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Arsonist fans flames in Joburg suburbs

TALI FEINBERG

A serial arsonist has been terrorising Johannesburg's northern suburbs, and members of the Jewish community fear for their safety.

This predator watches his victims before invading their homes in the early hours of the morning. He often eats, drinks, and even cooks in their homes. He has urinated in bins and defecated on floors. He's a loner who likes fruit, and seems to hate those with privilege. He's athletic, dresses smartly, and may even have a car. He's not known to steal.

Instead, after taking his time, he sets homes alight. He will often start with the couches or mattresses, and once set a bunch of teddy bears on fire. He's known to add an accelerant, and watch as people desperately try to put out the flames.

It sounds like something from a horror movie, but this serial arsonist is preying on upmarket homes in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, especially in Hyde Park, Houghton, Oaklands, Benmore Gardens, Illovo, and Craighall Park.

Many of the homes lie within a 0.5km radius of each other. The central point is where Jan Smuts Avenue becomes William Nicol Drive. Most of the arsonist's trail of destruction is within 2km of that point.

"My family and I have had trauma counselling and cancelled our holiday after our neighbours' home was set alight," says advocate Stanley Pincus SC, after a house in Oaklands was burned last week.

The arsonist roamed the area for three nights. In the early hours of Monday, 25 April, he chose his target. Pincus and his family were woken to "flames, glass shattering, horrible smoke, and screams".

Somehow, their neighbours – a couple and their dogs – managed to escape. When Pincus' son-in-law saw the neighbour running outside in just a pair of shorts, he gave him his shirt. "Rooms are completely destroyed. The TVs melted. On Monday, I didn't even go to work – we're

all very shaken," says Pincus.

The arsonist's crimes may have begun two years ago, and there may have been at least 14 incidents. But they made the news only recently after a Johannesburg resident highlighted her suspicions on Facebook. CCTV cameras have captured images of a slim, confident, clean-shaven man with a dark complexion, who is possibly in his mid-20s.

Residents fear that he's getting more dangerous. In early April, he beat up an elderly man before locking him in a room and setting his house alight. He was saved by a security guard, but remains in hospital on a ventilator.

A Jewish resident who asked not be identified says that in the middle of last year, the alleged arsonist set her neighbours' house alight. The neighbours were away at the time. "At 23:45, I took my dog out and noticed a car parked on the grass outside. When I came back, it had disappeared. Then at 05:00, I heard sirens. The neighbours' house was engulfed in flames.

"A brick had been thrown through the window," she says. "Later, I remembered the car, and looked on our CCTV cameras. We saw him driving up and down the road, parking on my grass, and going towards the neighbours. He sauntered over there – totally relaxed! He took nothing. He just wanted to burn the house down."

Near the end of 2021, the alleged arsonist beat up an elderly couple, locked them in a room, and set their home alight. They were saved by neighbours who pulled them through a window.

Andre Snyman is the founder of eblockwatch, a community crime-fighting communication system. He knows the couple, and says they were admitted to hospital. After being discharged, they didn't even go home, they went straight to the airport and left the country.

Snyman has since led the charge to catch the alleged arsonist. He says that in each case, people have saved victims, but it could have been so much worse. In one instance, children were in the house.

He says there was some pushback from people who



Happy 74th

Eti Teitelbaum, Megan Tobias and Lior Kolman celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut at Yeshiva College

See story on page 2

didn't want the news of a serial arsonist out in the open, mainly because it could affect property values. However, when people started getting hurt, Snyman felt he had to speak up. He's now working closely with security companies including Fidelity Security Services, which is offering a reward of R100 000 for any information. Its tip-off line is 083 939 0300.

"He's now pushing the envelope. In the most recent fire, he cut the hose pipe. He may be out to kill," says Snyman, pointing out that it's important to share information as soon as possible. For example, if a fire has just started, the arsonist may still be in the area.

Another resident described the arsonist as a "sociopath" who was seen drinking cider on her roof before setting her home alight. That was after he opened

a jar of sundried tomatoes and smeared them on the curtains.

Many of the homes are in Ward 90. Councillor for this ward, Martin Williams, says, "In December, when I raised the alleged arsonist issue with the City of Johannesburg's acting divisional chief of fire safety and research, I received a list of criteria that must be present before arson could be confirmed.

"In response to a further request to the city, in mid-January, I received a spreadsheet which didn't reflect what was being reported on social media. On 5 April, Colonel Owen King, South African Police Services (SAPS) station commander for Bramley, which covers some of

Continued on page 2 >>



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“Israel belongs to all Jews, whether they live there or not”

SAUL KAMIONSKY

“We’re here today to celebrate 74 years of the undoubtedly most important achievement of the Jewish people, the establishment of the state of Israel,” said Israeli ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky during the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Yom Ha’atzmaut event on 4 May at Yeshiva College in Glenhazel.

It would be difficult for Jews in South Africa to imagine their life without the Jewish state, Belotsercovsky said. “Even if we’re far from it, it’s part of us, very close to us. It’s our state, and we’re all part of it in our hearts.”

The SAZF held a festive event at Yeshiva’s campus on Wednesday evening that included a musical and dance show including pupils from Jewish schools and youth-movement members. The evening was compered by South African Union of Jewish Student leaders Ben Atie and Bethia Milner. The headline act was a performance by the award-winning Ndlovu Youth Choir.

“The state of Israel, when it was proclaimed, was considered nothing less than a miracle,” said Belotsercovsky. “A small number of Jews tried to create a country on a barren piece of land, surrounded by Arab countries that were trying to destroy the young Jewish nation. We’re proud to say that we’ve come a long way since those days.”

He said Israel was a recognised and respected member of the international community. Not only did it have diplomatic relations with 169 countries and host 91 embassies, it was known as the Silicon Valley of the Middle East.

“Today 10% of the workforce in Israel works in the hi-tech industry,” said Belotsercovsky. “Hi-tech companies own 40% of the value of the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, and 15% of the Israeli GDP [gross domestic product] is produced in the hi-tech industry.”

He also said Israeli start-ups had attracted billions of dollars in investment in 2020.

“More than 250 leading international conglomerates have research and development facilities in Israel. Eight Israelis got a Nobel Prize in science.”

All these achievements were made possible because Israel was an open and vibrant multicultural society and a thriving democracy, Belotsercovsky said. “This political system gives a stake in the country to every citizen.”

The other reason for Israel’s success was that “the Israeli system sees potential in every member of society. One of the main aims of the government is to create a system in which everyone can exploit their potential. Thanks to this, Israel is among the top countries in the world. It’s definitely something to be proud of. To conclude, I would like to stress that Israel belongs to all Jews, whether they live there or not. It’s our country, and you can rely on it at any time.”

Rabbi Yossy Goldman

– life rabbi emeritus at Sydenham Shul



Torah Thought

Power or providence?

So, Israel is 74 years old. Well, actually we’re 3 000 years old, but whether it’s our modern state or our ancient people, the incredible truth is equally startling. We’re here! And we continue to survive every attempt to destroy our people and our spirit.

Isn’t it miraculous? How else could we have possibly survived all the attempts to drive us into the sea? In 1948, before our astonishing victory in six short days in 1967, and in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, or even in the first Gulf War in 1991 when Saddam Hussein fired 39 Scud missiles on Israel.

I was part of a South African Zionist Federation solidarity mission to Israel then, and I stood on the rubble of a Jewish house completely destroyed by one Scud missile. Thank G-d, no one was home! And there were another 38 such miracles. And the war against the Jews continues unabated, with terror attacks a tragic daily occurrence in Israel today. If Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, or others had half the chance, we’d all be dead and buried, G-d forbid. Thank G-d indeed for all His miracles.

But our survival also bears testimony to the indomitable Jewish spirit. Israel is tiny but tenacious, small but super heroic. We’re punching way above our weight in the military, cyberspace, technology, medicine, agriculture, artificial intelligence, and more.

Jews are less than 0.2% of the world’s population and yet we have won more than 22% of Nobel Prizes! Of course, we burst with pride at that phenomenal achievement, but that’s a number so shocking that it’s almost embarrassing!

And there are more Jews studying Torah in Israel today than at any time in our history.

How is it that the mightiest empires of history have declined and disappeared to be remembered only in museums or history books while the numerically insignificant Jews are still here and flourishing?

I’ll answer a serious question with a light-hearted anecdote.

Moshe Dayan was driving on the highway and got pulled over for speeding. The traffic officer took one look and, naturally, recognised the famous offender. But he said, “I’m going to give you a ticket Mr Dayan because you, of all people, should be setting a better example for our drivers.”

Whereupon Dayan responded. “Look, you see I have only one eye. Do you want me to look at the road or the speedometer?”

The Jewish people have never looked at the speedometer. Mathematically, scientifically, logically, we shouldn’t exist. We have endured Holocausts,

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* one hour ahead of SA time

Arsonist fans flames in Joburg suburbs

>>Continued from age 1

suburbs, said, ‘Since 1 January 2021, to date I have received three arson cases. One in Illovo, one in Hyde Park, and one in Marlboro Gardens.’

“Again, this didn’t reflect the stories circulating,” says Williams. “King has since said the police would set up a team to investigate. One problem is that there doesn’t seem to be central database on alleged arson attacks.”

Sean Jammy, chief operating officer of CAP Security, says, “CAP was first made aware of an incident that matched this criminal’s modus operandi in Illovo in July 2021. Our team has been relentlessly collecting information on all incidents since then and feeding back to affected communities. We’re working with the SAPS on a high level to build a profile of the perpetrator and apprehend him.

“The criminal responsible for these arson incidents is an African male who operates alone. He appears to have an understanding of suburban homes, and is able to move between properties, evading electric fences and scaling walls.

“Ensure that you have an alarm system with good exterior detection and when it triggers, get your armed-response company to do a thorough inspection; be alert to suspicious activity – dogs that are uneasy, or strange noises; install fire and heat detection in each living space; and ensure that you have adequate fire extinguishing tools,” he says.

“Should you need assistance in ensuring your home is fire safe, reach out to us on info@zaka.org.za,” says ZAKA Fire Unit spokesperson Kayla Ginsberg.

The SA Jewish Report reached out to various SAPS officers, the City of Johannesburg spokesperson, and the city’s acting divisional chief of fire safety, but they all chose not to comment.

In an emergency, contact ZAKA Fire Unit’s control room on 086 18 000 18.

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SA *oleh* mourns friend killed in Ariel terror attack

TALI FEINBERG

“We were like brothers,” says South African *oleh* Nathaniel Landau (25), reeling from the murder of his close friend, Vyacheslav (Daniel) Golev (23), by terrorists while on guard duty outside Ariel on Shabbat on 30 April.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* in his South African accent after visiting the Golev family shiva house on 3 May, Landau said, “I was on the way back *motzei* Shabbos to the university because I have studies on a Sunday. When I put on my phone, I heard there was a *pigua* [terror attack] in Ariel, and someone was killed.

At the age of 25, this South African *oleh* has already had two friends killed in senseless shootings.

“When I heard that the person protected his fiancé, and that he was from Beit Shemesh and came from a haredi family, I knew it was him. He always did guard shifts with his fiancé. There was no way they were apart from each other. I just burst into tears.” He sent his friend a WhatsApp message, “Please let me know you guys are okay and that nothing has happened to you.” That message went unanswered.

Landau and his family made aliya in August 1998 to Beit Shemesh. “I met Daniel [Golev’s Hebrew name] in high school, in Grade 7. We became good friends. We had a lot of conversations about faith and our purpose in the world. Daniel made aliya with his family from Russia, and he used to tell me stories about Russian history.

“He was very clever – In Israel when you do matric, you can get up to five points in each subject. He got five points in English, maths, physics, and computer science. We did all of these subjects together. He was very strong, physically and mentally.”

The friends stayed in contact after high school. “After we finished army service, we both enrolled in Ariel University. He studied criminology and psychology. I studied molecular biology. This was our second year at the university. Last year, we both lived in Ariel, at the dorms. We had meals together, mainly on Shabbos.

“He was always there for his family, as the eldest of seven siblings, and for his friends. I had an operation a couple of months ago, and I had to cancel my lease with the dorms because my recovery was going to take long. But thank G-d, it wasn’t as long as expected, so I got back to university, but I didn’t have anywhere to stay. Daniel immediately offered for

me to stay at his dorm. I stayed for the whole semester.

“In one of our conversations a couple of weeks ago, we were talking about family and our plans for the future. The reason he decided to study criminology and psychology was because his dream was to become a psychologist. For his degree, he had to do volunteer work, and he decided to volunteer at the police station in Petach Tikva. There he worked with detectives and police officers.”

When Golev’s death was confirmed, “my friends brought me home. I didn’t sleep all of Saturday night. We were waiting to hear what time the funeral was going to be. We were waiting to hear if he was going to be buried that same night or not. I was at the cemetery at 13:00 to make sure everything was set up [the funeral was at 16:00].”

Golev and his fiancé, Victoria Fligelman, became engaged just a few weeks ago. Hundreds attended his funeral.

Hamas has since claimed responsibility for the attack. Golev is the 16th Israeli to

be killed in a wave of terror attacks since mid-March. Israel usually experiences about 15 to 20 terrorism-related deaths per year.

Though Hamas has encouraged and praised the previous attacks, this is the first time that the terror group has taken credit for an attack in the current spate of violence.

Two Palestinians were arrested on Sunday, 1 May, by Israeli forces in connection with the attack. According to Israeli media, the attackers planned the shooting for weeks, including acquiring a stolen vehicle and firearms and scouting the area for potential targets.

Ariel is an Israeli settlement in the central West Bank, about 16.5km east of the Green Line. It was founded in 1978. This is the first attack on Israelis in this region in the latest spate of violence. However, residents say it’s no different to attacks inside the Green Line.

“I’m saddened by the senseless loss of life of such a young man,” says Dr Yael Maizels, lecturer and scientist at Ariel University. Her husband, Hillel Maizels, is the rabbi of Ohel Efraim, an Ashkenazi shul in Ariel, and son of the late Rabbi Desmond Maizels of Cape Town.

“Because the attack was on Shabbat, I found out only after shul on Shabbat morning after my husband heard something from a Magen David Adom volunteer,” she says. “The past few months have unfortunately been tense all over the country: Beer Sheva, Hadera, Bnei Brak, Tel Aviv, and now Ariel. All Israelis have been a bit more cautious. I don’t think this feeling is unique to Ariel specifically or *Yehuda V’Shomron* [Judea and Samaria] in general – it’s countrywide.”



Both Beit Shemesh and Ariel have South African connections. South Africa is partnered with Beit Shemesh in the Jewish Agency’s Partnership2gether Peoplehood Platform (previously known as Partnership 2000), which connects Jewish and Israeli communities in 46 city-to-city and region-to-region partnerships.

Telfed Chief Executive Dorron Kline lives in Beit Shemesh and says the city and country is mourning a “hero and a beautiful soul”, but at the same time, they are “living their lives” and refusing to let terror affect them. Beit Shemesh is a multifaceted city of 150 000 people. Golev was from the ultra-Orthodox community, but people from all backgrounds came to his funeral, Kline says.

Kline is also the driving force behind the new medical degree in English in Israel aimed at South African students. The degree starts with a four-year pre-med at Ariel University. Maizels lectures in the course.

He says there are 16 000 students at Ariel University, “a considerable amount of which are Israeli Arabs. It’s a great example of co-existence. The university has its own security and is very safe. To travel there to and from Tel Aviv or Petach Tikva is one bus ride, on the highway.”

He says South Africans have been involved in Ariel since its inception, and there’s a hotel built by South Africans that’s still in operation.

This is the second friend that Landau has lost to terror. Four years ago, his friend, Yovel Mor Yosef, was doing a night shift in the army, protecting civilians at a bus stop near Jerusalem. A terrorist drove by and started shooting, killing Yosef and another soldier on the spot.

At the age of 25, this South African *oleh* has already had two friends killed in senseless shootings. As Israel marked Yom Hazikaron, he shared pictures of himself, Golev, and Yosef on hikes, hanging out with friends, and at yeshiva. Now, all that’s left are memories, telling their stories, and honouring their legacies.

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"I'm humbled by my son," says Devorah Kay on Eli's life work

NICOLA MILTZ

"We will be ok, we will get through this," is the mantra that gets Devorah Kay through each day as she mourns the death of her beloved son, Eliyahu (Eli) Kay, the South African *oleh* who was shot dead by a Hamas terrorist in the Old City near the Kotel where he worked as a tour guide.

She repeats it over and over as she wakes with renewed vigour to continue the work her son started but wasn't able to finish.

"And we are ok," she told the *SA Jewish Report* this week from London, where she and her husband, Avi, have chosen to mark their first Yom Hazikaron since Eli's passing by addressing hundreds of children and young adults.

One would expect the Kays, still mourning their son who was taken from them at the age of 25 last November, to be in Israel as the country commemorates its fallen soldiers and victims of terror.

But, although they are very much there in spirit, having conducted numerous interviews and video presentations before leaving for the United Kingdom (UK), the Kays felt it right to take the story of their son to the world in person and actively continue his work in his absence.

"What does it really mean to be ok? I mourn my son deeply every day. I miss him like crazy. I miss what our family was before and will never be again. However, Eli left us with a big job. The tragedy would be even more tragic if my family and I had fallen apart – that would be the tragedy of Eli's death. So, we push on, continuing with worthy projects that he couldn't finish," she said.

Eli's untimely death caused a groundswell of grief the world over. By all accounts, he was the embodiment of the Israeli spirit, dedicated to the ideals of a thriving Jewish homeland.

"I'm humbled by my child. I have learnt more about my child at his death than I knew about him in his life. We have made the choice to be strong, to move forward, and to take the lessons he has taught us about tolerance, peace, and diversity and bring them into our lives," Devorah said.

"It will never be normal. It's a different kind of normal. I will still allow myself to mourn. I'm still working through the loss because it's huge and will be with me forever. But I won't be a victim."

The Kay family have made a choice, she said, "a choice to continue Eli's passion for Israel and life's work, and to move forward in this way through our grief."

This week, her three children, sons Kasriel, Chanan, and daughter, Na'ama, together with their grandparents in the UK and South Africa, have attended numerous events commemorating Eli's life and other

fallen soldiers and victims of terror. Her children joined hundreds of thousands of diaspora Jews during Masa's Yom Hazikaron ceremony. The ceremony, held alongside Israeli government officials and Jewish community leaders commemorates Israel Defense Forces soldiers and victims of terror in Israel and throughout global Jewish communities, with a special emphasis on lone soldiers who have died and immigrants killed in hostilities and terrorism.

Against the backdrop of international flags representing Jewish communities around the world, members of Masa's global community and Jewish leaders laid memorial wreaths and lit candles. Chanan lit a torch in uniform to honour his brother.

While this has been a sad week for Jews worldwide, for the Kays, it has been purpose filled and affirming.

"Eli left us, and we intend to dedicate our lives to continue his legacy. There's a lot of work to do, especially in areas that Eli was passionate about such as land, education, and agriculture. This is what we plan to spend our lives doing, playing a vibrant role in Israeli society and contributing to the Jewish state, honouring his memory," she said.

"Our dream is to create a new yishuv because he dreamt about unity and living life on a mixed kibbutz."

The family and Telfed have recently come together 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 his memory.

Eli grew up in South Africa, and was a beloved member of the Jewish community. After school, he attended yeshiva, and was adamant that he wanted to live and work in Israel, so made aliya. He went on to serve as a squad commander in the paratroopers, became a kibbutz manager, and was loving his life touring the country, educating others as a guide, and building a spiritual life in the Jewish homeland.

Though he wasn't able to finish building that life, his family is now 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," Avi said.

"Eli's birthday is on Shavuot, and this is when they will officially open the home. Our family has set up a non-profit organisation called The Eli Kay Project, an umbrella for all the non-profit projects we plan to do to. We will launch a Sefer Torah in Eli's name on his birthday," he said.

"It will be a travelling Torah. First, it will be written all over the world – in South Africa, where Eli grew up; in Australia, where he went to yeshiva; in Israel, which he loved; the UK, 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. It will have its own waterproof backpack, and will be small enough to carry."

"These projects are how we as a family continue to stay positive, concentrating on doing things in the areas that Eli loved. The support of the community in Modi'in, wider Israel, and South Africa continues to be a huge source of comfort."



Devorah and Eli Kay

Israeli-Palestinian ceremony 'a beacon

TALI FEINBERG

"Yom Hazikaron is a deeply painful and sacred day. But so often, the Palestinian narrative is erased, which leads to greater despair for both sides," says Basil Dubb, the co-chair of the local Jewish Democratic Initiative (JDI), explaining the organisation's participation in a joint Palestinian-Israeli Yom Hazikaron ceremony on Tuesday, 3 May.

"As the organisers so eloquently put it, 'By acknowledging the pain of those living on the other side, the ceremony offers us all the choice to walk a new path: the path of respect, equality, freedom – and ultimately peace,'" Dubb says.

He hopes this is something the local Jewish community can embrace. "If as Jews and South Africans, we believe that peace isn't just possible but necessary and urgent, then all Jewish communities around the world must play their part in the educational, political, and socio-cultural process of peace-building," says Dubb. "Compassionate listening and engagement, even when it's excruciatingly painful, is a part of that process. The ceremony strives to remind people that war isn't a predetermined fate, but a human choice."

The Israeli-Palestinian Joint Memorial Day ceremony isn't

new. It has been hosted for the past 17 years by Combatants for Peace and the Parents Circle Families Forum. Combatants for Peace is made up predominantly of former fighters from both sides of the conflict who have since rejected violence. The Parents Circle Families Forum is an organisation of more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian families, all of whom have lost immediate family members to the conflict.

The event is the largest Israeli-Palestinian peace event in history. Last year 300 000 people joined in live, and more than one million people streamed it afterwards.

"It has become a beacon of hope for the peace community worldwide," says Dubb. "JDI got involved in sponsoring the event last year to support the peace movement. As an organisation dedicated to democracy, peace, and equality, we stand in solidarity with all those who strive towards those ideals. We believe in amplifying the global Jewish solidarity movement towards a more democratic, peaceful, and secure Israel without the threat of occupation."

He points out that "so many of the top former heads of the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and Shin Bet [Israel's internal security agency] have stated unequivocally that the ongoing occupation is one of the greatest security threats to Israel's national security. This ceremony is one way to address such a statement and show



Israeli bereaved parent Boma Inbar tearfully tells how he lost his son Yotam in a military operation in 1995

Sacrifice and sanctity – paying tribute to Israel’s fallen



SAUL KAMIONSKY

“Ever since Israel was established, our people have had to fight for their existence. Eight wars have been fought, 24 068 have given their lives in active duty, and more than 4 000 as victims of terrorist attacks. This year, we’re celebrating 74 years of independence. We’ve come a long way since the early days. Israel has become a leading nation in many fields.”

So said Israeli ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky. He was speaking during the Yom Hazikaron commemoration organised by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) on 3 May at Yeshiva College, Glenhazel.

“The cost of Israel’s continued existence will be heard through the deafening silence of the buried souls we mourn tonight,” said Rowan Polovin, SAZF chairperson. “We grieve over the loss of soldiers and security forces who sacrificed their lives defending the life of our beloved state of Israel.”

He also pointed out the thousands of individual victims of terror. “[They were] mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers and sisters, Jews and non-Jews, who were needlessly murdered simply because they chose to live and thrive in the world’s only Jewish state.”

Belotsercovsky said that in spite of Israel’s achievements, the country was still “paying the terrible price of its existence. Unfortunately, our enemies refuse to accept the existence of the Jewish state and continue their attempts to destroy us. We need to defend ourselves.”

On that note, he said the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was powerful “not necessarily because of sophisticated arms or advanced technologies, but because it’s a people’s army.”

Not only that, but, “The IDF is the symbol of unity between Israel and the Jews worldwide,” said Belotsercovsky. “Many young people from Jewish communities all over the world come to Israel and feel the need to contribute to its defence.”

Many South African *olim* had done their military service with the IDF, he said. “Unfortunately, there were 88 who fell, and 11 who were murdered by terrorists. Eli Kay, an amazing young man, was the last of the 11 killed on his way to the Western Wall on 21 November 2021.”

This year alone, 14 souls in Israel were lost to terror, said Polovin. “Five people lost their lives in the terrorist attack carried out on the evening of 29 March in Bnei Brak. This month, two childhood friends, Eytam Magini and Tomer Morad, from Kfar Saba, both 27 years old, alongside Barak Lufan, were murdered by a Palestinian terrorist while enjoying themselves in

“THE COST OF ISRAEL’S CONTINUED EXISTENCE WILL BE HEARD THROUGH THE DEAFENING SILENCE OF THE BURIED SOULS WE MOURN TONIGHT.”

Dizengoff Street in the heart of Tel Aviv. Last week, a young Jewish man in his 20s was in a guard booth with his fiancé when the shooters opened fire. He shielded his fiancé with his body and saved her life, but unfortunately lost his.”

According to the Mishnah, one person is like a whole world. “They had families who loved them and were proud of them. Now they are gone, and nobody can fill the terrible void that they have left,” said Belotsercovsky.

The only thing we can do, Belotsercovsky said, “is hug the families, be with them, and promise them that they will never be alone. The sacrifice of their loved ones will be remembered forever.”

of hope for peace’



The audience at the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Memorial Day ceremony in 2019

that the occupation does nothing but perpetuate violence against both Israelis and Palestinians.”

He says the memorial is “also about showing Israeli society the massive support there is in the Jewish and non-Jewish world for a diplomatically and citizen-led resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”.

“By far the most moving element of the ceremony is the testimony from parents and family members, Israeli and Palestinian, who have lost children, brothers, sisters, parents, and partners to this conflict,” he says.

“As the organisers say, ‘By mourning together we begin to shift public opinion on a massive scale.’

Dubb says that the fact that the ceremony attracts more than one million viewers worldwide speaks for itself. “Anyone who watches even part of the ceremony will experience the unique magic

and hope it provides. The ceremony honours the lives of all those who have fallen victim to decades of violence, and provides a framework for escaping and ending this violence once and for all.

“When we begin to process our pain as Jews who have seen

so many of our brothers and sisters die as a result of this conflict and occupation, and the pain of those who many see as ‘the enemy’, we can begin to heal and find a vision for the future. By fostering relationships with Palestinians, we can bring about a viable and permanent peace resolution.”

Furthermore, as South African Jews, “we have seen first-hand the powerful and even painful work of developing a shared society for all. Not that the circumstances are the same, but much of the trauma is the same. Violence is not a now-issue, it’s a forever issue. It lives in each cell of our bodies and is carried down epigenetically through the generations. We want to see Israel be a thriving, peaceful society that can be a light unto the nations as it was always imagined to be. The ceremony is a step in that direction.”

Dubb understands that some may feel

uncomfortable with the ceremony, but he asks, “If peace-building and shared healing is controversial, then what hope do we have as Jews for the future of Israel? We Jews are one of the few persecuted minorities in the world who have achieved what so many can only dream of: self-determination and a nation state where we can freely and openly express our culture, ethnicity, religion, and identity. This is no small feat. Surely, we Jews have an added responsibility to be an example to others, to show the power of peace and the evil of war?”

He says that JDI understands that many hold the view that there’s “no partner for peace”, “but it’s perhaps more accurate to admit that neither the Knesset nor the PA [Palestinian Authority] are committed to peace in this moment.

“Perhaps it’s time to move away from the hope that this peace agreement will be initiated by the governments, and towards the understanding that it’s the will of the people that will change the facts on the ground. To have a partner for peace, we Jews must begin to build and safeguard relationships with Palestinians who want the same as us: peace and self-determination. This isn’t a controversial statement. A two-state solution is the official policy of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Zionist Federation, the South African government, and the Israeli government.”

This and past ceremonies can be streamed online.

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Learning from our elders

I had a conversation with an Israeli grandson of a Holocaust survivor this week. It gave substance to thoughts that were ruminating in my head all week about Yom Hashoah, Yom Hazikaron, and Yom Ha’atzmaut – especially about the difference between the two memorial days.

I recall that when I was first in Israel, as a 10 or 12-year-old child, Israelis didn’t seem to talk much about the Holocaust. It seemed that they didn’t want to be reminded of it despite so many survivors living in the country.

I remember at the time asking my Israeli cousin why this was because at King David Linksfield, we spent a great deal of time learning about this horrific part of our recent history.

My cousin – about the same age as me – told me that Israelis weren’t proud of this time that Jews went “like lambs to the slaughter”, and so they didn’t want to it to be a big part of the curriculum. Rather, they wanted to show their prowess as heroes, people who could defend themselves, even to the death.

Now, you must understand that these were the thoughts of children, not sophisticated adults. We were in primary school at the time, and this is what he and, consequently, I understood.

It bothered me for a long time because it didn’t make sense to me not to shout out for generations to come about what had happened. It seemed that if you didn’t make a big deal of what had happened, it would be very easy to forget and allow it to happen again.

Obviously, whatever the thinking was in Israel at the time has changed substantially. Today, so much effort, time, and money has been put into building the Holocaust memory bank to ensure that Jews and the rest of the world will never forget a time when six million people were brutally murdered simply because they were Jewish.

However, the discussion I had with this young Israeli this week was about how his grandfather, who had managed to get to Israel after being freed from a concentration camp, had for decades not spoken about his past.

He was ashamed, according to his grandson. He didn’t want his emotional and physical scars to be shared. He didn’t want people to feel sorry for him or worse, to be ashamed of him. He wanted to be like all other Israelis – tough, strong, not letting anyone mess with them.

By the time this young boy was born, his grandfather had told his story because times had changed, and he was respected for having survived to tell the story.

But on Yom Hashoah a number of years back, the boy found his elderly grandfather staring at a crumpled photograph of his mother and sister who had perished in the war.

It was then that his grandfather explained to him that in Germany, Jews had money, power, and respect until Hitler came to power. Then, they had nothing, not an army, not a weapon, not a community that could stand behind them. Everything was taken from them, including their dignity and pride.

He told his grandson that he wanted to fight. He wanted to defend himself and his family, but he had nothing to do it with.

With pride, the old man told his grandson how today, we have a country and, no matter where in the world we live, we have a Jewish State. We have a place to call our own no matter what happens in the rest of the world.

So, if Israel is at war or battling, it’s still a country, a land that will always be there for Jews. That piece of land is to be defended and protected so that Jews can stand proud and fight off their enemies. Nobody can haul Jews off anywhere or kill them as they please anymore.

When I heard this story this week, I understood how Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron may both be days of memorial, remembering those who died, but they are very different. Yom Hashoah is about the devastation of people who couldn’t protect themselves no matter how much they wanted or tried to do so. They were at the mercy of the countries in which they lived. However, those we remember on Yom Hazikaron died in defence of the Jewish State, and although the sadness of their loss is just as great, they died defending Israel. They died so that we could continue to defend this country that we hold so dear.

Although the young man’s grandfather has since passed away, the lesson he taught his grandson was invaluable, and hopefully, I have passed it on to you. So, let it be with pride that we this week commemorate those who died for Israel and celebrate what we have in the 74th year of a Jewish State.

And in the same way this young man honoured his grandfather this week, Jewish people around the world are honouring the elderly over Shabbos when we read Kedoshim. “Rise in the presence of the elderly, honour the ages,” we will read in shul this Shabbat.

The chief rabbi this week told us that a late Israeli cabinet minister, Uri Orbach, created an initiative to pay tribute to our elders on this particular weekend every year.

The initiative, Shabbat VeHadarta, calls on us to give flowers to “oldies” before Shabbos, call someone, or visit them. Invite an elder to come for a Shabbos meal. The bottom line is, let’s make friends with people who are older and inevitably wiser than us. Let’s reach out to those who may not have as many friends as they used to – or aren’t able to get about much.

These people are our connection to days gone by. Listen to their stories. Record them. Let’s be the example to our children of how to treat our elders. Let this weekend be the start of beautiful relationships.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



“Never again” isn’t a slogan, it’s a commitment

OPINION

PAUL MIRBACH



Back in Zimbabwe, I was too young and self-absorbed to understand the ramifications of the Holocaust. My Barmitzvah teacher, Reverend Szlapak, was a Holocaust survivor. We called him “Shlapsie”, and often played tricks on him. We made fun of him and his quirks, but we were always aware of the tattoo on his left arm. Thinking back, I feel guilty about the tricks we played on him. And yet, he instilled in me a way to find meaning in so many prayers and how to daven.

Later, as a teenager in South Africa, at Herzlia school and in Habonim, we observed Yom Hashoah out of respect as Jews and as a way of identifying with Israel’s day of mourning. But we were too enamoured by our Zionist righteousness to concentrate on the people, the survivors, who lived among us and in our communities. Youth has a way of doing that. As movement members, our passion to make aliya often overshadowed our ability to truly connect with Holocaust survivors.

Little did we know or take an interest in what our friends, the descendants of Holocaust survivors, went through in their home environments. We had no idea.

All that changed for me on our Hadracha Course in 1978/1979, when we visited Yad Vashem and Kibbutz Mashoah and participated in Shoah educational seminars. It was in Mashoah that we confronted the conundrum of humans doing to other humans the incomprehensible and trying to understand how the most cultured society in Europe could suddenly become the most coldly barbaric. We learned that no explanation could ever explain or justify the genocidal frenzy that gripped German society as well as the countries



Holocaust survivors rescued from the war in Ukraine arrive at Ben Gurion Airport

they conquered – from France, the hub of European gentility, to Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, and Latvia – who all seized the opportunity to embrace their antisemitism publicly, elevating it to the status of a national value.

And still, the significance and full ramifications of the Holocaust went over our heads.

It was only once I made aliya that I began to comprehend fully the connection between the Holocaust and the imperative necessity for Israel’s survival on an elemental level as opposed to it being an intellectual cliché. But, back in the 1980s, society in Israel wasn’t yet ready to embrace the psychological scars that haunted survivors. They lived a double life: on the one hand, they built the country, and on the other, in the privacy of their homes, they grappled with their nightmares and the feelings of guilt that they had survived, too ashamed, perhaps, to tell anyone. “Led like lambs to the slaughter” was the passive-aggressive finger of accusation pointed at survivors, and this further encouraged them to suppress their post-traumatic stress disorder. Because that’s what it was.

Only later did the atmosphere in the country change, and we began to understand the true heroism of resistance, whether it was armed resistance in the ghettos and among the partisans,

or the spiritual resistance of concentration camp survivors who determinedly clung to survival and in so doing defied the Nazis and the master plan devised at the Wannsee Conference.

Personal testimonies made us aware not only of the enormity of the horrors of the Holocaust, but also its impact on the lives of our fathers and mothers, or our grandparents, and the impact it had on our lives, our psyches, even our parenting. Because, as Zimra Vigoda writes, trauma can be intergenerational.

However, it has always been a struggle to find a way for the full magnitude of how the victims suffered to pierce our consciousness. It was so long ago, and it’s so removed from our lives that it’s hard for us to relate. We paid tribute, but not empathy. Much of that has to do with our inability to visualise their suffering and the inhumane reality they lived.

Now, the Holocaust generation is passing on. Soon, there will be no one left to sit before us and tell his or her personal story. We need to think about how we can bring remembrance to life so that it touches us, so that we can truly honour the memories of the victims and the survivors. How can we humanise their experiences? How can we use it to make us feel their terror and desperation, their determination to survive, and also understand the resignation of those who accepted their fate? That’s the challenge that faces us.

Recently, I came across an extraordinary project that uses art to connect us to our tortured past. It’s called the David Labkovski Project. It manages to bridge the gap between having to imagine their life, fears, and hopelessness and being able to immerse ourselves into the scenes and almost

experience it ourselves through an uncannily accurate portrayal of life during this period in his art. When there are no more personal stories of survivors to move us, this will become the way to make Yom Hashoah touch us.

The Holocaust underlines the imperative necessity for a Jewish homeland. After centuries of living as guests in countries whose attitude towards us vacillated between grudging, fragile hospitality to

rejection and persecution, the true extent of how much we weren’t wanted was brought home by a Final Solution and the genocide with which most European countries (and others) willingly co-operated.

The purveyor of this genocide, Germany, was a defeated, humiliated country that lost World War I, forced to pay crippling reparations. It was this national emotion that precipitated Hitler and his party to adopt the emblem of a Phoenix rising from the ashes to portray the Third Reich.

How sweet is the irony, that we, the survivors and descendants of the survivors, were the ones to rise – literally – from the ashes of the Holocaust and to create a strong, vibrant home (and shelter) for Jews, with the wings of one of the world’s most powerful aerial fighting forces.

We are the Phoenix! There’s little more resoundingly gratifying than that.

For “never again” to have meaning, “yizkor” (remember) must come first. We must determine that “never again” isn’t an empty slogan, but a commitment.

• Paul Mirbach made aliya in 1982 to Kibbutz Tuval, a new kibbutz, just being built, with his Habonim garin.

The two toughest days not to be in Israel

OPINION

ZVIKA ARRAN



For an Israeli expat, Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Hazikaron are the toughest days not to be in Israel. I miss the blue and white flags hanging all across Israel, leveraging our pride and excitement. The songs on the radio always fit the particular feeling of the special days. I actually miss the minute of silence, when the siren goes off in Israel and the country comes to a halt during those mourning days. And you can tell they are days of mourning because places of entertainment are closed and all TV channels broadcast appropriate shows.

Though every Shabbat in Israel is more acutely experienced, as is every *yom tov*, especially Yom Kippur, the atmosphere before and during Israeli Independence Day is enchanting.

For me, the closest I can get to actually experiencing this unique feeling is going online to watch the torch-lighting ceremony on Mount Herzl that ends the Yom Hazikaron ceremony and officially starts Yom Ha'atzmaut.

There's such a powerful emotional jolt from grief to joy. You understand the concentrated capsule of the Israeli story and success through music, dancing, and some army marching drills with soldiers forming symbols.

The highlights are heroes of the year from across the nation who light 12 torches, sharing touching life stories, representing the variety of Israeli society. Each one of them concluding his short speech before lighting the torch saying: **ולתפארת מדינת ישראל** (And to the glory of the state of Israel!)

This is one of the precious traditions of our young, informal start-up nation. And for me – it's my biggest clash between state and religion – whether to watch this moving ceremony or to go to the special musical service to pray Hallel in shul.

After 74 years, we're reaching the critical milestone of previous Jewish independent sovereignties. The ancient Kingdom of Israel – of the mighty kings of Saul, David, and Solomon – survived hardly a century before it shattered into rebellions, foreign control, and destruction.

Our Jewish second cycle of independence – the Hasmonean Kingdom – was relatively independent

for only about 70 years. Maybe it's typical for newly formed states to go through an identity crisis during their eighties, like the American Civil War or the end of apartheid.

Jews aren't a success story in self-governing, well-run statehoods. As the late Chaim Weizman, the first Israeli president and Zionist statesman, once said, "Maybe the Jews are like fertilisers: when we're spread in different places, we're fruitful and effective. When you put the Jews in one place – it stinks."

Usually it's not the gentiles or the ground that can be blamed for failure, but ourselves. Division, lack of solidarity and unity were the real reasons for previous loss of national liberty.

Apparently, Israel's greatest test is in the coming decade: namely not to break apart.

Exactly 120 years ago, Herzl published his utopian novel *The Old New Land (Altneuland)* and envisioned a paradise in *eretz Yisrael*. These were unrealistic dreams at a time of antisemitism and persecution.

The early Zionists back then compromised on a sheltered, peaceful piece of land – even in Africa. Just a place to rest, a rescue. A century later, and as Herzl prophesised, "If you will it, it's not a dream." We have much more than an asylum – we have a palace.

Israel is coping with tremendous challenges and problems. The work isn't over to establish our homeland. But let's cherish this moment: we all live in these times of *shivat Zion* (the return to Zion), when a two-thousand-year-old dream was fulfilled and is now vivid and sustainable.

We need this annual moment to remind ourselves and our children who have never experienced a different reality. *She'hecheyanu ve'kiyemanu ve'higi'anu*. והיגיענו וקיימנו ושהיינו וקיימנו "... who has granted us life and sustained us and let us arrive at this time".

- *Zvika (Biko) Arran is a publicist, social entrepreneur, lawyer, advisor to philanthropists, and the host of the Berl Katznelson Center podcast. He lives in Johannesburg with his wife and four sons.*



Israel: 74 years young and thousands of years old

ROWAN POLOVIN

OPINION

The history of the Jewish people can be summarised in four words: we are still here.

Across two millennia, we sojourned around the world and prayed for a return to Zion and Jerusalem. We mourned the destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE and the loss of our sovereignty. We wandered, and were pursued, throughout the diaspora but never forgot our home. Seventy-four years ago, our prayers and deeds were answered. Our beloved Jewish state of Israel was reborn. Israel is the embodiment of our tenacity as a people.

This year, Israel turns 74 years young and thousands of years old. In 1948, our old-new land was revived with a mere 600 000 Jews. Today, it has grown more than tenfold to a mighty nation of 6.9 million Jews alongside 1.9 million Arabs. Israel remains the only democratic state and pillar of hope in the Middle East. To the world, she beams out the prophet Isaiah's words as a light to the nations.

The South African Jewish community will come together in thousands this week to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. We will celebrate the rebirth of our Jewish homeland alongside the astounding fact that she continues not only to exist, but to thrive.

Israel is an economic miracle with more start-ups in the technological and medical arena per capita than any other country. In a new record, Israeli technology companies have raised more than R88 billion in the first quarter of this year alone. What a spectacular failure the antisemitic BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement has been.

Israel is among the happiest nations on earth (much happier than the United States, Germany, Japan, and unfortunately, South Africa). Israelis have a far longer life expectancy than most other people, more than 82 years on average, and the highest birth rate in the developed world.

It has produced the most efficient desalination programme in the world, which has enabled it to overcome crippling water shortages and give assistance to other nations. And after 30 years of shrinkage, the Sea of Galilee is finally overflowing its banks.

The Jewish state has achieved all this in spite of 14 wars, countries bent on her destruction, international boycott movements, countless hostile United Nations resolutions, and a growing trend of worldwide antisemitism which has been further exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis.

Incredibly, the past two years have effectively ended the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel has normalised relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, as well as Sudan and Morocco here on the African continent.

The infamous 1967 Khartoum declaration of "three nos – no peace, no recognition, and no negotiation" has been transformed into the "three yeses" between Israel and the Arab world: yes to peace, yes to recognition, yes to negotiation.

A few weeks ago, the foreign ministers of Egypt, Morocco, the UAE, Bahrain, the United States and Israel travelled to the Negev desert in southern Israel to create a forum to further the historic Abraham Accords, which has led to a warm peace between Israel and the Arab world.

This metamorphosis within the Arab world, after decades of hostility towards Israel, has opened up new possibilities and opportunities unimagined until recently. This is just the beginning.

I'm optimistic about the future of Israel, and look forward to the next 74 years. May Israel make us closer, stronger, and prouder as a people.

- *Rowan Polovin is the South African Zionist Federation's national chairperson.*

Jews of Lithuanian or Polish heritage eligible for EU citizenship





There's a common misconception that to get European citizenship and a European Union passport, you need to have documents proving your lineage. **The fact is** not having any documents proving lineage doesn't necessarily disqualify you from eligibility. In many cases, the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin.

Having European citizenship offers many **benefits** besides the fact that it makes travel a lot easier than with a South African passport.

And, as we are fully aware, South Africa faces many uncertainties, not just today, but for our children as well. Though we still have it relatively good here, we know that the time will come when, as Jews, we will seek alternative options. European citizenship will be the tool we're looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived. Therefore, they are entitled to reinstate citizenship and obtain an EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is that prior to the end of World War I, the European map was very different from the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania didn't exist as independent countries, and until 1918, these territories were known only as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Russia empire, which ruled all of north eastern Europe.



Until 1918, residents of these territories had Russian citizenship as Polish and Lithuanian citizenship didn't exist. Therefore, applications for reinstatement of these citizenships are based only on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen. The descendents of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 won't be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after World War II, eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor originated.

For example, Jews who left Vilnius and its region could be declined, whereas a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

My name is Avi Horesh. I'm well-known in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

With only a four-hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius, I'm able to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I collaborate closely with local professionals in tracing the required documents for your successful application for reinstatement as a European citizen.

Having lived in Poland for seven years, I have in-depth understanding of European immigration laws.

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every three to four months, which will allow us to meet in person.

My next trip will be around June, July 2022

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From tea to tracksuits: the granny who rocked adidas

TALI FEINBERG

It's not every day that a grandmother is featured in an adidas campaign, but then again, it's not often that a nice Jewish girl from Cape Town becomes a senior art director for that brand. Yet South African Jews always punch above their weight, and Kim Hoffenberg (32) has made it into this role in the Netherlands and taken her grandmother along for the ride.

Hoffenberg describes herself as "a born and bred Capetonian Jewess and *RuPaul's Drag Race* enthusiast, with descendants from Germany, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom."

On featuring her 92-year-old gran – who escaped the Holocaust – in her latest campaign, she says it has always been her goal to be age-inclusive and get her grandmother on screen. "I also really wanted to give her the chance to see herself for the stunner she is, and feel confident. If you're blessed enough to still have ride-or-die grandparents in your life, I feel it's important to show them that just because they are a certain age, it doesn't mean they can't still have new life experiences."

Hoffenberg attended United Herzlia Schools and thereafter got a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Brand Communications at Vega School. "After my studies, I worked for a few years as a digital designer at South Africa's largest digital agency, Native [now Native VML], and then moved with my partner to Amsterdam, where we have been happily living for the past nine years with our two cats and two bicycles."

She works as a creative lead (otherwise known as a senior art director) at Studio A, which is adidas's in-house creative agency. "My role is to lead teams in the conception and production of campaigns across all of adidas' product categories,"

she says. "I've been lucky to be able to bring my life-long fascination with fashion and my career together."



So how did she get to where she is today? "When we set out for Amsterdam, I was feeling despondent about my career. I found that working as a designer involved too much solitude and didn't invoke much passion from me," she says. "Soon after arriving in Amsterdam, I took a job at Dutch fashion brand Scotch & Soda as a digital designer, with aspirations to become an art director. I enrolled in a course which I worked on in the evenings, with some of my work getting published. Eventually, Tommy Hilfiger offered me an art director position, where I spent many great years honing my craft, which finally led me to taking a creative lead position at adidas."

Her grandmother, Ilsa Smeyatsky, "is an absolute inspiration to me. She's seen the worst life can offer, yet she always has only kindness, a sharp wit, and a song to share. She's now 92 years old, and still

gives me a run for my money on any dance floor!"

"Growing up in a small village outside of Cologne in the early 1930s was dangerous for her and her family," says Hoffenberg. "Her father, Felix, caught a sense of the devastation that was to come as he 'passed' as Aryan in his looks, and was therefore able to pick up on conversations other Jews normally weren't privy to. After spending much time unsuccessfully trying to convince his extended family to leave, he got himself, his



Ilsa Smeyatsky in the adidas campaign

wife, and his two daughters [one being my gran, who was seven years old at the time] on the last ship out of Germany, which happened to be headed for South Africa.

"From there, they endured hardship as they tried to make ends meet in Johannesburg. All of the family they left behind – all 11 siblings of my great-grandmother and extended family – were lost in the Holocaust. It's crazy to think how that timely decision my great-

grandfather made is the only reason I'm alive today."

Asked if she has ever worked creatively with her gran before, Hoffenberg says, "I was always a creative kid and my gran encouraged this. She was my first patron and my first critic, treating my childish 'girl going to shul' fashion drawings as if they were fine works of art. The support continued as I grew up. She and my grandpa endured countless dancing competitions, drama plays, and violin concerts.

"As an adult, my gran continues to be my sage creative advisor, telling me that she feels that the fashion industry overlooks the elderly. This inspired me to become more age-inclusive in campaigns.

"It was only when I started working at adidas that I managed to achieve my long-term ambition to get Ilsa herself to star in a campaign. Look, my gran is gorgeous and has the most charming personality, so as soon as I heard we had the go-ahead to shoot in Cape Town for adidas Originals new streetwear collection, I asked her if she'd be interested in modelling for it."

When Hoffenberg first asked her gran if she would be keen, "She agreed, but sort of brushed it off as a joke! It took me a while to convince her that I was serious. A chauffeur picked her up and she came to have her make-up and nails done, VIP style. All the while, she kept the crew enthralled with her stories, and conversed in her mother tongue with one of my German colleagues. When it was time for her shoot, she absolutely rocked it. She was the most low-maintenance model ever, who kept posing through gusts of wind and even a drizzle of rain!"

When Hoffenberg pitched the idea of adding her gran to a cast of "young local creatives of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, gender identities", everyone was on

board. On set, "My grandmother was warmly welcomed. They were fascinated to learn about her journey to South Africa, and she was equally fascinated to learn about 'they/them' pronouns." The campaign should appear on ecommerce platforms and digital advertising spaces worldwide.

"I'll always appreciate the Cape Town Jewish community for teaching me the value of family," Hoffenberg says. "It's because of its love, support, and encouragement that I was able to follow my dreams. Being from a Jewish community also inspired me to seek out my own community abroad. It's always amazing to connect with another Jewish expat around the Shabbos table and break out into the same songs in spite of us coming from opposite sides of the globe. There's an instant sense of common-ground which I owe to my upbringing."

Her advice to other aspiring creatives is to "fill your portfolio with the type of work you want to attract, even if it's made-up projects. Then make connections however you can. Even if that connection is your friend's dad's brother's wife, reach out to them! Or go to events that attract the type of people you want to work with, and just be yourself.

"I've always found that my best career opportunities have come through social interactions and having a good vibe with someone. Invest time in creating a sharp cover letter that outlines your skill set and what you bring to the table in a straightforward and engaging way. Also, being a creative requires living a creative life. Inspiration and creative energy won't stay nourished long if it's being fed by looking at stuff on screens. You need to keep your brain refreshed by having new experiences, meeting new people, and trying new things."

Storytelling and survival: the Holocaust gets a new script

SAUL KAMIONSKY

For decades, the testimony of Holocaust survivors has been the most common tool to teach the younger generation around the world about the Holocaust.

However, until recently, it was different in Israel. According to Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Eli Belotserkovsky, the country had quite a long period in which it was still forming an Israeli identity and the Holocaust didn't quite fit in.

"People came from Europe, be it Holocaust survivors or others, and they had to blend in," he says. "They had to turn themselves into Israelis, a strong nation, a strong army. Israel was forming its own national identity based on a kind of heroic narrative. The story of the Holocaust didn't fit in, so the survivors weren't really talking about it. They wanted to blend in, to forget the trauma they went through."

This has changed, however. "Now, with more and more Holocaust survivors having passed away, we need to find new and engaging ways to tell these stories in a way that will be relevant," says Rose Fridman, the Embassy of Israel's deputy head of mission to South Africa.

Belotserkovsky was speaking on a panel on Yom Hashoah on 28 April about the role of storytelling in preserving the memory the Holocaust. He and Fridman were in discussion with Gabriella Blumberg, and Jordy Sank, the producer and director of *I Am Here*, the award-winning film which documents the life of 100-year-old Holocaust survivor Ella Blumenthal.

South Africa is also new to democracy and its history is traumatic and tainted, Sank says. That's why he was surprised at how well their film resonated with those who either lived during apartheid or felt the effects from their parents or grandparents who experienced that era. "They resonate with Ella being able to overcome trauma," Sank says. "They seem to take a page from the

book of her incredible outlook on life."

Blumberg says they used the film to speak not only about the Holocaust, but all forms of discrimination and othering. "It's a reminder to each of us every day as individuals about how we behave when we encounter someone who is different to us," she says. "Ella is a shining example of this, so we hope that through storytelling, we can begin these conversations about all forms of othering."

It isn't easy to teach the youth about the Holocaust, Belotserkovsky says. "It was probably the most terrible event in human history. Initially, people try to get away from atrocities or events that are particularly heavy. They try to protect themselves from this. You can understand wars and natural calamities," he said.

"The Holocaust is something that you cannot understand. If you cannot understand it, you try to get away from it. It's impossible to understand how one nation systematically devises a way to exterminate. From this angle, it's very difficult to teach the younger generation, which is usually very optimistic."

Hence, it was the optimistic angle of the film that Belotserkovsky really liked. "People want to connect to people who are optimistic and pass their energy to the viewers," he says.

Blumenthal survived three concentration camps and yet remained optimistic. "This is something that attracts a lot of people and could be an excellent way to talk about the Holocaust," says Belotserkovsky.

Says Blumberg, "I've always been drawn to creating films that, like this one, will become a catalyst for important conversations, themes, and topics that will bring to light an issue or something happening in society."

"There's something intuitive about knowing this isn't just a good story, but it has a good character. Through that character, we can access a world of knowledge

"I don't think I truly understood or felt the gravitas of the Holocaust until I sat and spoke to Ella and started working on the film," says Sank. "The next generation isn't going to be so lucky to engage and speak to a Holocaust survivor. It's so important for them to find out about the personal stories. Pick a name, do research on one person who went through the Holocaust."

The Nazis not only tried to exterminate the Jewish people, but also their memories. "They tried to destroy all the documents and burn the bodies," says Belotserkovsky. "The victory is not only in the survival of the Jewish people, but in the survival of memory of what happened."

When the then 98-year-old Blumenthal was swimming in a pool during the filming of *I Am Here*, she was told that they wouldn't rush her. "She just said, 'Nonsense,' and strode down steps into the pool and swam 10 laps," recounted Blumberg. "Not only did she show us resilience when it really mattered most – in the Holocaust – but she shows strength and energy in whatever she's doing."

Blumberg says Blumenthal exerts the same amount of energy when she meets someone who is different. "She takes the time to hear their side of a story," she says. "If we could all do this, there would be so much more understanding in the world."

In the film, Blumenthal uses one tea bag for five cups of tea. "Through the film, we tried to link it to why she acted like that," said Blumberg. "So, we used animation to show when she was trying to take just a scrap of potato. It's those links which remind us to understand. When we encounter our grandparents or anyone who has something that we might think is a strange habit, we should think, 'Where did these things come from?'"

"This is also part of understanding," says Fridman. "If you understand the person better, maybe you can understand the situation better."



Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotserkovsky



Rose Fridman



Gabriella Blumberg



Jordy Sank

and history, and start those conversations," Blumberg said. To preserve the memory of the Holocaust, Sank says we should discuss it with family and friends in our homes, but also speak at schools about the stories of survival that our grandparents told us.

Anti-Israel lobby reveals antisemitic undertones

TALI FEINBERG

The anti-Israel lobby in South Africa bends over backwards to say that it's not antisemitic, but it let the facade slip on four occasions in April 2022. The first was when local anti-Israel extremist Iqbal Jassat wrote in response to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD's) recent meeting with President Cyril Ramaphosa, "Will the presidency of the Republic of South Africa provide details about this cosy meeting with South African Jewish Board of Deputies at his residence?"

The second instance was when local anti-Israel extremist lobby group, Africa4Palestine (A4P), shared a post on its Instagram feed depicting a woman holding a Palestinian flag, with the words, "Stop doing what Hitler did to you" on the flag. It was posted along with the caption: "Dear Israelis, it's not too late to change." According to the widely-adopted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism, drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis is antisemitic.

The third instance was when A4P posted an image on Facebook with the words, "Dear Zionists, G-d has a nice piece of land waiting for you in hell!" accompanied by the caption, "a message for all Zionists!" It was shared 56 times. Responding to the post, Shameel Gabriels wrote, "Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine and Auschwitz is the capital of homeless Israel. As long as these colonial Zionist settlers advocate anti-Arab narratives, I'm 110% proud of being antisemitic."

The fourth instance was when A4P shared a cartoon of a man saying, "Ew, I stepped in sh*t." The second frame shows that he stepped on an Israeli flag. Comparing Jews to dirt or being "dirty Jews" is a classic antisemitic trope. The cartoon was shared 42 times.

Jassat's statement about the SAJBD's meeting with the president fits right into the antisemitic trope of "Jews having too much power". According to leading anti-hate organisation the Anti-Defamation League

(ADL), "Jews who pursue or occupy leadership roles in elected office or other stations of public life too often are deemed conspiratorial rather than commended for their investment in concerns of the collective. The myth of excessive Jewish power also relies on historical claims of Jews controlling global affairs. Jews are cast as manipulative and conniving schemers who work in the shadows to advance an evil agenda."

They note that "language and conspiracy theories from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* still creep into the modern lexicon – in tweets, social-media posts, newspapers, and out of the mouths of public figures and elected officials."

In addition, according to the ADL, "antisemites frequently suspect Jews of having allegiance only to fellow Jews and to a uniquely Jewish agenda. Jews are accordingly seen as untrustworthy neighbours and citizens, as if they are inherently disloyal or have inherently dual loyalties."

Jassat also shared the SAJBD's post about meeting the president on the Facebook page of his organisation, The Media Review Network (MRN), which has been described by experts as antisemitic. The MRN recently called leading South African Jewish organisations "Zio-Nazis". The term "Zio" is a pejorative for "Jew" and was brought into prominence by former Ku Klux Klan "Grand Wizard" David Duke. It's often deployed by white supremacists.

"Like all organisations riddled with conspiratorial thinking, the MRN sees something sinister in a

legitimate non-governmental organisation meeting with the South African president," says Milton Shain, a local antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town. "Such meetings take place on a regular basis as they do with many other non-governmental organisations. Only Jassat's warped

mind can find this problematic."

World-renowned antisemitism expert, Professor Yehuda Bauer, told the SA Jewish Report, "The post actually attacks South Africa, and its authors are a danger to South African society. The question is, why does anyone concentrate on a meeting of a group of citizens with governmental authority? You could perhaps ask whether they will pay similar attention to a group of Zulus or Afrikaners? Groups of citizens have the right to discuss

matters of their concern with whoever is in charge, whether they are black, white, blue, or green."

"Jassat implies that there's something suspicious in a meeting between the president and the representative body of the Jewish community," says SAJBD chairperson, Professor Karen Milner. "The SAJBD rejects this inane and ludicrous implication with the contempt it deserves. To suggest that Jews aren't entitled to meet their president to discuss issues of concern as are all other South African citizens simply reveals Jassat's extreme prejudice and

unhealthy obsession with Jews." Responding to the post comparing Israel to Nazism, the SAJBD wrote on Thursday, 28 April, "Today is Yom Hashoah. A painful day for global Jewry as we remember the six million Jewish people who were brutally murdered by Hitler's Nazi regime during Holocaust. It's at this time that A4P chooses to post a deeply offensive meme, which once again exposes its real intent. It's not interested in seeking peace for Palestinians and Israelis. It's interested only in hurting Jews. Choosing the most painful and horrifying event in Jewish history, from which the global population of Jews still hasn't recovered [numbers are still below pre-Holocaust levels] to taunt Jews is pointless and vicious."

"Both Jassat and A4P's posts show the real face of the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] movement," says Milner. "They are keyboard warriors with no greater mission than to find ways to offend Jews and create divisions in South African society. Jassat's anger at the meeting between the president and South Africa's Jewish community shows his contempt for South Africa's democracy and its Constitution. The A4P post about standing on the Israeli flag shows, again, that they aren't serious in their activism. Rather, they rely on childish toilet 'jokes' to offend rather than create change."

"A4P's Nazi comparisons and threats that 'Zionists' will go to hell shows its hateful disrespect for the 90% of Jewish South Africans with cultural, religious, and familial ties to Israel. It's also highly reminiscent of old antisemitic tropes of hellfire and damnation for Jews who refuse to give up their beliefs," she says.

"This literal demonisation of an entire group on account of their beliefs exemplifies the extreme religious-based bigotry and intolerance that has led to violence, persecution, division, and hatred throughout history," says Milner. "There can be no place in our society for such extreme incitement, which shamelessly flouts our country's proud culture of respect for religious diversity and recognition of the intrinsic value and dignity of all humankind, regardless of faith or creed."



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Antisemitic conspiracy theories arise in light of Ukraine war

TALI FEINBERG

Israel Diaspora Affairs Minister Dr Nachman Shai has expressed concern over the rise in antisemitic conspiracy theories in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is just one aspect of rising antisemitism around the globe.

Ahead of Yom Hashoah, Shai said that antisemitic conspiracy theories about Jewish culpability for world crises still persist. "We have an historical duty to rectify this situation," he said.

According to an analysis published last week by the ministry, a worrying picture is emerging in which extremist movements are exploiting the war between Russia and Ukraine to spread antisemitic propaganda on the extreme left and right.

Some far-right movements have advanced conspiracy theories of Jewish culpability for the war based on the Jewish identity of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

White supremacists speak about a "brother war" between two "white" nations, which they say is fuelled by a Jewish conspiracy to annihilate Western civilisation and establish a "new world order".

Other antisemitic conspiracy theories say Russian President Vladimir Putin is being controlled by Russian-Jewish oligarchs. This extremist far-right rhetoric has occasionally degenerated into calls for violence.

Meanwhile, on the extreme left, activists have compared the Russia-Ukraine war to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and have used the war to advance anti-Zionist messaging. These claims have been championed by high-profile political and media figures on the progressive left.

Nazi-related rhetoric and the use of the memory of the Holocaust has been widespread in relation to the current war.

"Holocaust Remembrance Day reminds us more and more every year of the horrific consequences of antisemitism, ignorance, and unbridled hatred of Jews,"

said Shai. "It's sad to see extremist movements exploiting the terrible situation in Ukraine for cynical purposes and to increase hatred and division. Israel has a historical duty to preserve the memory of the Holocaust, to fight ignorance, and declare war on antisemitism."

Meanwhile, antisemitism is on the increase generally around the world. The number of antisemitic incidents recorded in the Netherlands reached a 10-year high of 183 cases in 2021, a Dutch Jewish watchdog group said recently.



Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt speaks at the group's 2018 National Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C.

The 2021 tally was a 35% increase on the previous year, said the Hague-based Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI).

At least 72 of the incidents happened in what the CIDI, called "real-life" conditions, meaning in physical spaces and not online. Of those, 21 were acts of vandalism and three were violent assaults.

In one assault, three men punched a Jewish man and his sister on the street in western Amsterdam. The woman was wearing traditional Jewish Orthodox clothes and had a mask with a Star of David on it that she got from a Jewish old age home while volunteering there. One of the attackers told the siblings, "Jews don't belong here," the siblings told police.

One of the vandalism incidents involved a Rotterdam mural caricaturing Steven Berghuis, who isn't Jewish

but plays for Ajax, an Amsterdam team that's deemed "Jewish" by its fans and fans of rival teams. In the mural, Berghuis wears a yellow star and a kippah, and has a large hooked nose. It was titled "Jews always walk away" in an apparent reference to his transfer from the city's team, Feyenoord, to rival Ajax.

Canada also experienced a record number of antisemitic incidents in 2021, according to B'nai Brith Canada's annual audit released on 24 April. The advocacy group cited 2 799 anti-Jewish hate crimes in total, up 7%

from 2020. Most notable was a sharp rise in violent incidents, from only nine in 2020 to 75 in 2021.

Incidents included a kosher Montreal bakery being firebombed, beatings, and synagogue vandalism, with the sharpest increases occurring in Quebec and British Columbia, the audit said. In one incident, a man gave the Nazi salute before beating a woman in a Toronto subway.

Canada's Jewish community "leads the list" of minorities targeted in the country, said

B'nai Brith senior legal counsel David Matas.

In the United States, the number of antisemitic incidents recorded by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in 2021 reached an all-time high, according to a new report by the group.

The 2 717 incidents identified in news articles by the ADL or reported to the ADL directly in 2021 represent a 34% increase from the 2 024 incidents of antisemitism tallied by the group in 2020. Previously, the 2 107 incidents in 2019 were the highest total since the ADL began publishing annual counts in 1979.

Anything from a slur to a terror attack can be included in the tally. For the second straight year, there were no fatal incidents tied to antisemitism in the United States in 2021, but the ADL counted 88 antisemitic assaults, a 167% increase on the 33 assaults in the 2020 count.

The ADL also documented a surge in incidents linked to the May 2021 round of deadly clashes between Israel and Hamas. "Jews were being attacked in the streets for no other reason than the fact that they were Jewish, and it seemed as if the working assumption was that if you were Jewish, you were blameworthy for what was happening half a world away," ADL Chief Executive Jonathan Greenblatt said.

The 297 incidents that took place during the fighting in May represent an increase, but the ADL recorded other spikes later in the year, without a similar trigger.

More than any single factor, Greenblatt said the overall increase in antisemitic incidents could be linked to political instability and polarisation. "We know that Jews are experiencing more antisemitic incidents than we have experienced in this country in at least 40 years, and that's a deeply troubling indicator of larger societal fissures."

Greenblatt said at the ADL's national leadership summit that the rhetoric equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism ran the same risk of violent outcomes. Around this time, both Democrats and Republicans increasingly charged the other party with tolerating antisemitism.

The ADL has appealed to both parties to address antisemitism within their own ranks.

Greenblatt tied rhetoric from both the right and the left to the spike in antisemitic incidents. "That's why we're seeing this jump in antisemitic incidents, because groups from all sides of the ideological spectrum are using their words to make it OK to hate Jews," he said.

He acknowledged the violence often identified with the far-right, but said that didn't diminish the risk posed by anti-Zionist rhetoric from the left. "Unlike their right-wing analogues, these organisations might not have armed themselves or engaged in an insurrection designed to topple our government, but these radical actors indisputably and unapologetically regularly denigrate and dehumanise Jews," Greenblatt said, citing attacks on Jews during the Israel-Gaza conflict a year ago.

"Again, I'm not diminishing the singular threat of white nationalists. However, as we saw last May, vicious rhetoric isn't just an abstract issue. It's dangerous and destabilising because it can manifest in the real world and impel individuals to act violently."

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From 0 to 10 in one month – COVID-19 fifth wave upon us

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The fifth wave of COVID-19 has begun in Gauteng and the Western Cape, according to medical experts, with case numbers increasing substantially over the past two weeks.

Seventy-five new cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the community in Johannesburg during the week of 25 March to 1 April this year. By contrast, since last Saturday, 182 new cases have been recorded in the province. Nine of them are on home oxygen, while two are in hospital. These numbers are comparatively low because these days, many who contract COVID-19 don't report it.

On 3 May, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases recorded 1 685 and 473 new cases in Gauteng and the Western Cape respectively. A month earlier, on 3 April, it recorded 369 and 167 new cases in those two provinces respectively.

"We're seeing an increase in test positivity to above 20% in the past week, with large increases in case numbers," says Johannesburg family physician Dr Sheri Fanaroff. "We know that many people aren't testing, and many positive rapid tests aren't reported, so the official numbers are largely underestimated."

Cape Town family physician Dr Solly Lison has 11 patients who have or have had COVID-19 in the past three and a half weeks. "That's a lot in my practice," he says. For about eight weeks prior to this, he didn't have any COVID-19 cases in his practice.

The increase can be attributed to the highly infectious Omicron sub-variants, BA.4 and BA.5, says Professor Lucille Blumberg, a consultant for Right to Care. "We also had a lot of religious gatherings recently and spent Easter holidays together. I think it all sort of collided."

Doctors across the Western Cape have been seeing many more patients with COVID-19 recently, according to Lison, who is also the chairperson of Cape Primary Care – Qualicare, a group of 500 general practitioners (GPs) in the province.

"We do know virus particles have increased in the waste water, so there's a resurgence of the virus in Cape Town," he says. "The western area of the Cape Peninsula is much more contaminated than the other three areas."

Netcare hospitals have recorded an increase in both hospitalisations and the number of patients testing positive, says Netcare Group Chief Executive Dr Richard Friedland.

"The vast majority of COVID-19 admissions, just more than 250 at the moment, are patients who have incidental COVID-19 – people who happen to be in hospital and who tested positive for COVID-19, but weren't there because of it," he says. "In other words, they came in because they were giving birth, or for elective surgery, or some other procedure. A small percentage of COVID-19 cases, about 20% of our cases, are being admitted for COVID-19. In other words, they come in because they were sick with COVID-19."

He says those patients generally tend to be more elderly with a lot of comorbidities.

"The length of stay of those with incidental COVID-19 isn't any longer versus the people who are coming in for other conditions," says Friedland. "This is no different to what we saw in the fourth wave. Those who require intensive care have a longer length of stay. Also, the mortality rates were very high in the first three waves, low in the fourth wave, and we have experienced low mortality rates in this wave as well."

Hospitalisations at Netcare Linksfield Hospital are still low, even though it recorded an increase over the Pesach period. "Relatively speaking, from zero to over 10," says Dr Carron Zinman, a pulmonologist at the hospital.

She says GPs are seeing more positive cases than hospital admissions.

"Even though it's mild in terms of not causing hospitalisation, we are still seeing people who are very symptomatic and who develop long COVID-19 with its multitude of symptoms," says Zinman.

Symptoms being presented include congestion, sore throats, coughs, headaches, and upset stomachs. They have also noticed patients presenting with fever, cold shivers, muscle aches, and tiredness. Some patients feel weak, while others have a lack of taste or smell.

"It's difficult to differentiate COVID-19 from influenza and RSV [respiratory syncytial virus] clinically, and the only way of doing this is by testing," says Fanaroff. "We seem to be seeing a slightly worse clinical picture in some patients, with chests a little worse than what we were seeing in the fourth wave."

Lison says COVID-19 affects your muscles, including your heart muscle. "It's recommended therefore to return to gym and full physical activities only three or four weeks after full recovery from active disease to reduce the possibility of cardiac effects," he says.

"We have become a lot more complacent about it because it doesn't seem to be causing such a severe illness upfront. But it's going to leave a lot of people with long-standing problems."

All the doctors emphasise mask wearing because the virus is spread in the air. "Put a mask on when you're inside with lots of people. Keep the windows open," says Blumberg.

Doctors urge people to keep a social distance where possible, avoid large gatherings, and stay at home when sick – even if it's not with COVID-19, protect the vulnerable, take vitamin D tablets, and most importantly, vaccinate.

Says Fanaroff, "Vaccinating and boosting remain our best defences against severe illness. I would encourage anyone who hasn't yet had a booster to get one as soon as possible."

Flu vaccines are also recommended as "flus are probably going to make a reappearance and that just adds to the respiratory infections", says Blumberg.

Bobroffs throw curve ball at SA authorities

NICOLA MILTZ

Fugitive father and son personal injury lawyers Ronald Bobroff and his son, Darren, have thrown South African prosecution authorities a curve ball.

The notorious pair entered into a quiet settlement with Israeli authorities in February last year, resulting in them dodging criminal prosecution in Israel.

This was unbeknown to South African authorities, who were expecting R95 million to be returned to South Africa by order of the South African Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) in May last year.

Behind closed doors, the Bobroffs reached a settlement with Israel in February last year to evade criminal prosecution related to suspected tax evasion and money laundering for money stashed in Israeli bank accounts.

As a result, the Israeli government seized about R70 million of the R95 million in turn for dropping criminal charges against the pair. It's understood that the Bobroffs may have retained several million.

The settlement came to light in South Africa after a replying affidavit was filed by Ronald in the Constitutional Court in June 2021 that disclosed the deal.

However, this is money which the South African asset forfeiture unit had legally laid claim to after it was determined to be the proceeds of crime.

To date, not one cent has been returned to South Africa in spite of the SCA ruling in May last year that the money was the proceeds of crime and must be forfeited to the state.

Now, questions are being raised as to whether this money will ever reach South African shores.

News of the settlement came to light recently after the Constitutional Court released its judgment upholding the earlier SCA ruling.

Local authorities were surprised because Israeli and South African legal authorities collaborated for months in securing a court victory in May last year against the Bobroffs.

In a unanimous ruling by the SCA, about R95 million held by the Bobroffs in Israeli accounts was declared to be the proceeds of theft and money laundering. The SCA ordered the money to be handed over to South African legal authorities.



Ronald and Darren Bobroff

The SCA declared that the Bobroffs' overreaching (in fees charged), coupled with their decision to retain their gains and invest or reinvest same for their own benefit, after 2014, knowing that they were not entitled to the money, constituted theft.

Disgruntled by the SCA judgment, the Bobroffs took it to the Constitutional Court, telling the *SA Jewish Report* at the time that it was "plainly wrong and there were no irregularities" in terms of their Israeli bank accounts.

In the meantime, allegedly on the quiet, they had long before entered into discussions with Israeli authorities which they reportedly did not disclose to any of the South African authorities. Unbeknown to the NPA, the Bobroffs entered into a settlement agreement with the Israeli authorities in a bid to keep Darren out of jail in Israel for suspected tax evasion and money laundering.

According to Moneyweb, Israeli authorities never notified or consulted with the NPA or the South African Reserve Bank before reaching the settlement. The Bobroffs also allegedly didn't disclose it to the South African courts, where they were engaged in litigation against the NPA.

It's clear that the Bobroffs tried to keep the settlement, which an Israeli court sanctioned on 28 February 2021, a secret. They didn't raise it during arguments in the SCA application, which was heard on 23 February 2021, less than a week before the settlement was approved. Nor did Ronald proactively disclose it in his failed application to the Constitutional Court for leave to appeal against the SCA judgment, which was made a few months later, on 28 June 2021, Moneyweb reported.

The Bobroffs acknowledged the settlement only in court papers submitted to the Constitutional Court.

The details eventually emerged in Ronald Bobroffs' replying affidavit, in which he included the settlement agreement as well as communication between his legal team and Israeli authorities.

Some insiders speculate that the Bobroffs were hoping this settlement would be enough to put the matter to bed. However the Constitutional Court upheld the decision of the SCA.

The NPA told Moneyweb, "The only proposal the AFU [Asset Forfeiture Unit] received from the Israelis [after the settlement was reached] was to share three million shekels [about R14.5 million] with South Africa as a token of goodwill between the countries, which isn't acceptable to the AFU."

In 2016, the Bobroffs were disbarred following the emergence of details of financial irregularities. A warrant was issued for their arrest, but before it could be executed, they fled in haste for Australia. An Interpol Red Notice that allows for the provisional arrest of a person pending extradition or other similar legal actions was issued.

Since then, the Bobroffs have been enjoying their new life in Australia. They have reportedly bought expensive homes in upmarket suburbs in Sydney, and their grandchildren attend private schools.

Among other things, it's alleged that the Bobroffs stole money due to clients from the Road Accident Fund.

They have vehemently denied this, and continue to profess their innocence, saying they fled the country in fear after receiving threats.

The NPA's Bulelwa Makeke told the *SA Jewish Report* this week, "We would all love to see the Bobroffs face justice in South Africa, but so far they have used every trick possible to evade the law."



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Bradley Silberman turns pain into purpose with *Be the Bubble*

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Recovery from a life-threatening brain injury after an unprovoked attack outside a Johannesburg nightclub in November 2004 gave Bradley Silberman new purpose. Now, he’s sharing his transformative life lessons in his book, *Be the Bubble*. “I’m grateful because if it hadn’t happened to me, I wouldn’t be who I am today. There would be a big, big piece of me missing,” says Silberman, speaking of the injury that nearly ended his life. It’s this positivity that helped him turn darkness into light – a mindset he breaks down in *Be the Bubble*. By living in your own bubble, Silberman writes, you protect yourself from external influences. You know you’re enough, your past, present, and future are distilled into the current moment, and you live your destiny. “We all have a purpose in life, and through energies and societal indoctrination, we lose our way,” he says. “Even if we’re successful according to society’s definition of the term, it doesn’t necessarily make us happy. *Be the Bubble* is about connecting to who you really are and living life according to that.”

"I'm grateful because if it hadn't happened to me, I wouldn't be who I am today."

The prognosis was alarming. “They told my family that if I woke up, they could expect me to be sitting on the corner in a chair blowing bubbles for the rest of my life,” says Silberman. Yet, when he woke up a few weeks later, he felt like he’d had a “great sleep”. However, he’d suffered brain damage. “I’m not sure if someone who is brain damaged actually understands that they are,” he says. “At the time, I certainly thought I was normal, but I wasn’t. I was speaking slowly, and I couldn’t eat food. My left leg was limp, and I had to drag it on the floor. My left eyeball was turned around and I had to wear an eye patch – everything was blurry. I couldn’t do anything on my own.” Yet, retaining his get-up-and-go mentality, Silberman registered for a BCom in entrepreneurship at the University of South Africa (Unisa) just more than six months after the accident, against medical



Bradley Silberman

advice. “I’d read for two minutes and then have to sleep for two weeks. I had extreme migraines, and nothing would help except sleep. The doctors were right in that respect,” he says, “but maybe my decision to do it anyway contributed to my miraculous recovery.” It took Silberman three years to recover fully and regain the ability to be responsible for himself in terms of relationships, friends, and life in general. Over the seven years it took him to complete his entrepreneurship degree, he also explored coaching, integrated

therapies and meditation, and started businesses in the healing space. In 2007, his corporate-wellness business, Rejuve, was born. Today, he’s a successful businessman, husband, and father of two. Yet, it was only fairly recently that Silberman decided to share his story and personal philosophy in the form of a book. After giving a talk to Chabad House Director Rabbi David Masinter’s community on Shavuot in 2019, the glowing reviews he received gave him the push he needed to put keyboard to curor.

“I’d always said I’d write a book, when I’d achieved x, y and z,” says Silberman. “The same thing applied to my mindset about telling my story on stage. Delaying these things and worrying about what people would think was all about fear. After the rabbi shared the community’s great feedback, I decided to start my book. “I realised that others’ opinions aren’t my problem – the main lesson in the book. The key element is embracing that fear of pushing yourself and stepping up.” When it comes to violence from bouncers, the scene has changed, says Yanni Coutroulis, the owner of Taboo Night Club in Sandton. “In the past, there were a couple of big beatings for a lot of different people,” he says. “It’s not as much of an aggressive scene anymore. “Post-COVID-19, [bouncers] have taken another stance – they don’t take nonsense, but they don’t have to hit to get their word across. It’s actually more the patrons that beat each other up.” That’s not to say that there are no incidents – different club owners have different outlooks and tempers do flare – but many, like Coutroulis, have zero-tolerance for displays of aggression. “Once you get branded on social media, it’s detrimental to your business,” he says. “We have enough problems trying to make our businesses full and flourish after COVID-19, we don’t need those negativities.”

Chag Star Wars sameach!

SAUL KAMIONSKY

If you know Craig Nudelman or Adam Rosman, they are most likely to greet you with the following on 4 May: “May the fourth be with you!” Because while it may be Yom Ha’atzmaut, it’s also known as Star Wars Day. Since their childhood, Nudelman and Rosman have been two of millions of passionate fans of this American epic space-opera multimedia franchise. When Rosman was studying at university, he would commemorate Star Wars Day by organising screenings and watching some of the films. Since then, this Johannesburg-based engineer hasn’t done much to celebrate the day. The same can be said for Nudelman. “I just maybe post something on social media, but I can’t say that I go out and do some cosplay or anything like that. I don’t go out of my way to make it an official *chag*,” says the Cape Town-based programme and development manager at the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Whereas Rosman watched *Stars Wars* on VHS (video home system) as a youngster, Nudelman first encountered the show when his mom took him to a video shop as a seven-year-old. “I just happened to pick up the first video that looked cool and it happened to be *Star Wars*,” recalls Nudelman, also the director of Mother City Jewish Tours. “I just watched it over and over again. Then I saw there was a second one, so I watched that, and then a third one, and I watched that. I was hooked.” What appeals to Nudelman about *Star Wars* is world creation. “I’m a big fan of fantasy, JRR Tolkien, Robert Jordan with *The Wheel of Time*. It’s fascinating how different places, people, and cultures are created,” he says. “There’s this amazing diversity and everyone kind

of gets along, but also the battle between good and evil appeals to me. The heroism and the music. I mean, John Williams’ scores are also something amazing.” When Nudelman’s six-year-old daughter was about four and a half, he told her, “We’re watching *Star Wars*.” She became obsessed with the show and its music. Rosman says that when he has children, they are going to have no choice but to watch *Star Wars*. He likes the clear-cut good-versus-evil storyline in *Star Wars*. “Plus, I suppose the sort of space and Western angles appeal to everyone’s inner child. It has that cool sci-fi effect. You get to enjoy it every single time, even when you know what’s going to happen. Then, there are all the offshoots, all the various animated series and all those sorts of things, which are great, but I don’t think you can beat the originals.” When the latest sequel trilogy came out, Nudelman not only watched it with his wife, but also went with his friends to see it on IMAX. He believes watching the show should feel like a special occasion. “You make it special. To watch it is a privilege almost. The new series are just added treats. The films,



especially *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, are to be enjoyed and appreciated like special occasions.” **The Jewish connection to *Star Wars*** Israeli-born American Jewish actress, Natalie Portman, stars in the trilogy of *Star Wars* prequels as Queen Amidala, the secret wife of Anakin Skywalker and the mother of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia. Jewish screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan co-wrote four *Star Wars* films. Darth Vader’s chest box has some Hebrew letters written upside down. According to those who have closely analysed the three lines of text, it comes from Exodus 16 about repentance. Born to Jewish parents, JJ (Jeffrey Jacob) Abrams wrote and produced two *Stars Wars* films. Not only does he claim to be “the most nebbishy Jewish director ever”, but he told *Jewish Journal* in 2009 that he’s “very proud of his heritage”. Although his family is interfaith, with Abrams’ wife being an Irish Catholic, he takes his children to high holy day services. Harrison Ford, who portrays Han Solo in three *Star Wars* films, is half Jewish. Not only were his maternal grandparents Jewish immigrants from Belarus, but he said the following in August 2000: “As a man, I’ve always felt Irish. As an actor, I’ve always felt Jewish.” The late Carrie Fisher, who played Princess Leia in *Star Wars*, was raised Protestant. However, her paternal grandparents were Russian-Jewish immigrants and her father was the late Jewish American singer and actor, Eddie Fisher. She attended Jewish services with Jewish Orthodox friends, even though she described herself as an “enthusiastic agnostic who would be happy to be shown that there is a G-d”. The first exclusive pictures from the *Star Wars* set were taken by Jewish photographer Annie Leibowitz for *Vanity Fair*. Yoda was voiced by the late, half Jewish actor, Frank Oz, real name Oznowicz. Some believe Yoda is an abbreviated form of the Hebrew *yo-dei-ah*, meaning wise or knowledgeable.

When Koe’siestes and Kneidlach mix on stage – a soupy sisterhood

Laughter is medicine, especially when it accompanies some integral cultural, religious, and familial issues. We catch up with *From Koe’siestes to Kneidlach – With Kids!* director and co-writer, **Megan Choritz**.

What was the inspiration for the original *From Koe’siestes to Kneidlach*?

Chantal Stanfield was keen to tell her own true life – very theatrical – love story. She was right in thinking that there was an audience who wanted to hear it. She found the idea of a cross-cultural love mash-up truly funny, odd, and even painful at times, but mostly funny. And then, of course, there was the kneidlach. Kneidlach are hard to get used to if you haven’t known them since birth.

What drew you to directing this show?

I was lucky that Chantal thought of me and asked me if directing *From Koe’siestes to Kneidlach* was something I wanted to do. Honestly, I would have been less excited to direct something more traditional, but I have a lot of experience just being Jewish and growing up in Joburg, and now I live in Cape Town in a very mixed but predominantly coloured part of Woodstock, so I felt like I knew both worlds of the story intimately well. I “felt” them. When you feel it, you know it’s the right fit.

How did you and Chantal meet and decide to work on this?

I knew Chantal from when she auditioned for me for a different project. In my mind, she was always “on file” as someone I wanted to work with. I think it was the same for her. She plucked up the courage to ask me, and I was delighted. It has flowed easily ever since. Chantal is a dream to work with. She’s an amazing actress to direct: receptive, quick, intelligent, funny, and emotional. I’m so happy we’re making the sequel. We have a hilarious way of working. Lots of Zoom and Skype and WhatsApp chats, face to face to play and develop the script, and then finally coming together to make the show in intense and productive rehearsals.

As this is based on Chantal’s life. Tell us a bit about it.

The summary: Chantal grew up on the Cape Flats, but also attended one of the first model C schools, Muizenberg Primary. She went to varsity to study drama, came to Joburg to follow her dream, met and fell in love with a nice Jewish boy from Joburg while she was on a performing tour in Turkey and he was back home. She came back, the romance blossomed, they got married, she made the first play, she fell pregnant, we tried to do the sequel, it got closed down before we even opened because of COVID-19, Chantal got COVID-19, and ... a few big life changing events later, she’s back on stage with the sequel, praise be, *Baruch Hashem, Insha’Allah*.

Tell us about your working relationship with Chantal and how between you two, you conjured up this fabulous first show and now this. What did it take?

The most important part of our working relationship is that we find each other funny. Wait, it could just be me! No, I do think it’s mutual. Also, we see things the same way. I’m political and outspoken, I don’t tolerate racism, or discrimination, and I do believe Chantal feels safe with me. I’m pretty much in awe of her talent and skills, so it’s a great combination. Add Daphne from Theatre on the Square into the mix, and it’s a delicious theatrical event.

How would you describe this show to someone who isn’t Jewish or from the Cape Flats?

From Koe’siestes to Kneidlach with Kids is a cross-cultural exploration of what makes us human,

what makes love, family, and community.

Tell us about some of the myriad cultural, religious, and familial issues you chose to deal with in this show and why you picked those particular ones.

Well for all the similarities between the cultures – feeding and feasting being the biggest – I think there are some stark differences. Baby showers are huge in the coloured community, for example, but non-existent among Jews. There are a lot of Jewish holidays. For Christians, it’s pretty much Christmas and Easter. But every culture has those that judge, those that disapprove, those that criticise, and are unkind. Even some audiences had some weird or even inappropriate responses to the first show, and I know it will be the same with this sequel. But, motherly advice happens across the board. The excitement (and family pressure) of a new baby, the universal markers of pregnancy. The show also goes to history and the pain of the past in different ways. We are who we are because of where we come from, on both sides of this relationship.

When preparing this show, what were the funniest experiences and most difficult moments?

Chantal and I laugh a lot. Sometimes we’ll have ideas about a certain character, and we’ll run with it, building onto them more and more, and each new thing will have me in hysterics. There’s a tiny cameo character in this show that literally nails me every time, she’s so funny. It’s also painful to deal with the more emotional parts of the subject matter. When Chantal told me some of the criticism or racism she experienced, I found myself full of shame. Interestingly, the most challenging thing for us was when we were cancelled in Cape Town. We

felt devastated, lost, and empty. Theatre makers just want to work, and COVID-19 hit us so hard. I’m so grateful we’ve finally been able to do it.

Were you surprised when your first show (pre-kids) was such a hit, especially with the Jewish community? If so, why?

I wasn’t surprised because the story is heartwarming, funny, and delightful, and the Jewish part just meant that more of a specific Jewish audience

came, loved it, and told their friends. I also think people like seeing themselves represented on stage. What was surprising was being able to tell the percentage of Jewish or coloured people in the audience by where the big laughs were.

Sometimes Jewish people find it difficult to laugh at these issues. How did you manage to get past the discomfort, enabling them to let go and laugh?

We were able to be entertaining and provocative at the same time. Some of the issues are pretty heavy, and we handle them with sensitivity but also stay true and clear. An audience will respect that. But there will always be

someone who complains about something. And that you can find in every culture or creed.

What do you and Chantal want people to take home from this show?

Tolerance, respect, the acknowledgment of difference, the

celebration of all that connects us, and the preciousness of children. It’s a lot!

• *‘From Koe’siestes to Kneidlach – With Kids!’ is at The Theatre on the Square from 3 to 21 May.*



Megan Choritz



Writer and star of the show, Chantal Stanfield

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Blaming the victim

It is unfortunately commonplace for ideologues of various persuasions to make baseless, misleading, and often deliberately offensive analogies between the Holocaust and Nazism in general when seeking to smear their opponents. Such false parallels must always be strenuously refuted. Whether cynically calculated or simply insensitive, they cheapen and trivialise the realities of this horrific period in history, insulting the memory of its victims, and desensitising people to the critical lessons that need to be learned from it.

On Monday evening, 2 May, I was interviewed on SABC TV regarding the latest instance of this abuse of truth and memory, in this case by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Ever since invading Ukraine, Russia has sought to justify its actions with the ludicrous claim that it is defending itself against the menace of incipient Ukrainian Nazism. That neo-Nazi groupings exist in Ukraine is undeniable and of course we don't condone this, but it's a distortion of reality to claim that they pose the same kind of threat as Nazi Germany did.

Lavrov went even further than this, however. When challenged about how Ukraine could be a hotbed of Nazism when its president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was Jewish he responded that Adolf Hitler also had Jewish antecedents, and that some of the worst antisemites were themselves Jews.

It was disturbing enough to see Jews being dragged into a conflict that has nothing to do with them, but the most scandalous feature of these remarks was their suggestion that Jews were somehow

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

complicit in their own destruction. Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid put it in a nutshell when he said, "Jews did not murder themselves in the Holocaust; the lowest level of racism against Jews is to accuse Jews themselves of antisemitism."

Lavrov's comments indicate how in spite of having long since been investigated and debunked by mainstream historians, the theory of Hitler having Jewish ancestry persists in certain quarters. The durability of the myth can at least in part be attributed to a desire, subconscious or otherwise, to shift some of the guilt for the Holocaust from its perpetrators to its primary victims. Evidently, it's easier for some to come to terms with the genocide of European Jewry when Jews themselves, to the extent that they helped to produce Hitler in the first place, are held to be complicit in what befell them. Such loaded historical revisionism is also an affront to truth and memory, and what makes this particular case that much more serious is that it comes not from a fringe conspiracy theorist but the representative of a global superpower. There has been a strong backlash against Lavrov's outrageous and bizarre statements, which one hopes will resonate beyond the global Jewish community.

• 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



Squash gives power to inner-city kids

SAUL KAMIONSKY

It may seem strange to read about squash saving lives, but that's exactly what Egoli Youth Empowerment is doing for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time, their enthusiasm for squash has literally saved the game in South Africa.

"We're empowering people so they can empower others," says Lesley Cowan, Egoli's girls programme director. More than 3 000 youngsters are involved in the programme, which started as a squash programme and is now an empowerment programme. It's the biggest squash development programme in Africa and the only one in the inner city of Johannesburg. The youngsters come from the inner city, Alexandra, and Soweto.

Before joining Egoli, the youngsters had never heard of squash. The programme has squash courts at the University of Johannesburg Doornfontein Campus, where it runs sessions on Wednesdays and Thursdays. In addition to sessions there and in Parkview on Saturdays, Egoli enters the kids in squash tournaments.

The idea came about in 2009, when squash-lover and engineer Glenn Lazarus wanted to give back to society. He met Dikana Mthombeni, a first-league squash player, in Soweto and they decided to run some informal sessions there.

They spoke at schools, inviting kids to come to the courts. About 300 kids arrived and there were only three coaches. "The programme blossomed from there," says Lazarus, the director and founder of Egoli. "It evolved from being about sports to being about life skills, building great citizens, making sure we have kids going to school, promoting sport as a healthy lifestyle, and making sure they are better people and ultimately achieve in life."

Egoli reinvented itself during the COVID-19 pandemic by becoming an outreach programme which handed out weekly food parcels to hundreds of kids in the inner city. It spent R245 000 on food in the first seven months of the pandemic.

"Because of COVID-19, we started branching out into a lot more areas," says Cowan, a tax consultant and a provincial squash player herself. "One of the areas is street racket, which is a game that can be played anywhere, at any time, on any surface, with any bat and a soft ball, and it can incorporate lots of people."

The kids in the programme play street racket in a way that allows them to learn subconsciously. As Lazarus explains it, "You might be hitting the ball to a person and calling out cities of the world. So, I hit the ball to you, and I say 'Johannesburg', and then you say 'Tel Aviv', and so on."

In addition to painting street racket courts around the Standard Bank Arena in Bertrams in the inner city, the programme also established offices across the road from the Johannesburg Cricket Club in the middle of Bertrams. "It's a fantastic cricket field," says Cowan. "Now, we're in association with it. They teach our kids cricket, and we teach their kids squash."

With the easing of restrictions, Egoli has resumed its squash programme.

The programme aims to use the Ellis Park Sport Precinct, which boasts rugby, tennis, cricket, swimming, and athletics facilities. "We're hoping to introduce padel [paddle

tennis] as one of the games as well," says Lazarus.

Mthombeni's rise to coaching squash juniors and seniors at the 2017 Maccabi Games is one of the programme's success stories. "It was like going to the Olympics," he says. "One of the highlights of my coaching career. Two of our players got gold medals."

Besides Mthombeni, the programme has produced some of the top 20 squash players in South Africa, and players have represented the country in championships across the globe.

"Many of our kids get bursaries to top schools and universities," says Cowan. "We sent kids on a carpentry course and sponsored six of them to go on a six-week computer course. One of our kids became an optometrist, another a teacher, another is in his final year of LLB."

The latter is Request Sinyandiwo, who has been involved with Egoli since 2011 – first as a kid in the programme and now as a coach. "The programme stands for change, not just changing the community but changing how society views certain aspects of life," he says. "We're mostly focused on getting kids off the street. I'm a testament to that."

"Kids in the inner city don't get a lot of opportunities," says Mthombeni. "A number of them turn to drugs or crime, or they're sexually abused. With Egoli, we're trying



to create a safe space, where they can come every day, have a meal, do their homework, and play squash."

Clinton Ndebele, one of the coaches who came through the programme, is a full-time teacher who helps educate the kids. "We do learning activities, verbal, and writing activities," he says.

"We have an amazing group of coaches who have come through the programme," says Mthombeni. "We're rewriting the coaching manual. Usually, you have one coach for two or three kids. You never hear of 40 kids per coach. Every session ends with yoga, and there's complete silence, which shows how dedicated the kids are."

Lazarus, who played squash at the Maccabi Games, says, "Squash took a huge dive in South Africa during the early 2000s relative to other sports, and a lot of kids started to focus on technological games. But we have probably brought in excess of 8 000 kids into the game."

"Previously all the squash players were white and from Christian schools," says Cowan. "Now at a tournament, you will see 60% Egoli players."

"We're not a charity. We're raising funds to uplift. The kids get nothing without doing something. They give back all the time. We want to uplift these kids so they can make money themselves."

• If you want to learn more about the programme, contact Lesley Cowan on 083 232 0758.

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WIZO empowers girls through self-defence workshop

Freedom Day on 27 April commemorates the first free elections in South Africa, but democracy doesn't in and of itself create a free society. Freedom is about ensuring respect. As the Pesach seder reminds us, freedom is a communal experience. Enjoying our freedom doesn't mean ignoring the rights of others. It can be said that we are unable to experience real freedom until those around us are also free.

That's why WIZO (the Women's International Zionist Organisation) decided to work with South African Friends of Israel, Westside FM, Keep Safe Self Defence, and SG Mafaesa Secondary School to make a difference to the lives of the young women at the school, holding a workshop to empower them to defend themselves.

WIZO works to uplift and support women and children through its day care centres, shelters for abused women and their children, boarding schools for teenagers at risk, and its representation at the United Nations. A lot of its



Bafana Modise (SAFI), Michele Engelberg (Keep Safe Self Defence), Andrea Wainer (WIZO Johannesburg), and Lebo Nxumalo (Westside FM)

projects are based in Israel, however WIZO recognises the great need in our own country and tries to make an impact locally through initiatives like this.

Laughter rang out from the hall at SG Mafaesa School in Kagiso, as Michele Engelberg of Keep Safe Self Defence spoke to the girls and gave them tools to protect themselves from unsafe situations. Soon, the laughter turned to shouts as the girls tried out some of the moves taught to them to enable them to get out of danger.

As we celebrate our freedom and responsibility, let's never forget that together, we can change the world.

Letters

SERVICE IS A QUESTION OF GIVE AND TAKE

Let me open by asking Howard Feldman ("Zero for Israeli customer care", *SA Jewish Report*, 28 April), was the customer service you received in New York, Naples, or Norway any different?

It's all a question of attitude (*gisha b'ivrit*). Let me politely put you in the picture about Israeli service. It's a give-and-take situation. I made aliya 22 years ago from South Africa. There's no need to explain to you that this little country of Israel is a melting pot of people from a multitude of backgrounds, hardships, and sometimes horrifying experiences.

Ever tried putting a smile on your face or giving an extended handshake or perhaps a pat on the back when asking for assistance?

A few personal experiences

At Rami Levy Supermarket, if I cannot locate an item, I approach one of the workers, smile, however forced, apologise for my lack of Hebrew and for disturbing them, and ask questions. Invariably, nine out of 10 times, the worker takes me to the shelf concerned. On buying a pair of shoes in the *shuk*, I was embarrassed that I was short of cash to pay for an item. I smiled at the

chap, explained in my limited vocabulary that I hadn't enough money to pay. His reply? "Pay me what you have, and bring me the balance tomorrow."

On boarding the bus to work one morning, I discovered that I had left my wallet at home. I smiled, and explained my situation to the driver. The driver (who wasn't of our faith) said, "No problem, have a free ride. Take 10 shekels – how will you get home without any money?"

At the office registering for our *t'udat zehut* (ID), there were streams of people waiting to be called, with constant language difficulties. Our turn finally came, we went up to the clerk with a smile, apologised for our lack of Hebrew, and commented how beautiful her nails were. The attitude change was remarkable. She inquired about our origins, took us to the issuing office, and guided us through the process.

As I mentioned before, it's all a matter of one's attitude – what you give is what you get. Unfortunately, South Africans arrive with a little bit of a superior, better-than-thou attitude. I've seen it so many times.

– Itzik ben Menachem, Petah Tikvah, Israel

TALK ABOUT BEING RIPPED OFF OVER PESACH!

Of course I couldn't but agree with the letter from "Concerned shopper" regarding "Supermarkets ripping off Pesach shoppers" (*SA Jewish Report*, 28 April). Through your esteemed *SA Jewish Report*, I have written numerous letters complaining about being ripped off with kosher products in general, but the following example is a case in point:

Purchases of a 500g tub of chopped herring

and 500g of Danish herring, sold by one of the kosher delicatessens on 20 April (during Pesach) and bearing the kosher-for-Pesach sticker, sold for R128.99 and R141.99 respectively.

The identical products, purchased from the same outlet on 28 April after Pesach and not having the Pesach sticker, were sold for R79.99 and R101.99.

If this isn't a whopper of a rip off, then I don't know what is. – Aubrey Lampert, Johannesburg

SPORTS SONGS LOST IN TRANSLATION

For years, I've been wondering if there are any Hebrew translations of well-known sports songs, especially Olympic themes and World Cup themes.

Does anyone who has participated in Maccabi, is reading the *SA Jewish Report*, or writing about sport have any idea if there are any Hebrew translations of such songs, even though Israel might not have participated, such as the *World in Union* rugby song and *Cricket Lovely Cricket*, from the 1960s? – Ricky Lomey, Johannesburg

SUPPORT CHARITY BAZAAR TO EASE SUFFERING IN UKRAINE

The war in Ukraine has caused enormous loss and sorrow. To assist those suffering, a group of ambassador's spouses, including my wife Asta, is organising a charity bazaar on 8 May in Pretoria.

The bazaar will be held at the Hellenic Community of Pretoria Centre (37 Lynwood Road, Brooklyn, Pretoria) on 8 May (Sunday) from 10:00 to 16:00.

Funds will be raised from ticket sales, the sale of Ukrainian national and international food, handicraft, raffles, and an auction. Information about Ukraine will be provided by members of the Ukrainian Association in South Africa. There will be entertainment for children.

The goal isn't just to organise a charity bazaar but to invite embassies/high commissions and

businesses to participate. You can purchase a table and promote your products among diplomatic society and beyond.

The organisers are also requesting monetary contributions or the supply of prizes for the raffle or auction. Logos of participants will be published on posters for the event.

With this goodwill, they hope to collect funds for the most needy in Ukraine.

For further information, or if you would like to participate, email Asta, adirmaite@gmail.com.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation and generosity. Please spread this information far and wide.

– Ambassador of Lithuania, Dainius Junevičius

Jews of Lithuanian or Polish heritage eligible for EU citizenship



There's a common misconception that to get European citizenship and a European Union passport, you need to have documents proving your lineage. **The fact is** not having any documents proving lineage doesn't necessarily disqualify you from eligibility. In many cases, the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin.

Having European citizenship offers many benefits besides the fact that it makes travel a lot easier than with a South African passport.

And, as we are fully aware, South Africa faces many uncertainties, not just today, but for our children as well. Though we still have it relatively good here, we know that the time will come when, as Jews, we will seek alternative options. European citizenship will be the tool we're looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived. Therefore, they are entitled to reinstate citizenship and obtain an EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is that prior to the end of World War I, the European map was very different from the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania didn't exist as independent countries, and until 1918, these territories were known only as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Russia empire, which ruled all of north eastern Europe.



Until 1918, residents of these territories had Russian citizenship as Polish and Lithuanian citizenship didn't exist. Therefore, applications for reinstatement of these citizenships are based only on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen. The descendents of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 won't be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after World War II, eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor originated.

For example, Jews who left Vilnius and its region could be declined, whereas a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

My name is Avi Horesh. I'm well-known in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

With only a four-hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius, I'm able to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I collaborate closely with local professionals in tracing the required documents for your successful application for reinstatement as a European citizen.



Having lived in Poland for seven years, I have in-depth understanding of European immigration laws.

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every three to four months, which will allow us to meet in person.

My next trip will be around June, July 2022
Contact me on

WhatsApp: +48 783 953
Email: adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com

I was raised by Germans. I went to sleep with the bedtime stories of Struwwelpeter where a girl sets her hair on fire because she fiddles with matches and another cuts her thumbs clean off because she refuses not to play with scissors. The blood squirts everywhere as a visual warning to those who won't take heed. Sympathy wasn't a staple, unlike criticism and instruction, which we understood to denote love and care.

The training was important, given that I live with hate because of my support for Israel. I'm undeterred by those who try and threaten me into silence. I have learned to not allow the bullying to bother me. If anything, it makes me more determined to write and live my truth.

Even at risk.

What does worry me is when we as Jews behave the same way when we're taught to be different. To be unafraid of discussion and an alternative view. We're meant to be able to debate, argue, and prove. We aren't meant to bully those with uncomfortable opinions into silence. Insulting them because of a view is as cheap as it's unimpressive. Especially when it proves the point that was being made in the first place.

The backstory is that in last week's *SA Jewish Report* (28 April 2022), I wrote a column on my

Howard Feldman



recent trip to Israel in which I raised concern that I felt less at "at home" during the trip. I deliberately used examples of a benign incident at a restaurant. The example was, of course, a meaningless one, chosen to open the discussion.

I knew that there would be a reaction. No one wants to have these discussions. But living my truth means doing so even if it's uncomfortable. What I didn't expect was the reaction that I received from ex-South Africans. Someone wrote that a "privileged, spoiled, wipe-my-ass attitude reflects the response" that I received.

Others chose deliberately and disingenuously to focus on the restaurant incident, knowing full well that the substance of the article was a lot more significant than that.

The attempt to shut down discussion reflects one of two things: either that no one not living in Israel is entitled to a view, or that there's tremendous insecurity and fragility among those who are doing so.

If my very personal experience has the ability to upend them emotionally to the extent that it did,

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it undoubtedly speaks volume as to the precarious nature of their lives.

I don't expect a pass. I don't expect them to know that each day, I devote at least three hours to educating people about Israel. I receive almost daily abuse from those who would be happy to harm me. There are times when I not unreasonably think my middle name is "Nazi" because of my support for Israel.

I don't expect them to appreciate the price I pay when the response to each article on News24 or other platforms where I take the South African government to task will be discredited by some because I support

"apartheid Israel". Or that I have to have security at my book launch because I'm a target.

But I do expect that we don't lose sight of our values. And that's to be able to disagree, argue, and debate without attacking the writer and without this level of hysteria and toxicity. And without group think.

The stories of my childhood aren't recommended for everyone. I wouldn't suggest that we raise our children on the German fables of my youth. But I'm grateful that my upbringing allows me to see that all the hate and venom deep down is simply an expression of love. After all, we're all just brothers and sisters, no matter where we live.

KosherWorld

TRULY KOSHER

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