days to notify the public.

According to the reports, Strauss didn't order the recall before getting the final test results on the products, which were delayed due to Pesach and therefore received only on Sunday, 24 April.

In an interview on Channel 12 on Monday evening, Dror apologised to the Israeli public but insisted the company

had done nothing wrong.

"Last week, we received an initial indication of salmonella in our liquid chocolate tanks, which is the raw material we use to make our products," he said. "At that moment, we stopped the process and notified the health ministry, before launching a series of tests."

"It wasn't until yesterday morning [Sunday 24 April] that we received information that indicated that the bacteria might be found in final products, which didn't leave the factory," he said, "meaning that at that point, we still didn't know of any product in the market that was even suspected of containing salmonella."

Asked why the company failed to take immediate action to notify the public once it had an indication of the health hazard, Dror said, "I can understand that some people are disappointed in us, angry at us, and I would like to offer my apology. You need to understand that beyond working with the health ministry in full transparency, there's a process that takes time. Many times you have suspicions that are later refuted. I can honestly say that everything we did was done with genuine concern for the public's health."

Rabbi Dovi Goldstein of the Kosher Desk at the South African Beth Din said, "We don't certify or import Strauss/Elite chocolates so unfortunately cannot comment."

Ugly "ferribel" rears its head as former mashgiach takes on the UOS

n aggrieved former mashgiach (kosher supervisor) of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) has expressed his longsuffering gripes on social media in what some say is an outrageous attempt to discredit the reputable organisation and shake up the Johannesburg kosher

Velvy Bokow has more than a bone to pick with the organisation he once worked for.

He claims the organisation has treated him unfairly and discriminated against him for many years, and said he was going public with his story because he had tried all other halachic avenues in vain, leaving him with no choice.

"Every human being has a right to justice," he said on Facebook.

Bokow is now a competitor of the UOS, having recently launched a new kosher hechsher in a bid to compete with the Beth Din, the country's foremost kosher certification under the UOS.

Kenny Rabson

Velvy Bokow

Bokow is the director of Kosher Certified South Africa under the halachic supervision of his father, Rabbi Avigdor Bokow.

So resentful and bitter is he, he has obtained permission from the controversial Badatz Rabbinical Court of Lakewood to pursue claims against the UOS in a non-Jewish court of law.

However, this rabbinical court has been discredited and delegitimised internationally.

In a bombshell announcement on Thursday, 21 April, a few hours before yom tov, Bokow laid out his long-winded and convoluted grievances in nine pages on Facebook. In it, he alerted the community to his intensions to take the matter further in a non-Jewish court of law.

"The UOS has been summoned on more than three occasions to Din Torah and has failed to attend," he said. He accused the UOS of failing to appoint a zabloh (ad-hoc tribunal) and said he had therefore received permission to pursue his claims against the UOS using "other avenues" in an effort he says to "seek relief".

Bokow's grievances go back more than two years in an epic palava which has resulted in a protracted souring of relations between him and the UOS, culminating in his licence as a mashgiach being revoked last year.

He insists he has raised his concerns and lodged grievances in accordance with halachic requirements in an effort to seek relief, and accused the UOS of repeatedly refusing to come to a Din Torah.

In response, Kenny Rabson, UOS board chairperson, said he felt it was crucial to reach out to staff, dayanim and associates following Bokow's Facebook post, which he described as "inflammatory" and said "omitted significant information on top of inaccuracies."

Rabson said the UOS wouldn't engage with any claimants on Facebook or in the public domain.

In a letter to staff, he said, "I want to stress that the board of the UOS, our rabbis, dayanim, and staff are

certainly not above the law and we are all subject to the same shulchan aruch (code of Jewish law). While we exist as a non-profit organisation to serve the community, we recognise fully that our actions will always be closely scrutinised by all."

He said Bokow's claim that the UOS had declined to appear before a Beis Din, was "simply not true".

He explained to staff how the process of litigation worked from a halachic perspective.

Should a claimant feel that the dayanim of the Johannesburg Beis Din aren't independent

> enough to hear their case, they can opt for a zabla (as defined in shulchan aruch) to be co-ordinated by the Beis Din. This involves the

claimant and defendant each nominating a judge, and these two nominated judges agreeing between themselves to a third judge. "In Mr Bokow's case, this hasn't

worked, and he has gone to a Beis Din in Lakewood, New Jersey, for resolution of his claim," said Rabson.

However, he said that the halacha provided that the choice of Beis Din belonged to the defendants - the UOS in this case. "Though the board of the UOS is of the view that Mr Bokow has no legitimate claim against it, we

communicated with him several weeks ago that not only would we appear before a Beis Din, but importantly, we offered to subject ourselves to one of the most reputable Batei Dinim in the world, that of Dayan Asher Weiss in Jerusalem, which Mr Bokow declined."

This piece of information is a crucial omission in his document. The claim of being mesareiv I'din (avoiding justice), is simply not true, Rabson said.

"Mr Bokow asked the UOS to communicate through his legal representative in London, who isn't only a solicitor, but also a reputable rabbi.

"Again, before Pesach, Mr Bokow was offered a zabla as communicated to him by his solicitor, which he hasn't accepted. This information isn't in his posting, but from the UOS perspective, we are comfortable that we have offered him different choices, which he has declined. We remain open to alternative routes of resolution as well."

Rabson said that given that any defendant must be comfortable with the Beis Din selected, "we declined to appear before the Beis Din selected by Mr Bokow in Lakewood".

He said this was because the rabbonim of Lakewood had issued a letter in the United States saying that this Beis Din "wasn't to be accepted by anyone". The letter, he said, instructs defendants to ignore summonses issued, judgements, and granting of rights to go to secular

"On the back of the controversies around this Beis Din, which we didn't investigate further, the UOS utilised its halachic right to reject this Beis Din," said Rabson.

"We ceased communication with it, and have rejected

the heter arkaos (the right to go to secular court) issued by it. It must be questioned why Mr Bokow would choose such a Beis Din in the first instance, given his awareness of these letters."

Rabson said that while the UOS wasn't aware of the multitude of claims Bokow had against it, it was aware through his solicitor of his claim to be reinstated as a mashgiach for the UOS.

"I'm sure you will agree that this can never happen, given that he is the director of a competing company and has clear disregard for this organisation," he said.

Rabson said the UOS would continue to try find a way forward with Bokow to resolve the issue.

Bokow's post on Facebook has been received with criticism and praise by members of the community.

One community member, Tzvi Chaimovitz, accused Bokow of "dribbling" on this platform.

"The people you seek revenge from will not dignify your pompous rhetoric on this absurd medium where your friends lurk in the shadows of your misinformation campaigns," he said.

The Beth Din of Lakewood has allegedly been "delegitimised by dozens of prominent Beth Dins around the world", he said.

Said Rabson, "We aren't going to let a man like this destroy an organisation that has been built up over many decades by prestigious and respected dayanim and rabbonim to satisfy his personal crusade."

Bokow told the SA Jewish Report that he didn't wish to



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6 SA JEWISH REPORT 28 April - 5 May 2022

Jewish Report The source of quality content, news and insights

Good relations, with an Achilles' heel

e have our national president on our front page today. It's wonderful to read that President Cyril Ramaphosa and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies sat down for a real heart to heart.

It means a lot to us because it means he recognises that we're relevant in the scheme of things - integral to this

The fact that he has taken time to meet our people is important. This is reason enough to have pride of place in our newspaper and give us confidence in our position in our

We shouldn't really need acknowledgement from Ramaphosa to know our place in a country in which we all participate fully. Just because we're part of the Jewish community doesn't make us any less South African. It doesn't make us any less a part of the people of this country.

However, we have a history that defies this logic, and so Jewish people need the recognition to feel

It doesn't take a stretch of our imagination to recall how many Jewish people in Germany poohpoohed the impending Holocaust, saying they may be Jewish, but they were German first. I don't need to push this point. It's part of our historic makeup, and hence our fears.

Having said that, the truth is that South African Jewry are a pretty stable bunch. We don't have the kind of antisemitism that's being experienced in Europe and even in the United States. Just this week, the Anti-Defamation League announced that there were a record number of 2 717 antisemitic attacks in the United States in 2021, a 34% increase on the year before.

We in South Africa have a lot to be grateful for, and we show our gratitude all the time by what we do in this country.

I have to say, I wasn't surprised when our community – even those who have been sorely impacted in KwaZulu-Natal – went all out to help those suffering as a result of the floods (page 3). Nobody stopped to think or wait for someone to ask, they just did what needed to be done. Whether it was rebuilding, feeding, or sending money or water, they got on with rebuilding people's lives.

I can assure anyone who may feel the need to question it that this isn't done to prove anything to anyone, just to help those in need.

So, whether or not Ramaphosa recognises it is irrelevant to them and us. It certainly shouldn't make a difference to our relationship with the government or those in authority in the country.

However, there's an Achilles' heel in our relationship with the government – Israel.

We cannot seem to agree on this, no matter what. Can I say - and I'm sure the government would disagree – that this is a warped blind spot on its part?

This weekend, while the war in Ukraine continues, about 2 500 lives have been lost, and the government still has a lame response to it (at best), the South African government - or the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) - once again lambasted Israel.

Yes, we're aware that this is pressure-cooker time in Israel because it has been Easter, Ramadan, and Pesach – all very important religious holidays for Christians, Muslims, and Jews. This time is specifically important for all in Jerusalem, the heart of all these festivals. It's not something we can escape or avoid. This was always going to be a potential of a tinder box.

Having said that, am I wrong in thinking it has been fairly peaceful, considering? Yes, I know peaceful means no violence and that isn't the case. However, there have been no murders, no people being maimed, and so on. Yes, Jewish people have been prevented from going to the Temple Mount. Yes, the numbers of Christians participating in the Holy Fire Ceremony on Saturday, 23 April, were limited and police did use force to prevent violence. And yes, Israeli police did respond to stone throwing and other violence with rubber bullets and teargas on Temple Mount. Yes, there were people injured. Israel took every precaution and may have been heavy handed, but in the light of 14 citizens murdered in terrorist attacks in the past few weeks, what choice did Israel have?

Having said that, what has occurred in the past week appears to be better than most years. However, while the South African government hasn't felt that Russia has been heavy handed in killing thousands, it believes what's happening in Jerusalem is important enough to condemn Israel again.

In Dirco's media statement on 24 April, it said, "South Africa is appalled by the increased violence and heightened tensions in Jerusalem, particularly at the Al-Agsa Mosque, and the restrictions placed on religious sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

"We strongly condemn the attacks against Palestinians, especially at a time of religious importance for all faiths in the region."

And then, "We appeal to the government of Israel to allow Palestinians their right to worship and gather for prayers in peace. We reaffirm that the holy sites in Jerusalem and the status quo around these sites must be respected."

It went on in the same vein. Now, when I read this, I wondered whether perhaps it was dated wrong and was from May last year when there was a real problem between Israel and Gaza.

As you can imagine in my job, I keep an eye on Middle East news, but I went online to see all the news channels to check if I had missed something. I hadn't.

When 14 Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks recently, the South African government neglected to mention it. Nobody was lambasted. Nobody was censured for out-and-out murder.

But now, it finds something to condemn Israel for even when it hasn't really done anything. It seems to be that any reason to condemn Israel – even when there isn't a reason – is reason enough.

And then when other countries commit atrocities, like those committed by Russia in Ukraine, instead of standing up about it, our government seems to prefer to lambast Israel.

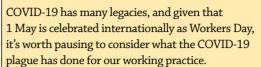
If it wasn't so upsetting and outrageous, it would be laughable.

I just wonder what it's going to take to pull the wool from our government's eyes in terms of what's happening in the Middle East. Or will it continue to get its information (or misinformation as it happens to be) from the anti-Israel lobby?

While I wish you all a wonderful Freedom Day and relaxing Workers Day, I do hope this gives our government the time off to look into the truth of this tiny country in the Middle East.

Shabbat Shalom! Peta Krost Editor

Work is what we do, not where we do it



I favour the view that it has simply speeded up changes which were in train and inevitable but on a slower trajectory.

In terms of the nature and impact of these changes, my first observation is that the rate of societal change is seldom uniform nor regular. Things tend to happen in fits and starts, and not at a similar pace across all economies. We don't wake up one morning and find that the entire world has changed overnight. We tend to forget this fact when we listen to broad prognostications as to how the world is changing, but we are by no means a homogenous population, in developed and sophisticated Western-service-based economies. What's true for some is by no means the norm for all.

We therefore need to be cautious about generalisations that make for popular reading and best-selling books. In spite of all the popular talk of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the fact is that you can't run a manufacturing operation with production workers logging in from home - at least, not yet.

However, if you're a clerical or administrative worker, and there's no alternative, you can work from home, a trend which was taking place in any event, but obviously was given huge impetus by the pandemic.

Working from home poses problems for employer and employees. Initially, while welcoming the absence of the boss's eagle eye and enjoying going to meetings in a top only with pyjamas below the equator, it can soon pale. If your dining room table is now your workplace, and this may have to be shared with a partner in a small two-room flat, the joy of this freedom can soon fade. Equally, couples who may have been happy to see their partner at the end of a day in which they had to go in separate directions can also find that having no respite or boundary between work and home can make for stresses in a relationship.

Another issue is how distant employees are to be supervised. Increases in technology will result in new and automated ways of monitoring employees' activities, and this will result in increased stress and pressure on employees themselves. This is already with us, and one of the reasons that the labour turnover in call centres is so great is the fact that the productivity of the employee is monitored minute by minute. This sort of pressure becomes relentless and unremitting. Workers will need the opportunity to gaze out the window for a few moments each day, imagining what they are going to do on the weekend.

It's also now clear that the future pattern of where and how work is done is likely to be a mixed one. There will almost certainly have to be some requirement for obligatory attendance at the workplace. Physical proximity isn't just important for meetings and the like, but also for the unseen and more nebulous atmosphere which is summed up as "company culture", let alone the office politics and whispers at the coffee machine, which at times can be a somewhat more negative aspect of work but nevertheless serve to meet the need of people for contact with others. Besides, some of the best ideas and contributions stem from these informal

The next issue is hotly debated, although the answer is guite clear - it's the "V" word. Can an employer insist that in order to attend the workplace, employees be vaccinated?

The common argument here is the issue of the right of bodily integrity, which is underpinned by our Constitution. So it is, and no person may be compelled to undergo vaccination against their wishes, but what the refuseniks don't consider is the fact that you may exercise a right, but there may well be consequences for doing so.

Also, there are times that individual rights and the rights of collectivities clash, and in such cases, priorities need to be determined. In the case of COVID-19, clearly, the right of the collectivity of those at the workplace to be as safe as possible overrides the individual's wish not to be vaccinated,

for whatever reason, rational or irrational.

Besides, the employer has a statutory duty, in terms of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, to provide a working environment which doesn't put any other employee at risk.

The consequence for refusing to be vaccinated is that the employer may refuse the employee access to the workplace, and under these circumstances, there would be no pay for no work. After a reasonable time, the employer could terminate on the grounds of incapacity.

Before termination, the employer would be expected to take whatever reasonable steps it could to accommodate the employee, since termination is always a last resort. These steps would include isolating the employee where this

might be possible, or arranging to work from home if this is feasible.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which may not even be over yet, has given rise to other issues such as whether the employer can enforce short-time working, layoffs, or even reduced salaries. Not only were many households affected in this way, but nearly two million workers lost their jobs and many of these jobs will be lost forever. COVID-19 has given rise to a far greater insecurity of employment, which will also be an enduring legacy going forward.

As I suggested at the start, these changes will take time to work through the system, and while many were in train, there's no question that COVID-19 has given them an unforeseen and unexpected

 Andrew Levy has spent his entire academic and working life writing, teaching, and consulting on labour and labour-market issues. He is a frequent commentator in the media on South African labour-market issues. You can follow his podcasts on dealing with practical labour problems at www.andrewlevy.co.za.



In spite of this, many employees are now somewhat loath to return to the previous nineto-five regime. For the boss, too, while ultimately working from home will reduce office space and associated overheads, the immediate problem is that when the cat's away, the mice aren't always at their most productive. Thus, the issue of supervision becomes particularly important.

The problem is at its most acute for salaried employees in which the focus will change from presence to productivity.

Traditionally, insofar as such employees are concerned, remuneration is paid simply for the employee being there. Having to manage performance and productivity, the traditional job of supervision, is then the employer's constant battle. With working from home, this will all change. The challenge here is how to set the standard and how to measure the output, particularly jobs that are more esoteric or cerebral in nature. Of course, pure piecework – incidentally illegal in South Africa – is hardly new, but it's not as if today's virtual workers are actually producing a physical output that can be counted, as opposed to 17th century cottage

28 April – 5 May 2022 SA JEWISH REPORT **7**

Calling Israel "apartheid" puts the BS in BDS

OPINION

s a South African, it was a privilege to visit UC Berkeley on 7 April as part of the American tour of Africans for Peace. I was able to get a sense of the scholarship and the history, as well as the activist focus of many students on Berkeley campus.

This sense of social justice is something that I recognise from my own time studying for a law degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg.

These were all positive emotions, but I sensed something else that I recognised. In speaking to some of the UC Berkley students, I often heard that Israel was an apartheid state.

This is familiar.

When I started at university, I joined the youth league of the African National Congress. I became involved because I believed in advocating for the rights of the poverty-stricken, marginalised black majority in our country. However, I also found myself caught up in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and particularly the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. It started when I was elected to the Student Representative Council at Wits.

I didn't have much information on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so I attended workshops and movie screenings hosted by the BDS movement. I went to these because I was told Israel mirrored the system of apartheid that had oppressed my parents, grandparents, and all black South Africans. I didn't think any other people should suffer the injustices imposed on black people during the apartheid era in South Africa.

After being involved in militant BDS



activity on my campus and in the rest of the country, I eventually ended up with a disciplinary action against me from the university. I helped to storm the recital of an Israeli pianist on campus. This led to troubling questions about the motives of the BDS movement, its goals, and tactics.

These thoughts persuaded me to visit Israel and Palestine in 2015. I expected that I would arrive in a country exactly like South Africa during the long years of apartheid.

To my surprise, I didn't find any of the aspects that every South African knows about when they think about apartheid (literally an Afrikaans word meaning separateness). I didn't find signs and boards separating Jews and Arabs, nor Jewish or Arab-only colleges, schools, and beaches like we had in South Africa.

It was even more shocking to find that

Israeli Arabs are entitled to vote and serve in the parliament and judiciary, even as members of the governing coalition. In South Africa under apartheid, such a situation would have been unimaginable.

So the question arises, why claim that Israel is an "apartheid" state?

The answer is clear – BDS uses this terminology to attract black South Africans. BDS understands very well that any black South African, and indeed some African Americans that I met on my trip, know that those interested in the anti-apartheid struggle will be attracted to a campaign that claims to oppose apartheid elsewhere in the world.

I came to understand that the analogy of apartheid in Israel is an abuse of the memory of apartheid, just as it's possible to abuse the memory of the Holocaust KLAAS MOKGOMOLE

or slavery in a similar

South Africa faces different challenges to Israel. Many of the challenges originated from English and Dutch settlers colonising South Africa and turning the indigenous inhabitants into virtual slaves. Israel isn't a settler state. The Jewish population is indigenous to Israel, and are the descendants of refugees who were cast out centuries ago. It's irreconcilable to brand original inhabitants returning to their ancestral homeland as participating in a settler-colonial project.

To BDS supporters, Israel was born in 1948 in a state of "original sin".

The centuries before 1948 are never mentioned. The complex history of Jews and Arabs, along with the Jewish return from Europe and elsewhere in the Middle East to their homeland, is ignored completely. Those involved in BDS need to know that both sides have legitimate rights.

As South Africans, we know that what ended apartheid was ordinary people and enlightened leaders realising that if we wanted peace in our country, there was a need to sit down and engage with one another and find a way forward.

engagements by using and abusing other peoples' historical narratives will ultimately not bring results, just more conflict.

The BDS policy of shutting down these

- Klaas Mokgomole is head co-ordinator of Africans for Peace and a former BDS activist. He lives in Johannesburg.
- Published with permission from J. The Jewish News of Northern California, jweekly.com



8 SA JEWISH REPORT 28 April – 5 May 2022

The angel who survived Auschwitz

TALI FEINBERG

"Pregnant women tried to kill their own babies. It was better to kill their babies than let the Nazis experiment on them," says 98-year-old Holocaust survivor Lily Ebert.

"We have people asking us, 'Why did you choose to go to Auschwitz?' As if one could choose between

camps," says her greatgrandson, Dov Forman. "They're not being racist, they just don't know."

The pair is a force to be reckoned with, bringing Ebert's story to socialmedia platform TikTok, where they have 1.9 million followers and 28.7 million likes. Ebert answers people's questions about surviving the Holocaust, and their top five most popular videos have collectively been viewed by more than 50 million people. In a world in which the reality of the

Holocaust is being softened in books and movies, and where many millennials have never heard of the mass murder of European Jewry, they are showing that it's possible to educate about the reality of the Shoah to the TikTok generation.

Ebert and Forman, who live in the United Kingdom, are guests of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Yom Hashoah event on Thursday, 28 April 2022. In a special interview with SAJBD President Mary Kluk recorded beforehand, viewers will be given a glimpse into Ebert's story of survival and how she and her great-grandson have joined forces to fulfil a promise she made to herself in Auschwitz: if she survived, she would tell the world about the reality of the camps.

While she may be 98, Ebert's playful, childlike delight in life shines through, both in her TikTok videos and in the interview. One can see why young people are so drawn to her and how she's able to capture the attention of a generation that's constantly

distracted by Instagram, Netflix, and Twitter.

She still wears a tiny gold pendant of an angel that was given to her by her parents for her birthday as a child. The eldest of six siblings growing up in Hungary, she says, "The war was almost over and 99% of European Jewry was dead," by the time she and her family were forced into a ghetto and then put on a train to Auschwitz. Her mother, younger brother, and



sister were gassed on arrival.

Although they could take nothing with them, her brother hid the angel pendant in the heel of their mother's shoe. How the angel managed to survive Auschwitz is an incredible tale. Ebert wears it in memory of family members who perished and as a potent symbol of endurance and hope. One could say that she's another angel who survived Auschwitz.

Ebert's great-grandson, meanwhile, is erudite, passionate, and proudly Jewish. Wearing a kippah and a smile, he shares how "Lily's story is becoming a part of me. It's hard to explain. I don't just know it [her story], but feel it deep inside.

"I'm often taught about the dangers of social media – how hate can spread like wildfire online," he says. "I felt that a space was missing for education through social media. As Lily says, you can't explain the unexplainable, but she has to. We thought that if people could go viral with dancing and cat videos, we could too. And the response has been

overwhelmingly positive."

Foreman is one of Ebert's 35 great-grandchildren. The pair spends nearly every day together and their project has brought them closer. They have shared joyful moments that they never imagined when they began like being invited to Buckingham Palace. There, they met Prince Charles, who wrote the foreword to their award-winning international bestseller, *Lily's Promise*. The book has been called "utterly compelling, heartbreaking, truthful and yet redemptive, a memoir of the Holocaust, a testimony of irrepressible spirit and an unforgettable family chronicle".

Ebert and Forman have collaborated with various departments of the UK government, including the department for education, the Foreign Office, and the Home Office. In November 2020, they spoke at the UK Parliament in favour of the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. They have also appeared on international radio and television, giving interviews to more than 180 news outlets in more than 35 countries.

In the 2016 New Year Honours, Ebert was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to Holocaust education and awareness. Forman received the Points of Light award from the UK prime minister at 10 Downing Street in November 2021 in recognition of exceptional services to Holocaust education.

Forman, who is also a spokesperson for the USC Shoah Foundation, says there have been many incredible moments in their journey as social-media stars, but he also appreciates the quieter times, like being able to spend Shabbat together.

As the last of our precious Holocaust survivors leave us, it's safe to say that with young men like Forman dedicating himself to Holocaust education, their stories won't be lost. Forman says it's an honour to have this role, and he's grateful to play a small part in ensuring that future generations will be able to learn about the reality of the Holocaust and its lessons.

Yom Hashoah ceremonies will be taking place throughout the country as follows:

- KZN: 28 April | Durban Jewish Centre | 17:00
- CT: 28 April | Pinelands Jewish Cemetery No 2 | 12:45
- Pretoria: 28 April | PHC Synagogue | 17:30

Power trio raise R750k for Kyiv Holocaust survivors



Clifford Joffe, Rabbi Eitan Ash, and Rami Sassen STAFF REPORTER

wo Johannesburg businessmen heeded the recent call from Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein to help Ukrainian Jews, setting up a 50th birthday fundraiser which raised R750 000.

Business owner Rami Sassen and Clifford Joffe, the director of an automotive group, have been best friends for 35 years. To celebrate their 50th birthdays recently, they decided to do something special for charity. The plight of the desperate 1 800 Holocaust survivors in Kyiv resonated with them.

Joffe contacted Rabbi Eitan Ash of Chabad Savoy and together, they hatched a plan to create the event in two weeks. Ash had been speaking to chief rabbi of Kyiv, Rabbi Yonatan Markovich, and Goldstein about raising money for Pesach food parcels for Kyiv survivors.

"What struck us was that they were Holocaust survivors, alone, with no option to leave and no ability to fight. But they were desperate," said Sassen.

"We considered that these people were going through yet another time in which they couldn't celebrate Pesach. The Pesach story of freedom is in stark contrast to being stuck in an area with little access to food and being the recipients of food parcels.

"We couldn't simply stand by and watch this happen. We all have a responsibility to play our part. They may be 9 000km away, but they need global support," Sassen told the SA Jewish Report.

And so, the Tri-4-Ukraine Challenge was borne, and 100 participants joined on 24 April to swim, run, cycle, or all three, raising money for these Holocaust survivors. Sassen, Joffe, and Ash aimed for their event to give the chief rabbi's cause "steroids".

"We had seen no real mechanisms for the local community to contribute to this cause and believed that we needed a channel to give back to a community decimated by war," said Sassen. "As triathletes, we thought of a fun [and gruelling] way for people to participate in a swim/ride/run event to raise money."

The three have been involved in triathlon events and have been training for years. "We love the sport, the freedom of the outdoors, the adrenalin rush, and the ultimate challenge of testing our bodies and minds,"

Their Tri-4-Ukraine took place at Old Edwardians (Old Eds) in Houghton, and was made up of a 1.9km swim in the outdoor pool, 90km ride, and 21km run. The bike and run routes from Old Eds were held over seven hours.

Many people came on board willingly, Sassen said. "Though it was informal, Capri cycling club jumped onboard and supported the entire event with nourishment and its entire cycling club. Old Eds gave us its outdoor pool to use, and we had friends and friends of friends testing their mettle in either one of the swim, bike, run, or all three. We even had Uri Krost set up a swimming group in Cape Town which did the swim leg in Camps Bay – in nine degree choppy waters."

Each participant wore the name of one of the Holocaust survivors in Kyiv printed on their shirt.

The Pesach food parcels paid for by every cent raised in Tri-4-Ukraine provided food and supplies over Pesach, and the trio have received "an incredible number of images of the people getting their parcels".

Said Sassen, "We're humbled by the generosity of people. It shows that the spark of an idea can turn into a reality that has a real impact on people's lives and livelihoods. Some causes you simply cannot ignore."

Any further contributions to this cause can be deposited in: COS Charitable Foundation, FNB, Branch Code: 210835, Acc: 62942922792. (Please use name + tri as your ref, when doing an EFT).

"It happened. I was there" - the stories of Holocaust survivors

SAUL KAMIONSKY

hen Pinchas Gutter, a Holocaust survivor who went on to live in South Africa, was liberated from the Theresienstadt Ghetto in Czechoslovakia in 1945, he was 13 years old and all alone.

His twin sister and parents had been murdered by the Nazis. However, soon after he was freed,

he spotted two horses pulling a wagon and claimed them as his "family".

He explained in a hologram questionand-answer session, "On the first day of my liberation, I went out and suddenly spied a wagon with two horses. I would have spent a lot of time with horses on my grandfather's farm, so I loved horses. I started walking towards this wagon. I didn't see anybody." He pulled the reins of the horses, and they went where he directed them. "They became my family. They became my closest friends. They just became my life. I built a stall for them."

The hologram was shown as part of the Yom Hashoah commemoration at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 26 April. It was jointly organised by the Union of Jewish Women South Africa and the Women's International Zionist Organisation.

Gutter's family was extremely religious and living in Poland when the Nazis invaded in 1939. The Gutters then moved to Warsaw to escape, and landed up becoming interred in the Warsaw Ghetto before being deported to the Majdanek concentration camp. It was there that Gutter's parents and twin sister were murdered. He was marched to the Theresienstadt Ghetto and was liberated from there by the Red Army in 1945

He went on to live in Paris, Israel, England, and South Africa before emigrating to Canada.

We should bear in mind that the Holocaust didn't begin with gas chambers, said Brenda Trope, a volunteer guide at the centre. "It began with dark, hateful, evil words, so we need to be mindful of our actions." "I went to school in 1933," said Gitta Rossi-Zalmons, in a video telling stories of the Holocaust.



"I was just a simple kid in Germany. On the way home from school, I saw the brother of a friend of my mother and offered him a sweet. He said, 'Not from you.' I will never forget that answer, and I realised for the first time that this was going to be the new politics of our little town."

World War II began on 1 September 1939. The Nazis first conquered Poland, then most of Europe and some countries in Africa.

Henia Bryer, born in Poland, said, "Everything changed immediately. The Jewish people, religious people, were the first target. They [the Nazis] used to catch them on the street, beat them up, and have them do the most terrible things in the streets."

Irene Klass said, "My mother arranged with a teacher in the ghetto for me to have lessons. There

were about five or six children in the group. We used to go every morning to a certain flat and get taught the basics. We were told that if there was a knock on the door or if we heard somebody coming, we must quickly hide the books under the beds because Jewish children aren't allowed to learn."

More than 52 000 forced labour and concentration camps were established in Europe and Africa. Shlomo

Pieprz said, "They gave us the striped clothes and it was very cold, and they gave us shoes from the people who got killed in Auschwitz."

Thousands of Jews survived in hiding or with forged papers. Many were sheltered by Christians or Muslims at great personal risk.

Ascia Lieberman was hidden by a Lithuanian farmer. "For one year, we didn't get out at all. The farmer was like an angel to us."

After 1943, Germany began to lose the war. As the allied armies advanced, the retreating Nazis marched the prisoners on forced death marches into Germany. Thousands died.

Don Krausz, who survived a death march, said, "They marched us about 53km. This is the distance from Johannesburg to Pretoria. They shot anybody who couldn't walk. We were stepping over the bodies."

Two-thirds of European Jewry were dead by the war's end in May 1945.

Said Krausz, "For years we had been thinking what we would do to the Nazi soldiers. But we were so weak, so demoralised, we didn't touch them. We just let them go."

Many people have suggested that Bryer remove her tattoo. "I don't want to take it off. It must remain," she said. "People are already saying these things never happened. I want them to see it happened. I was there."

Taking a cue from Freedom Day

wenty-eight years ago, on 27 April 1994, South Africans headed to polling stations in their millions. We were voting in the country's first democratic, non-racial elections to usher in a new government and consign apartheid to the rubbish heap of history. Every year, we commemorate this watershed moment as Freedom Day. April is designated "Freedom Month" by the government, and this year, it coincided with Pesach - zman cheruteinu, the festival of freedom. Here are some thoughts triggered by the longest queue I have ever stood in.

In 1994, I was 23 years old, and completing my honours in International Relations at the University

of the Witwatersrand. It was a heady time. I had more hair and less waistline. Election day capped four tumultuous years of intermittent political negotiations, internecine violence, and great uncertainty for the country.

I remember 27 April 1994 as a warm, sunny autumn day. Early that morning, I had joined the voting queue at the Jabula Recreation Centre in Sandringham. By the time I got there, there were already hundreds of people in the line snaking in front of me. There were grannies and nannies and tannies, businessmen and students, housewives and gardeners, South Africans of all types patiently yet excitedly waiting to cast their ballots. The line crackled with chatter as everyone shared in this extraordinary experience. Cell phones had just been introduced, and a few folks were brandishing these strange fat new toys.

Bomb blasts at what was then Jan Smuts Airport that morning, instigated by right-wing extremists, couldn't derail the elections. Neither could brinkmanship by the Inkatha Freedom Party, which finally chose to participate in the election only days before. This necessitated a sticker with the beaming face of Mangosuthu Buthelezi to be affixed to the bottom of the ballot paper. Among the plethora of parties was the Keep it Straight and Simple (KISS) Party and the Sport Organisation for Collective Contributions and Equal Rights (SOCCER).

I waited in that queue for seven-and-half hours. It was well worth it, and I will never forget that historic day. Someone (who may or may not now be my wife) said she wasn't going to stand in line all day. She waltzed into her voting station at 19:30, and waltzed out again at 19:35. I still maintain that she missed out on the true freedom-forming experience.



I was reminiscing about those long lines last week. I was with my daughter in another queue, at the Wynberg home

affairs department to collect her passport. I say queue in the loosest sense of the word. We had arrived at 07:45 to be close to the front when the office opened at 08:30, but there were at least 40 people in front of us. Two people had already asked for a bribe for us to skip to the front. I declined. I knew we were in for a 1994-like long haul.

At 08:30, an official emerged from the dreary building and simply said, "We have loadshedding." A grumble of frustration whistled through the throng. I heard muttering from those who said this was their third or fourth time waiting there. Very few abandoned ship, however.

And so, we waited. The official emerged at 09:00 and announced that the electricity was back. He then said the words that strike dread, "But the system is offline." More grumbles and mumbles from the crowd. The line wasn't moving at all.

I was experiencing the five stages of grief. First, denial, "This can't seriously be happening!" Next, anger, "This flipping useless government. Do I have to waste a whole bloody day here now?" Bargaining comes next, but I'd already turned down the opportunity to negotiate with the chaps who'd asked for a bribe. Then depression, "This line is never going to get shorter. Why me?" And then, finally, acceptance, "I can't do anything about this. And I'm not coming back here again. We'll have to wait in this line until we're called."

The sun was beating down and I retrieved an umbrella from the car. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, people started shuffling forwards. The official collected our receipts and disappeared into the bowels of the building again. They started letting people inside. But then, all of a sudden, people appeared with babies in blankets and were ushered to the front of the queue. Others approached the door and I was baffled as to why they were permitted to enter. It's like that feeling you get at the supermarket checkout when you seem to have chosen the wrong queue and the adjacent one always moves faster than yours does.

Eventually, my daughter was summoned inside and emerged with her spanking new green passport 15 minutes later, valid until 2032.

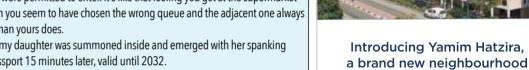
Now that, my friends, is freedom.

First Two Oceans in two years - a dream for runners

Dean Horwitz

Mark Rodgers

• Steven Gruzd is a political analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.



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SAUL KAMIONSKY

▶apetonian Sarah Silber exceeded her expectations by coming 19th out of 1 010 women in the Two Oceans ultra-marathon (56km) in her hometown on 17 April

"My goal was to come in the top 20 or 25, but I was doubtful after hearing how many elite ladies there would be at the race," she says.

Her time of four hours and 16 minutes, an average pace of four and a half minutes per kilometre, meant that she finished just 45 minutes behind Olympian and reigning Comrades Marathon champion Gerda Steyn, the first woman to cross the finish line in this year's edition, thus claiming a hat-trick of victories in what is known as the world's most beautiful marathon.

Silber entered this year's race as part of her training for her first Comrades in August. "I've missed races so much. We have hardly had any since the start of COVID-19," she says. "Two Oceans is a big event on the running calendar, and I would have had a serious case of FOMO [fear of missing out] if I didn't enter."

She has run several marathons, her most recent being the Cape Peninsula Marathon, in which she placed fifth and ran a personal best time of two hours, 59 minutes.

Her time in this year's Two Oceans was 33 minutes better than her previous participation in the race, in 2019.

Silber follows a training programme which involves a combination of speed sessions, long runs, and time trials.

"I increased my mileage quite a bit in the weeks leading up to the race, and then went into taper mode in the last two weeks," she says. "The week before the race is always very important for any runner. Doing too much can really jeopardise your performance, and it's crucial to make sure you rest and eat properly during that time.

"There was so much excitement at the start about being able to line up for the Two Oceans for the first time in two years," says Silber.

It was an amazing experience, especially the support along the route. While ascending Chapman's Peak, the runners were treated to magical views of the coastline.

When they ran up Constantia Nek, "every little shuffle was met with a round of applause", says Silber. By the time the runners reached Kirstenbosch gate, they started sprinting on

the downhill because they knew the finish line was near. "That finish-line feeling is indescribable," she says.

For two other Capetonians, Dean Horwitz and Mark Rodgers, running in the 2022 Two Oceans seemed like a pipe dream two years ago, yet they completed the half marathon (21km).

Horwitz, a freelance social-media manager, has gone from barely being able to walk 5km two years ago to finishing in the top 50% of all runners who completed the half marathon.

"I started running in March 2020, right at the beginning of lockdown," he says. "It was basically like either I sit around and do nothing, or just start doing something, and I decided to give running a try. I started running in my

parking garage. As the lockdown eased, I moved to running on the promenade here in Cape Town, and I fell in love with running. I slowly built up the distance." Rodgers, in his first-ever half marathon, finished just less than 20 minutes behind

Horwitz, achieving his goal of finishing within two hours, 45 minutes. "For about 40 years, I didn't think I could run," says Rodgers, a financial manager of

a non-governmental organisation which deals with childcare in Africa. "I didn't enjoy running. In fact, the last race I did was in 1999."

Had Rodgers not joined Spartan Harriers sporting club at the end of 2019, enrolling in its 12-week running programme for beginners, he wouldn't have been used to putting on his running shoes let alone entering the Two Oceans.

"I never thought I could run a race," he says. "I thought you had to be an athlete to run a half marathon. But I soon realised it's not about the race. It's the training for the race that's much more important."

Rodgers played sport at school but was never a top sportsman.

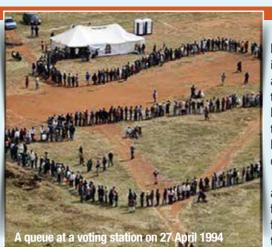
"I always thought that people who ran marathons were sports jocks, but that's actually not true," he says. "Some people started only five or six years ago but became top runners five years later. You just need to dedicate some time to it."

For a while after COVID-19 arrived, Rodgers didn't run. "But six months ago, I re-joined the club and then suddenly, I was in the Two Oceans training programme. We ran every Tuesday and Thursday evening and on Saturday morning for 12 weeks."

Having completed Two Oceans, he aims to enter more races and get more people into running. "The bug has bitten. I'm enjoying it. On the run, you meet like-minded people from all walks of life."

Horwitz, meanwhile, always tries to run with different people to make the experience fun. "Last year, I did six half marathons with one other person every time," he says.

About a year after taking up the sport, Horwitz roped in ultra-marathon runner Nic de Beer as his coach. "A friend of mine's husband was friends with him," he says. "He gives me a weekly training programme. It was quite a weird experience in the beginning to follow this programme. I didn't really know what was going on or what I was doing. But once I started trusting the process, that's kind of when it all kicked into place. He basically took me from running 10km to a half marathon in six months."





10 SA JEWISH REPORT 28 April – 5 May 2022

Creating art in the name of a legend

TALL FEINBERG

housands of South African Jews attribute their safe journey into this world to the late obstetrician and gynaecologist, Dr Jules Leeb. When he passed away in 2019 at the age of 87, the loss was devastating, especially for his daughter, Roslyne (Ros) Leeb Smith.

Looking for a way to honour his legacy, she turned to art – a constant source of creativity in her life. But this time, Judaism came into the picture, and she began to make paintings that brought the beauty of Judaism to the world, all in the name of her father.

"Soon after I emigrated to the United States in August 2001, I broke both my arms rollerblading," she recalls. "A few weeks later, 9/11 happened. Then the Chicago winter arrived. I was a mother of young children, missing home terribly, and art became my therapy," she says. Since then, she has settled in her hometown of Chicago, Illinois, but she still maintains strong ties to her Jewish and South African heritage.

"When my dad passed away, my rabbi told me to do charity work and Jewish learning to elevate his soul. He

had delivered thousands of babies and each one was a *mitzvah*, so I had big shoes to fill! But he said to me, "use your art". Then COVID-19 arrived. I started painting a different lady each week for Shabbat. They were whimsical, fun, and joyous. Friends started looking forward to them.

"The goal is to give back to the Jewish community and spread the light of Shabbat globally. I encourage members of Jewish communities and organisations to celebrate Jewish culture on social media tagging others in the community. In the spirit of Shabbat

and my dad, we can help each other by sharing our work, inspiration, and our aspirations." Anyone can download these graphics for free from her website to share on Instagram as a way to spread the joy of Shabbat.

Smith also donates her paintings to benefit charities, especially in South Africa. "I feel strongly about giving back to the South African Jewish community. This is where my roots are," she says, speaking from Johannesburg, on a recent visit for a family wedding. "I'm actually a very private person, but this project isn't about me, so I've never felt exposed. Rather it's about honouring my dad. In fact, his rooms

were the first place I ever displayed my work."

Each of the women in her paintings also has their



Film festival connects Oz expats with SA stories

using #theshabbatshalomartproject hashtag and

Rina (Joy)

TALI FEINBERG

hen South Africans emigrate, many of them shut the door on their former country. But Claire Jankelson and Di Singer, who live in Australia, have not only kept that door open, but consciously reach through it to join hands with South Africans. Their initiative, the South African Film Festival (SAFF), is a not-for-profit event organised by passionate volunteers to showcase South African talent, culture, and diversity and support educational opportunities for disadvantaged children.

Jankelson (nee Gilinsky), was born in Cape Town, and her family moved to Johannesburg when she was 11. "I attended King David Linksfield – my main memory being the incredibly broad-minded and enlightened teachers there. Many of them were banned from teaching at government schools because of their perspectives. I remember sitting on the lawn at break time with my teachers, having political conversations. They were true educators! I had an exceptional education on so many levels."

It's these memories that have fuelled her passion for supporting education back in South Africa. "Di Singer, co-film festival director and formerly of Joburg, and I started working on the SAFF in 2018 and ran our first festival in 2019," says Jankelson. "We're following in the footsteps of SAFFs in Canada and the United States. All the SAFFs are run as non-profits, with many volunteers, and all proceeds support a project based in the Western Cape called Education without Borders (EwB), which is an after-school mentoring project for students in township

Jankelson returned to Cape Town to attend the University of Cape Town from 1974 to 1977. "I studied psychology and philosophy and finally ended up with a degree in computer science. My husband, David, and I and our three sons moved to Sydney in 1994. I've worked as an academic, largely doing qualitative research looking at the social impact of government projects."

The SAFF has been "a great adventure. With no background in film or fundraising, we have cobbled together an amazing committee of more than 30 people throughout Australia and New Zealand," says Jankelson. "They have helped pull together all the film selections, marketing, fundraising, and screenings.

"The films, which are only shown in Australia and New Zealand, open doors for our audience, offering new ways to make sense of their South African backgrounds," she says. "They get a bird's eye view into the complexities of a nation and the struggles, tenacity, courage, humour, beauty, and remarkable creativity that dwells in the country."

They began screening films in cinemas in 2019, and then reinvented the festival into an online environment from 2020 because of COVID-19. "We could now offer the festival to all of Australia – including the many South Africans who live in regional and rural areas. In 2021, we included New Zealand. This year, in May 2022, we have limited in-cinema screenings at seven venues in Australia and online throughout Australia and New Zealand.

"At the heart of the festival is the mission to raise funds for EwB. We do this through donations both

in anticipation of the festival and ticket sales," says Jankelson. "We also encourage sponsorships, and invite organisations to consider the social responsibility aspects of brand identification. We have been pretty successful at fundraising. After our first festival in May 2019, we sent A\$45 000 [R505 926] to EwB. In 2020, we sent \$65 000 [R730 782]. Last year in May, we were very excited to send \$100 000 [R1,124,280], which included six Schools in a Box [now widely used throughout the teaching programme]. This year, we have set ourselves a lofty goal of \$150 000 [R1,686,420] towards funding a permanent meeting or training space for EwB."

Claire
Jankelson



Jankelson has a great affection for the festival. "For me, it's a process of re-looking at the history and understanding the evolution of a post-apartheid South Africa. I'm interested in aspects of identity formation; the place of the Khoisan people in the country; the fact that South Africa has 11 official languages; and what this means in the ongoing unfolding of culture."

There are numerous fascinating films on offer. "One is called *Die Ongetemde Stem* [The Untamed Voice]. It reviews the nature of the Afrikaans language and how it's evolved within particular cultural groups. Another one that deserves a mention is a short film called

#WeAreDyingHere. Three women are portrayed reciting an indictment of the unending violence perpetrated against women in South Africa, and as the drama unfolds, one realises that the war on women isn't just about South Africa. It's valid universally, and has a strong colonial past.

"Our opening film this year is Pieter-Dirk Uys' Nobody's Died Laughing. I did a wonderful interview with him and Charlize Theron, where they spoke about humour and its place in changing attitudes. They are great old friends, and both are significant social activists. Uys wondered how he ever got away with his humour during apartheid, and they both considered the notion of community as the jewel in the crown of life.

"Other films include remarkable life stories such Melanie Chait's *Dance me to the End of Time*, and films about the impact of gold mines such as *Dying for Gold* and *We are Zama*. They look at refugees who have come to inhabit unused mineshafts, trying to scrape out a living through finding precious fragments within the mines."

For Jankelson, "The impact of this festival is that it reminds many of us South Africans where we've come from. We love gathering, don't we! We hear of far-flung regional areas where small groups of South Africans gather to watch the films. So there's a tremendous engagement in the films, and of course at in-cinema events. At the cinema, we always have a bit of fun and create a great atmosphere. We sell South African sweets, biltong, and other nostalgic items.

"There are certainly those South Africans who say, 'We left and we're not interested', but there are many South Africans here in Australia and in New Zealand who eagerly wait for the next film festival and will watch every single film. That could be a film a day for the two-week period," she says.

"We also have a lovely following from some Sydney-based indigenous Australians. One radio announcer on Koori Radio watches every film and feels a great resonance with issues of First Nations people here. She wants us to take the festival to Alice Springs – the heart of the country – and play our films for locals there. I hope one day we have the privilege of doing that. We believe our audience includes 10% to 20% non-South Africans.

"We would so appreciate it if you would let your family and friends in Australia and New Zealand know about the festival," says Jankelson. "Invariably people come to us after the festival asking to watch the films and to complain that they didn't know about it. We're trying to get the word out as far as possible."

To the South African Jewish community, she says, "We're an incredibly bright, hardworking, and ethical community. We have made an extraordinary contribution within society. I think that a by-product of growing up in the apartheid system is that we were challenged at a very young age to find our ethical compass, to shape our values as individuals and Jews, and to strive for tikkun olam (to heal the world). The film festival assists in that ongoing sharpening and shaping process, as I and others find ways to be the best we can. I love the country of my birth. I love to walk on the land and be a part of its evolution."

• The festival runs from 7 to 24 May 2022. For details, go to www.saff.org.au. own Hebrew name. "This was inspired by a trip to Israel, where I travelled with a group of lovely women from Chicago," she says. "We participated in a naming ceremony in which women from all over the world could choose their own Hebrew name if they didn't already have one. Whether it was a name that had been passed down from generation to generation or simply a name with a strong spiritual connection, this experience allowed us to feel empowered in our connection to G-d.

"When I came home, I felt inspired to paint women and identify them with their Hebrew names. I was mesmerised by the women I met in Israel with head coverings – they were so elegant, modest, and spiritual. At the same time, I was in my year of mourning after the loss of my father. As a result of both of these life events, studying Judaism and creating Jewish art became my mitzvah. Now, my goal is to spread the light of Shabbat globally and give back to the community."

Smith says she will usually paint a woman and then give her a Hebrew name that suits her. She has been fascinated to discover the meanings of Hebrew names – for example, both the names "Vered" and "Shoshana" mean "rose".

She is drawn to bright colours, especially in the long and cold American winters. Though she knows minimalism and dull colours are trendy, she says art can't be faked, and she'll always paint what comes naturally to her and brings her the most joy. She's inspired by the world and loves travelling, but during lockdown, she had to turn to her own "inner landscape" for inspiration. The light of her Judaism reflected back at her

Orit (a small light); Sigal (violet); Ruth (friend); and Aviva (springtime) are just some of the women you meet in her paintings. Each one is vibrant and unique, epitomising the purity of her Hebrew name.

"I'm proud to be Jewish," says Smith, pointing out that audiences from all walks of life have responded positively to the paintings. She has experienced a number of meaningful moments because of them. The first was when a Chabad rabbi from St Lucia in the Caribbean contacted her.

"It was special because a lot of my family is in Australia, and he grew up in Melbourne and his parents were also South African. He said that every Friday, he went to the cruise ships that docked at the island and handed out candles and challah for Jewish passengers to welcome Shabbat. He asked if he could put one of my paintings on the box. I said yes, of course, and donated the image. The box included the blessing for the candles, and I asked him to include on the back the words 'In loving memory of Jules Leeb'.

"He agreed, and I love that my father's spirit and light is taken all over the world by these travellers. They might not even know they have my dad's name, but it is still so meaningful." Ironically, the rabbi's parents have a printing business in Melbourne, so the boxes were printed there, and Smith's nieces saw them before she did.

Another very meaningful moment was when Smith was asked to send a paper to a young girl dying of cancer. She chose to donate "Gila", meaning joy, and the image was shared with thousands of religious Jewish women on social media, praying for the girl's well-being. While the girl passed away a week later, Smith was grateful to have brought her a little bit of joy in her last week. "I think my dad would have been proud. And I'm proud to be his daughter."



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12 SA JEWISH REPORT 28 April – 5 May 2022

Community shocked by passing of beloved, "one-of-a-kind" waiter

NICOLA MILTZ

any of us know the faces of the waiters at our most-frequented neighbourhood eatery, some might even know their first names and strike up a quick, friendly conversation.

However, things were different with the late Meli Nkomo, 41, of Frangelicas in Glenhazel. He was more than a waiter. He was a friend. For some patrons, he was more like family. He knew the way you liked your eggs, over easy, or your cappuccino, hot and strong. He also knew when you were having a good day or when you were feeling a little down and needed a lift, perhaps a chocolate symphony biscuit would do the trick.

Nkomo, known to hundreds of customers at the popular kosher restaurant, passed away suddenly last week. He was found by neighbours lying on the ground in the courtyard of his apartment building in Hillbrow at about 21:00 on 17 April. It remains puzzling exactly how he died, but according to those nearest to him, there was no evidence of foul play. One thing's for certain, Nkomo touched hearts at every table he served.

His tragic, untimely passing has struck a nerve in the community, as seen by the steady stream of tributes that flooded the eatery's Facebook page this week.

"I loved Meli, he was like family," one patron who wished to remain anonymous told the SA Jewish Report. "We had endearing nicknames for each other, and he knew exactly which of the different muffins to put aside for each of my children for Shabbos."

The restaurant was closed over Pesach when news of his passing trickled in. During Chol Hamoed, one heartbroken family taped a printed poster on the doors of the restaurant with his name, encouraging people to write special messages in a book. People placed flowers and messages of condolences in the book.

Distraught staff were inundated with calls by concerned patrons asking for details about what had happened to their beloved Meli. When the restaurant opened again after Pesach, there were a number of offers from psychologists and social workers for grief counselling for staff and others who have been devastated by his loss.

Frangelicas co-owner Elana Godley said she was deeply moved by the amount of love and support shown by the community. "There's been an outpouring, it's nothing short of breathtaking", she said.

Thousands of rand have been donated, which will go to Nkomo's family upon its return from his resting place in Zimbabwe, Godley said.

"Meli understood the ethos of Frangelicas, and took it very seriously. He made people feel like they mattered, like they were seen and heard. It's a family-run, community-based business, and he knew his customers and made them feel special," she said.

"He lived his life in ways that mattered. He's an inspiring, shining example of how a kind word, a smile, and genuinely noticing someone matters."

Nkomo was one of the waiting staff when Simon and Elana Godley bought into the business several years ago.

"He grew with the business and

worked his way up to becoming our head waiter. He was one of those people you could see just loved his job," she said.

He was a mentor and role model. She described him as "wonderfully cheerful, optimistic, engaging, lighthearted, playful, and helpful".

For Nkomo, "The hours were never too long, the work never too difficult, the demands never too much, the concerns never too daunting," said Godlev.

Describing it as an "irreplaceable loss", she said Nkomo was a deeply religious man, who "was always there to lift us up, especially through the bad times".

The restaurant posted on Facebook that it had been an honour to share his life, and that it was proud knowing that he had "left such deep footprints" on everyone's hearts.

"Meli's soul should receive an aliya from seeing and hearing all the ways he made this world a better place. May he be uplifted in his journey knowing how many looked forward to seeing him and how much affection he stirred in all of us."

Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler described him as a "sweet and beautiful man whose demeanour never failed to lift one's spirits".

He was described as "a legend of a man". One person said he was a "oneof-a-kind human being". Others said he was a "bright light", a "humble, gentle giant of a man", "a mensch and true example of leadership", and "the epitome of a gentleman with a heart of gold".

People said they were "devastated, shocked, and shattered" by the news. "The world will be a sadder and poorer place without him," one woman said.



Shereen Abramowitz-Sacks posted on Facebook, "I'm absolutely devastated to hear this. We were probably one of the last tables Meli served on Thursday evening before the Easter weekend. I was still going to write a sterling review of him and our beautiful evening at Frangelicas. We were a table of 19, a huge family reunion from four continents. Meli

was our waiter of choice – he was outstanding! He managed our huge crowd beautifully. He was so kind, helpful, and accommodating and gave us a truly wonderful Frangelicas experience, as he always has."

Jackie Jacobson said, "My heart is so sad and broken to wake up and read this news. Our family loved you, and you looked after Morri all the years and knew what we wanted without a menu . Your care for me when he passed on was so comforting always, and you knew the grandchildren by name. Coming to Frangelicas is always

a highlight and even if you never served me, your smile and greetings were there. The last time I saw you was Thursday night, and Gavi and I said, 'Hi Meli' for the last time. You touched the hearts of all who knew you."

Godley said she would put together a book of memories, messages, and stories to be given to his wife, Happiness, together with the donations, "So his family will know Meli through our eyes and understand the impact he made on our lives."

Nkomo is survived by his wife and three children.

Attitude over aptitude, says founder of Oz's first unicorn

SAUL KAMIONSKY

henever King David High School Linksfield (KDL) alumnus David Shein sits at a table, he always looks around and says to himself, "I've got to have the lowest IQ at this table."

That said, Shein's dad always told him, "You haven't done too badly for a bloke who read two books in his life," so he believes his dad would be most surprised to see that his son has recently authored and published a book, *The Dumbest Guy at the Table – How I built Australia's First Unicorn*.

Com Tech Communications, a specialist supplier of networking and communications products, was that unicorn – the term for a start-up company valued at more than a billion dollars, typically in the technology or software sector.

When Shein established Com
Tech in Australia in June 1987,
he had just emigrated from South
Africa with Bachelor of Commerce
and Bachelor of Accounting degrees from
the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

His mother-in-law pointed at him, and said, "You've got to get yourself a job like any normal South African." In 1989, she asked, "Why don't you give me any shares [in Com Tech]?"

Eleven years later, in 2000, Com Tech was sold to Dimension Data at an enterprise value of \$1 billion (R15.6 billion). At that point, Shein's company had more than 1 400 employees, offices throughout Australia, and revenue of \$700 million (R10.8 billion). Com Tech had been profitable since its inception, and never used external debt.

Since the sale, Shein has been an early-stage investor and mentor for several start-ups, many of which have been successfully exited.

A couple of years ago, KDL's former headmaster, Elliot Wolf, sent an email to Shein, reading, "Dear David, I will be coming to Australia and would love to catch up with you. I so fondly remember how you excelled academically and your feats on the

sports field were no different. Your sister was also such an asset to the school."

Shein replied, "Dear Mr Wolf, I neither excelled academically nor on the sports field, nor do I have a sister. I was a naughty kid, and didn't excel in school by any means."

Reflecting on this, Shein said on 13 April 2022 during a Wits-organised webinar titled "How a Witsie built Australia's first unicorn", "I think Mr Wolf definitely got the wrong student. There are

two things that probably saved my life.

One is I did national service. That really was a life-changing experience fortunately

for the right reason. I just grew up in those two years, and they knocked the crap out of me."

His other lifechanging moment
was after concluding
his national service,
when he said to
himself, "You're 19,
you're old, and you've done
absolutely nothing with your

life."

Shein was lucky enough to garner a "fantastic education" at Wits between 1980 and 1984. "If you looked at the marks that I got for my matric, I should never ever have been accepted to any irreputable university, let alone a reputable one like Wits," he said.

Before Shein went to Wits, his brother told their father, "I'm not sure how you can be sending him to university. He's not university material." That was a time when you didn't even have to pay fees to attend Wits.

Some of the best lessons Shein learned came from outside the curriculum. "I remember when I was in the first semester of first-year law, our lecturer said, 'When you answer your exam, just assume that the lecturer knows absolutely nothing because just for stating the obvious, you're going to pass."

Shein has adopted this approach when

communicating with staff, customers, and business partners.

"Albert Wessels, who bought Toyota to South Africa, was the keynote speaker at my graduation," said Shein. "I'll never forget that in his speech, he said, 'In my lifetime, there have been eight recessions and seven booms, so I guess we're heading for another boom.' I have always looked at that knowing that when things are really good, they can't last forever, and when things are really bad, they're not going to last forever. You just have to ride those bad times out."

When Shein emigrated to Australia, he was all set to work at PricewaterhouseCoopers. "Somehow, I met someone in South Africa who had a company in Australia in the technology industry."

Shein said securing a job in this company was his "luckiest break because I was paid badly. I was treated badly. I had a job which felt like someone was pushing me out the door to get to the office. I had no say in what I did, it was almost like I was paid to do, not to think. I just hated my job. My opportunity cost was that low – A\$2 000 (R22 542) a month – that I thought that if I ever wanted to have a go at starting my own company, I might as well do it then."

He founded Com Tech. "Obviously I was good at something," he said. "I was a good salesperson, I was good at attracting and retaining people, I was good at selling to our business partners. But as with most things, there were a lot of smarter people than me, especially in the areas I wasn't good at."

Shein is a firm believer in EQ (emotional intelligence) over IQ. "It's no use getting a degree without understanding how to deal with people," he says. "I would advise anybody that it's your attitude, not your aptitude, that will determine the altitude.

"I always say, 'fair first, tough second'. If I have a blemish on my manager-management style, my biggest is that I was fair for too long, that I probably should have sometimes cut my losses a little bit earlier than I did. I would maybe have tried to educate that person, but you still have to make those tough decisions when you have to."



28 April – 5 May 2022 SA JEWISH REPORT 13

Israel prize winner dedicates award to fellow SA olim

TALI FEINBERG

uth Berman was born in Cape
Town in 1935, and grew up in Sea
Point in a Lithuanian immigrant
family. Her mother's father was the famous
Rabbi Moshe Chaim Mervish, the first fully
qualified rabbi in the Cape Colony, who
has a street named after him in the Mother
City. She attended Habonim and Talmud
Torah, which influenced her love of Hebrew
and her decision to make aliya in 1954.
Incredibly, although she wasn't born Israeli,
her immersion in the Hebrew language is
so extensive, she was awarded the Israel
Prize last week for her trailblazing work in
linguistics.

Making time to speak to the SA Jewish Report amidst numerous media interviews, Berman (nee Aronson) says she dedicates the award to "my fellow South Africans who came to Israel in the 1940s and 1950s, who haven't always received acknowledgement for their tremendous contribution to building Israel. This is especially in regard to those who came from the Zionist youth movements and went on to become leaders in their fields, from medicine to academia to the arts. This award isn't only mine, but theirs."

Berman is Professor Emerita at Tel Aviv University, where she held the chair in Language across the Lifespan. She is a recipient of The EMET Prize for Art, Science and Culture in linguistics (2012) and received an honorary doctorate from Haifa University (2013). She has been a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities since 2013.

Surrounded by books that fill her

apartment in central Tel Aviv, Berman quips that "being a celebrity isn't easy because I can't do my normal work!" However, she's delighted, proud, and grateful to receive the award. She's not the first Israel Prize winner in her household: her partner, Ya'akov Ya'ar, won it in 2007 for his work in architecture. At the age of 92, he still goes into his office in Jaffa every day. "When I called to tell him he let out such a yell that people thought something was wrong! And when I called my daughter who lives in Los Angeles, she said, 'What are you going to wear?" Berman will be presented with the award at the closing ceremony of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

In dedicating her prize to fellow South African *olim*, she says, "This includes the many volunteers among them, including my sister, Adele Rubin, who has been active in Ezra since its inception and who set up the Ethiopian Women's Embroidery Centre in Sderot."

Looking back, she remembers their carefree childhood in Sea Point, "going barefoot down to the sea every day". Their home was particularly Orthodox, and her parents were strictly kosher and *shomrei Shabbos*. "We were raised very Zionist and us three siblings and my parents all settled in Israel. My parents are buried here."

She was also "extremely active in Habonim [now Habonim Dror]. I learnt a lot about Israel and Zionism, and also social values that I still hold dear and can trace back to my time in Habonim." Habonim alumni from around the world have celebrated her award.

"I remember Ruth as a lovely *madricha* from Cape Town, and already a fine Hebrewlanguage scholar," says fellow academic and South African *oleh*, Professor Gideon Shimoni. They followed a similar path from their days in Habonim to excelling in Israel.

Berman feels that both her upbringing and her time in Habonim were driving factors in her decision to make aliya. In addition, her rejection of apartheid was a deciding factor in choosing to leave South Africa. She and her American-born husband, Yitzchak (Isadore) Berman, lived on Moshav Beit Hevrut for 30 years, of which he was a founding member. They had one daughter. After he passed away, she took a sabbatical in France and then returned to settle in Tel Aviv. She says she's a true Tel Avivian, and loves living in the centre of it all.

Asked how she came to be so immersed in Hebrew, she says her teachers at Talmud Torah – she remembers them as Adon Blesvosky and Adon Bitnun – were Israelis who were very forward-thinking, excellent Hebrew educators. Then, when she arrived and studied at Hebrew University, there were few English speakers, so she had no choice but to learn. She and her husband also spoke Hebrew at home. "I love the Hebrew language, reading it, and analysing it," she says.

Berman received a BA degree summa cum laude from the University of Cape Town in languages and literature (1954); an MA degree from Columbia University, New York, in general and applied linguistics (1964); and a PhD from Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in Hebrew language and linguistics (1973).

She began her career teaching English,



but her interest in linguistics was sparked when she studied at the University of Edinburgh on a grant from the British Council, from 1958 to 1959. It was there that she was taught by some of the world's leading linguists.

"At the time, linguistics in Israel was very Anglo-centric, and there was almost nothing on modern linguistic work in Hebrew," she recalls. "I was always a bit of a maverick and I wanted to do something different." So she blazed a trail in the burgeoning field of modern Hebrew linguistics, switching her research focus every 10 years.

Though the average person may not think of linguistics as important, Berman says "language is one of humankind's most valuable and unique possessions, which sets us apart from other species. It's deserving of deep analysis and research."

"Hebrew is quite unique," she says. "It has a special history in that it's both 2 000 years old and 150 years old. Its roots are in Biblical, Mishnaic, and medieval Hebrew, and it's fascinating to see how it has evolved into an everyday language." Berman has particularly led the way in understanding how children acquire Hebrew as a first language, "and I'm proud to say that my students and their students have done abundant research on this".

Though she has been in Israel since the age of 19, Berman's South African accent remains strong. She thanked the community for its support, and hopes that fellow South African *olim* to early Israel will feel like they are standing on the stage beside her when she receives her award.





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14 SA JEWISH REPORT 28 April - 5 May 2022

The man behind the one-woman "Storm in a B-Cup"

Kate Normington may be a Storm in a B-Cup and married to a Jewish actuary, but she isn't "part of the tribe". However, director **Russel Savadier** is. The SA Jewish Report speaks to the actor and director about this one-woman show.

Your name and face are familiar to us all because of your performing career. How would you describe yourself?

Acting is my first love. It always will be. But I think of myself as a story-teller. Whether it's acting, directing, or writing. What I enjoy most about the industry is that we have the ability to touch people's lives, to make them forget about their reality for a short while, and take them on a journey of discovery.

Most people know you as an actor, not a director. What is it about directing that appeals

I haven't directed for quite a while now - and I'd forgotten how much I enjoyed it. To create something from scratch, to have a vision and see

it realised is such a thrill. That can work only if you have a strong creative team around you, and as raw material goes, having Kate and Rowan [Bakker] doesn't get much better. To collaborate with the brilliant Denis

Hutchinson, our lighting designer, and Owen [Bakker], our choreographer, and watch such a beautiful piece of theatre come to life is as thrilling as

How would you describe Kate Normington?

Storm in a B-Cup is such a great description. I can't vouch for the B-cup part, but she's an explosion of talent, isn't she? She's the ultimate "triple threat" (as they refer to it on Broadway). She sings, dances, and acts - all brilliantly.

What drew you to directing her in Storm in a

Kate and I have discussed working together on stage for the longest time. I've known her for the best part

of my adult life and have always been knocked out by her talent. I have always encouraged her to tell her story and find the songs from her career that best illustrate that. When she asked me to help write the script and direct it, I practically bit her hand off. It seems to be a trend of late for theatrical talents

to do a one-person show about their lives. Why do you think this is?

Partly financial, I would think. It's difficult to stage large shows right now. Theatre is still - bizarrely in my opinion – subject to the 50% capacity COVID-19 rules. Restaurants are open with no limits on numbers, yet theatres are restricted. It makes no sense. As a consequence, artists and managements are looking for smaller projects. The one-person show fits the bill.

Why has Kate done this now?

She's at a great stage of her career with an impressive body of work behind her. She felt strongly that now was the perfect time to share that journey with an audience. It has been a dark time for all theatre folk during the pandemic. What impact has it had on you, Kate, and the rest of the cast? It truly has been a very dark and difficult time for most performers in this country. There's been very little financial help from the government and so everyone has had to look at reinventing themselves and find new ways of surviving. Literally, It's been very tough.

Hopefully we're through the worst of it and theatre will



return in all its glory. **Describe the experience** of directing Kate in this show.

Kate is an absolute perfectionist. She demands 100% from everyone - and most of all from herself. She's one of the hardest working actresses I've ever worked with. Our work process was entirely collaborative, and because we've been good friends for all these years, we have a short cut to communicating.

We trust each other's artistic choices completely, so it

was a very enriching experience.

What impact has being Jewish had on your life and career?

I've got to play a lot of Jewish lawyers and doctors (ha ha!). A big breakthrough in my career was playing the Jewish lawyer on *The Big Time*, a wonderful TV series about the Greek community. I played Harold Fisher on Fishy Feshuns, and am about to return to acting soon in a play titled When a Tree Falls, playing a rabbi. So, I'm often the go-to Jewish actor, which I'm always grateful for. What can our audience expect from this show? A wonderfully entertaining musical journey filled with warmth, light, and humour. It's an escape from

everything else that's going on in the world. Audiences that have seen our show have responded positively and in many cases emotionally. It's a show that seems to touch everyone personally.

---- A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies ---

Frank discussion with the president

busy month for the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) culminated last week in an extended and productive meeting with President Cyril Ramaphosa at his home in Johannesburg.

National President Shaun Zagnoev, Vice-President Zev Krengel, National Director Wendy Kahn, and I constituted the delegation from the Board while Ramaphosa was joined at the meeting by National Security Advisor Sydney Mufamadi. It was the first opportunity for our leadership to engage formally with the president since our 2018 Gauteng Council conference, in which he and business leader Stephen Koseff exchanged perspectives on South Africa's challenges and prospects. Some difficult issues were raised and addressed in a frank and open way, while a number of positive, South Africa-focused initiatives were also discussed. The meeting was constructive, and outcomes are being followed up.

Yom Hashoah 2022

For the first time in three years, our communities in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria are this week holding in-person Yom Hashoah gatherings. Thanks to modern technology, we were able to host two very successful virtual commemorative ceremonies during lockdown, but we're grateful to be able to come together physically once more on this important day of solidarity and remembrance. There has been a distinct gain from the experience in that the virtual ceremony has been retained for those unable to attend in person or who prefer to participate online.

ABOVE BOARD Karen Milner

All Jews without exception were targeted for annihilation by Nazi Germany, and while that regime was ultimately defeated, the hateful ideology that underpinned it continues to be propagated in similar forms and various platforms to this day. Remembrance, combined with constant vigilance, is thus a duty incumbent on us all. This year, we pass the baton of remembrance to the next generation to ensure that what took place in those dark years and the lessons we must learn from it are never forgotten.

One of the outstanding examples of this intergenerational transmission in recent years has been the partnership between Holocaust survivor Lily Ebert and her great-grandson, Dov Forman. Together, they have made an extraordinary impact in bringing Lily's story to a global audience, both through the production of the acclaimed book *Lily's Promise*: How I Survived Auschwitz and Found the Strength to Live and via their TikTok video sharing platform, which has gained more than a million followers. For this year's ceremony, we are privileged to be able to present an interview with Ebert specially conducted for the occasion by SAJBD Vice-President Mary Kluk. Kluk also once again headed up the national Yom Hashoah committee, for which we commend and thank her.

• 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

JNF supports Pesach seders in Uganda

he Ugandan Tsyon Beit HaMitzvot community celebrated two seders this year thanks to Ugandan Sarah Nakintu and support from the Jewish National Fund (JNF).

With the JNF's support, Sarah and her colleagues were able to purchase members and their offspring. sufficient provisions to celebrate Pesach in traditional style, koshering their utensils, getting the community involved in baking *matzot*, making their own wine, preparing the seder plate, and setting up tables in their shul for a communal seder.

As well as being a Jewish community leader, Nakintu is a passionate Zionist, member of the Commonwealth Jewish Women's Network, and the highly respected head of the Shalom Women's **Development Initiative Agency** (SWODIA), a Jewish charity in Uganda that supports vulnerable groups including women facing domestic violence, children with special needs, teenage mothers, and the lonely and

often infirm elderly. SWODIA works not only within the small Jewish community but across all segments of Ugandan society.

Nakintu is determined to ensure the future of this small community, imparting the tenets of Judaism to its

She was introduced to the JNF some time back, when, voicing concern about the lack of trees in the area which was responsible for some of the devastation caused by climate



change, the JNF took her community under its wing, giving advice and assistance.

Accolades for Hirsch Lyons public speakers

irsch Lyons Girls High School public speaking team beat 90 other schools to take the runner-up award in the junior division of this year's High School Public Speaking Festival on 6 April. The festival was held during February and March this year.



At the award ceremony with their coach Yehudis Gralnik



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Zero for Israeli customer care

long with the frozen yoghurt and double espresso, I asked for a Coke Zero. I paid, was handed the coffee and "Zero", and waited for my son to add the fillings of his choice to his yoghurt.

Just before heading to the table, I noticed the Coke bottle was still sealed and so not unreasonably, I thought, I asked them for a bottle opener or to please open it. The waitress looked at me as if my request was for her to whip up fresh sushi using a very rare yellowfin tuna found only off the coast of an unhabitable Japanese island.

"We don't have an opener," she said, while dismissively shaking her head and turning to the next, hopefully more reasonable, customer.

For her, the matter was closed.

"Wait! What?" was my less than eloquent response. "Please open this." It was a tense moment, but not long lasting. Realising I was going nowhere, she belligerently snatched the bottle, shouted something to someone at the back, and a moment later, handed me my now drinkable drink.

It was a small but powerful victory for me on the battlefield of Ben Yehuda Street, Jerusalem. A small victory in a war otherwise lost.

Israel, it seems, needs to get out

After two years of relative isolation, it's clear that the country is no longer as accustomed to visitors as it might once have been. With world travel curtailed, and most of us having been forced to "chat amongst ourselves", it might be true of many countries.

> SPECIALS IN-STORE

It means South Africans are even more South African than we have been, Australians more Australian, and Israelis, so much more Israeli. We have all been undiluted and less exposed

to other cultures, influences, and expectations. Aside from the breath taking prices

and understaffed facilities, we also observed fewer people being able or willing to speak in English (even at hotels). Hotel experiences varied wildly, with some offering offensively bad "service" and others, quite the opposite.

This might be part of the reason that after an absence of more than two years from the country (the longest I can recall), I was saddened to feel less at home and more of a visitor than I ever have before.

The tense security situation, especially in Jerusalem, no doubt added to the overall feeling, but the sense of belonging based simply on being Jewish wasn't the prevalent feeling.

I have never felt Israeli, but I have always felt at home. This trip was different.

It's not to say that I didn't love the time spent. I'm blown away by the development, innovation, and progress of the country. I love the spirit of the people, the zest, and the resilience. And I feel anger, hurt, and outrage for that which people are forced to endure because of the threat of terrorism.

I'm proud that my son, an Ashkenazi Jew, married a Yemenite Jew in a ceremony that combined the best of our heritage. I loved that they were married in the mountains outside Jerusalem



and that they will continue to live and work in Tel Aviv. I remain connected to the country on a religious and emotional level that's near impossible to describe.

I just wish that I felt that the feelings were mutual.

Perhaps it will be: next year in Jerusalem.

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Letters

SUPERMARKETS RIPPING OFF PESACH **SHOPPERS**

Further to your article, "Sky-high prices spur innovative shopping" (SA Jewish Report, 14 April 2022), we should all exercise innovative shopping strategies.

When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, food was simple during Pesach. There was no tomato sauce, milk chocolates, Coca Cola, crisps, or mayonnaise. Jam, cream cheese, and cakes and biscuits were home-made.

What really upsets me is the way some supermarkets are ripping us off with their pricing. One supermarket chain started putting out their Pesach products shortly before Purim. Two weeks later, when the other stores in the area filled their Pesach shelves, suddenly the prices dropped by as much as 25%!

Matza that was originally R42.99, came down to R34.99. Shmura matza went from R64.99 to R55. Elite chocolates went from R39.99 to R32.99. My list could go on.

If the store could sell these products at the lower price, why didn't it put them out at the lower price from the outset. Not one of these items was marked "special".

Did others note the drop in price and feel ripped off because they, too, did their Pesach shopping early?

- Concerned shopper, Johannesburg

REMOVE PANDOR OVER CONTEMPT FOR ISRAEL

The statements attributed to Naledi Pandor in the well written article by Nicola Miltz, "Pandor lambasted over 'outrageous' Ukraine/Palestine comparison"

(SA Jewish Report, 14 April 2022) are most disturbing. But it was comforting to note the comments of former Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Arthur Lenk; political commentator Daniel Silke; Steven Gruzd, the head of the Russia-Africa Project of International Affairs Johannesburg, together with the extent to which the South African Jewish Board of Deputies lambasted Pandor.

It's well known that Pandor has publicly expressed support for the Palestinians and has accused Israel of being an apartheid state. Her attempts to compare Israel's response to continued Palestinian aggression with the totally inappropriate invasion by Russia of Ukraine and the

devastation such invasion has wrought on defenceless citizens including women and children shows a degree of partisanship which is indefensible. What causes it to become offensive is that such statements portend an official government stance about the situation.

It's noted with alarming regret that the department of international relations and cooperation, being the organ charged with communicating government's foreign policy, has declined to comment on the substance of the article when called to do so.

It would be appropriate for the Board to lodge a formal complaint to President Cyril Ramaphosa to register its condemnation of Pandor's contemptuous statements at the highest possible level and call for her immediate removal as minister of international relations.

- Leslie Kobrin, Johannesburg



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