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# south african Jewish Report

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## ‘Pure Jew hatred’ behind protest at Tuks

TALI FEINBERG

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn has described as “chilling” a demonstration titled “in protest of Zionism’s presence at universities” at the University of Pretoria (Tuks or UP) on Wednesday, 15 March.

The “sit-in” was billed as part of this year’s iteration of the hate-fest known as Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW). However, Kahn says it was clearly calling for the exclusion of Jewish students from working with the Student Representative Council (SRC) at UP.

This comes after the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) at Tuks formed a working relationship with the SRC to help needy students. “While the protesters tried to hide their real reasons behind political slogans, we saw their hatred for Jewish students exposed. This was pure, unadulterated Jew hatred,” says Kahn.

Said was also told that the protest was illegal and that the university was “aware of who was part of it”. At the same time, she says, “the university is a safe place for Jewish students, and we’ll do everything in our power to make sure it stays safe. I will take the hate a hundred times if it means other students can feel safe.”

Kahn says the university supports the inclusion and safety of Jewish students on campus and has told her



Anti-Israel activists at the University of Pretoria on Wednesday



Yoseph Haddad (centre) with SAUJS students outside the University of Pretoria

SAUJS Tuks Chairperson Sasha Said agrees that “they were calling for blatant exclusion and isolation of Jewish students. They were saying that Zionism doesn’t belong on campus, which is blatant antisemitism. They were saying we don’t belong here, when in fact every society and student has a right to be here.”

Kahn says the sit-in was illegal as the students didn’t get permission for it to take place, and university security was called to ensure that it didn’t deteriorate. “It was sad and disturbing to see two rows of about 30 students demanding the exclusion of Jewish students. It goes against the basic ethos of this country and the principles of a university environment,” she says.

that it’s taking the illegal protest seriously, with disciplinary action against anyone who violated the rules. “There was definitely a clear message that this won’t be tolerated by UP,” she said.

“For me, it was appalling once again to see BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] supporters staging an event that required the campus to go on hold and a security presence,” says Kahn. She says she didn’t feel

personally threatened or unsafe, and she believes the university remains safe for Jewish students.

Amid all this, Jewish student leaders came to the fore and set an example. “Sasha Said is an extraordinary leader,” says Kahn.

“This has been a stressful time, and at all stages, she handled it with great leadership, engaging with all parties.”

Kahn is equally impressed by Tuks Jewish students, who remained calm and spent the protest engaging in discussion with Arab-Israeli activist Yoseph Haddad. At one point, anti-Israel protesters came to find Haddad to confront him, but the conversation remained civil with Haddad in control.

“We had open conversation, and Jewish students felt heard. We’re now back at our lectures and studying,” Said mentioned after the event.

She says the atmosphere at Tuks has been tense since she led SAUJS to initiate a working relationship with the SRC, with Jewish students facing “an extreme backlash and calls for exclusion. However, SAUJS has persevered, and received incredible support from fellow organisations on campus as well as the community at large.”

The atmosphere ramped up during IAW, but “while there is an ongoing anti-Israel campaign, SAUJS has worked proactively to educate fellow students about Israel and dispel the myths being propagated on

campus. We’re tremendously fortunate to be joined by Yoseph Haddad as well as several StandWithUs delegates.

“We’ll be on campus throughout the week, handing out information booklets, hanging up posters, initiating open discussion, and having a presence. Students are equipped and confident to be on the ground.”

Otherwise, IAW has been a “damp squib” in 2023. The South African Zionist Federation’s Benji Shulman notes that there have been very few IAW events advertised this year, with no high profile speakers and most events being held online.

It shows, Shulman says, that “though the

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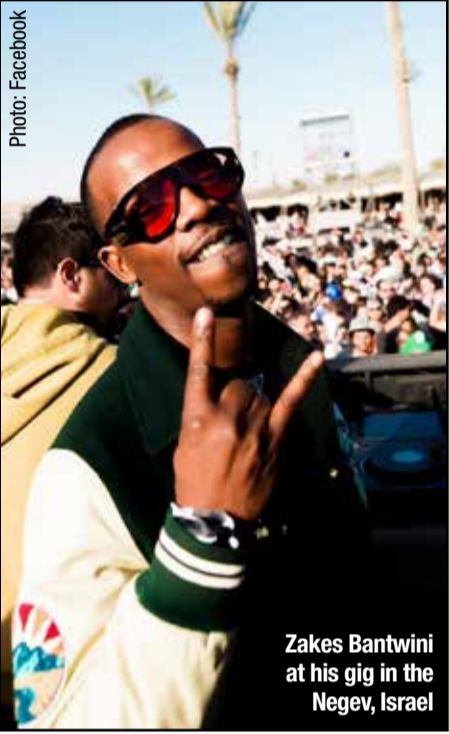
## SA Grammy winner brings heat to desert festival

TALI FEINBERG

Ignoring the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement's call for artists to boycott the Jewish state, 2023 Grammy Award winner Zakes Bantwini (born Zakhele Madida) played at a festival in the Negev in Israel in early March, and proudly shared his gigs on social media.

This is the second time that the South African singer, record producer, and businessman has performed in the Jewish state.

"Last year, I was fortunate to be invited to play in Tel Aviv. I had a great time, and formed a good relationship with event promoters there who invited us to perform this year," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. "We were happy to oblige. Our second trip was as enjoyable as our first, and we look forward to going out there again. I have a great affection for the people in Israel, and am always pleased to see the extent of cultural and technological advancement, plus the energy of the people and their love for music and our sound."



Zakes Bantwini at his gig in the Negev, Israel

He played at one show in the desert to about 3 000 people. "It was a great experience playing at that festival as it was a very diverse and inclusive audience that really enjoyed my music. I performed from 07:30 to 10:00. The crowd was amazing, the experience was very different, and a great time [was had] overall."

He followed in the footsteps of fellow South African musician and Grammy winner Black Coffee, with whom he has worked, and who also ignored the BDS call to boycott. Bantwini emphasises that he didn't choose to play in Israel to make a political statement about the conflict or to take sides. Rather, he played there because he was invited to do so and wants to make music for all people to enjoy.

On Instagram, he wrote, "Art has this incredible ability to bring people together – whether we're admiring it in a gallery or expressing ourselves through it," alongside joyful images of his gig in the desert, the Desert Weekend – Purim Edition two-day festival, hosted by Music Tel Aviv.

His next post highlighted the Israeli tendency to start partying late in the night and continuing the next

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## Eternal flame

Torah Thought



Rabbi Greg Alexander – Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation

**Y**awn! Not another Torah portion describing the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle)! Really? Didn't we cover this in great detail already?

If you're reading this week's parshah you might be thinking similar thoughts. Though the book of Exodus starts in dramatic fashion with the compelling story of the exodus from Egypt, it closes with page after page of building instructions. Not only have they already been described in previous portions, but the furnishings in the Mishkan aren't even seen in Jewish life today. Yes, we have an ark in shul, but the one in our portion is gold inside and out with the ten commandments inside and never opened. The ark in shul is different – effectively a cupboard for the Torah scrolls to be kept in. We don't use a table for special display breads left out all week (except for the *brocha* table groaning with smoked-salmon bagels), and we don't have a giant altar for sacrifices. We don't have a stand for burning incense, and the only golden menorah you might find would be decorative on the walls or lights or as a chanukiah for December use only (with nine branches instead of the seven in the Torah).

Much of the furnishings of the Mishkan exist only in symbolic fashion today. The clothes of the kohanim are represented in the coverings of the Torah. The *parochet* that screened off the Holy of Holies is remembered by the curtains over the ark, and above the ark of most shuls you'll find a *ner tamid* (eternal light) that's there to remind us of the menorah. Well, let's just say that here in South Africa it's "eternal" if it's backed up by an inverter, otherwise it's "mostly eternal" except during load shedding.

And that's an important difference right there. You see, in the days of the Mishkan, the kohanim would light the lamps of the menorah daily (from pure olive oil – think of the Chanukah story) and they burned from evening until morning. It wasn't just plugging it in to the socket and leaving it to burn. It was a daily ritual that required someone turning up continuously, every day, to do the lighting. So *tamid* (eternal) can be because of one act – plugging it in – that then keeps going, or by the repetitive and conscious acts of people turning up.

If we want our values, our community, and our Jewish practice to be something eternal or even just long-lived, we'll

need both. We'll need firm and decisive action that lasts for the foreseeable future. Think of building a shul, setting up a foundation, or writing a book or blog. Many of the things that our ancestors put into place then are still here for us to enjoy – we stand on their shoulders. And at the same time, there are an infinite number of little acts that need people to show up regularly, again and again, for them to endure. Think of making a *minyan*, teaching a child, or supporting a family with *zedakah*.

This Shabbat, may we have the chance to think of how we can be a *ner tamid*, and ensure that the things we care for most are there forever.

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Moses reiterates the commandment to observe the Shabbat. The people donate the required materials for making of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Moses has to tell them to stop giving. The Mishkan is completed and brought to Moses, who initiates Aaron and his four sons into the priesthood. A cloud appears over the Mishkan, signifying the Divine Presence that has come to dwell within it.

# ‘Dysfunctional, but all hands on deck,’ say doctors on frontline

NICOLA MILTZ

Doctors at public hospitals, many of them Jewish, have had to sweep floors, take patients to the toilet, and wash them while dealing with critical medical conditions during the protracted public service wage strikes this week (its second week).

“We were all hands on deck,” said one Jewish doctor who couldn’t be named for his own security and for fear of losing his job. “We all did what we had to do.” Surviving on a skeleton staff, doctors still had to save lives and attend to patients as clinical operations were severely hamstrung by the low turnout of nursing and administrative staff.

The crippling protests outside hospitals, which were marred by violence and intimidation, included protesters barricading roads with bricks and stones and setting fire to tyres, in some instances preventing non-striking staff from going to work.

“I had to dodge protesters and rocks in the road to try enter the hospital where I work to treat the ill and injured who managed somehow to get through to us,” the doctor said. “Some patients were turned away, others redirected to other hospitals because we simply couldn’t treat them.

“While I’m immensely sympathetic to the plight of those striking for higher wages, it’s the patients who suffer the most during these salary negotiations,” he said.

After a tumultuous few days in which industrial action turned violent and there were major disruptions at a number of public hospitals, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union (Nehawu) vowed to intensify its strike on Monday, 13 March. This as the government and unions failed to find each other after returning to the negotiating table to settle the impasse in the public-sector wage talks.

However, doctors and patients breathed a collective sigh of relief later the same day

after the Labour Appeal Court delivered a scathing ruling against the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu)-affiliated union and police inaction to stop the violence associated with the strike. The court forbade workers from going on strike until the finalisation of further legal proceedings.

Health Minister Joe Phaahla warned striking Nehawu members to return to work or face criminal charges and possible dismissal.

“At one stage, there were only three nurses tending to 50 sick patients when there are usually 20 nurses,” said another Jewish doctor.

The South African Defence Force said the army medical corps was being deployed to hospitals that were the worst affected after the health department asked for assistance.

Professor Efraim Kramer of the Thelle Mogoerane Hospital in Vosloorus, which was seriously impacted by the strike, said he was grateful to charity and non-profit organisations including the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) who responded to his call for food to help feed babies and their mothers in the paediatric ward after kitchen staff went on strike.

In a message of gratitude to the SAJBD, Kramer said, “Amongst the negativity that the protest action has had on the hospital, its services, sick kids, and their attending devoted mothers, a gold lining of care, concern, comradeship, and commitment

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doctors “pulled together and went the extra mile in a show of solidarity and camaraderie which brought out the best in everyone”.

“It hasn’t been mayhem or chaos, just serious levels of dysfunction. It’s sad because patients are the pawn between the two great powers, and they are the ones who suffer.”

Another Jewish doctor at a different hospital said, “The majority of nursing staff came to work although out of uniform to avoid intimidation. This is really to their credit, putting their patient responsibilities first.”

In the first few days, he said some patients were prevented from entering the hospital and turned away. Ambulances made use of the staff entrance which he said wasn’t blocked so emergency services didn’t have issues.

“There were burning tyres and picketing workers initially, but for the most part, access is back to normal now. Throughout the strike, things remained relatively calm although we were on high alert and discharged any elective and non-emergency admissions in case we were going to be short staffed.”

Another female Jewish doctor said that although there were some bad apples among the protesters, it was important to empathise with healthcare workers who just wanted to be heard.

“One needs to understand why they are

doing this in the first place. Our colleagues were there during the COVID-19 pandemic too, and risked their lives. Now they are asking for a liveable income and a decent increase in the face of the rising cost of living.”

“

AT ONE STAGE, THERE WERE ONLY THREE NURSES TENDING TO 50 SICK PATIENTS WHEN THERE ARE USUALLY 20 NURSES.

The Labour Appeal Court called Nehawu’s approach to the strike of essential service workers “deplorable, with the gravest and, in some instances, it appears, deadly consequences”.

“In this regard, the union and its members illustrated a flagrant disregard for the law, the employer, and the people of this country entitled to access essential public services.”

The court said it was inclined to grant the interdict “given the urgency of the matter and reports of serious acts of criminality, misconduct, and intimidation by such striking workers around the country, many of whom appear to be healthcare workers employed in hospitals, clinics, and other essential services”.

The Labour Relations Act defines essential services as those that, if interrupted, would endanger the life, personal safety, or health of the whole or any part of the population.

Last Thursday, Phaahla announced that four people may have lost their lives because of the strike, but it’s believed this figure is likely to rise.

On Tuesday, Nehawu agreed to suspend the strike for 72 hours to consult, but wouldn’t guarantee that it wouldn’t resume the protest.

Minister of Health Dr Joe Phaahla and MEC for Health and Wellness Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko at Helen Joseph Hospital

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# “COVID-19 never left me” – survivors share hope and heartbreak

TALI FEINBERG

Three years ago, the world shut down in an effort to combat an unknown enemy: the newly emerging COVID-19 pandemic. Though this terrifying time has faded into the past, for some, the pandemic never ended or was just the beginning of a waking nightmare. Many of these “walking wounded” are still picking up the pieces, yet they show resilience as they emerge from the darkness.

“What people don’t know is that almost dying from COVID-19 is one thing, but then there are the after-effects,” says Capetonian Ryan Lipman (22), who fought for his life for three weeks in hospital at the age of 21, including 11 days in an intensive care unit (ICU) at the height of the third wave in July 2021.

“You deal with a lot of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder],” he says. “Some of the things I saw and heard [in ICU], I still hear them and picture them today. I was scared to walk out the house. I couldn’t look at pictures of people in masks or on ventilators. You get some very weird fears. I would stay up all night, or cry at random points, not believing what I had gone through. It was so overwhelming.”

He says that after he survived, he felt like he had to “grab life with both hands”, which led him to make some questionable choices. “When you’re scared for your life, you’ll land up doing anything. I went through a bit of a rebellious stage. I also wanted the fun and freedom that a person in their 20s would usually enjoy, that was taken away from me.”

He also turned away from Judaism, “because I didn’t believe someone I pray to would put me in that situation. But after time in a clinic and therapy, a rabbi I’m extremely close to, Rabbi Sean Cannon, took me under his wing. I met him every week, and he encouraged me to come to Israel on the Ohrsom programme. The moment I put on tefillin for the first time since I had COVID-19, at the Kotel with him by my side, was extremely emotional.”

Lipman, a musician, has gone on to join the Herzlia JET (Jewish Experiential Team) department, playing music for its events, including Kabbalat Shabbat, and he volunteers in other communal capacities including at Bnei Akiva. “I’ve come to realise I’ll never understand why it [getting so ill] happened, and I’m okay with that. COVID-19 changed my life for the better.”

He still has lung damage, but is able to live a mostly normal life. “You develop an appreciation for the things we take for granted. When you can’t walk or breathe on your own, you wonder if you will ever be able to do those things again. I’m grateful to be alive.”

Some never recovered from the virus. “It’s been a great challenge living with long COVID-19,” says Belinda Silbert, also in Cape Town. She and her children became extremely ill in the first wave, and her life has never been the same. “I’ll never be one of those who can put COVID-19 in the past and pretend it never happened. I live with the reminder every day of my life,” she says.

“As an opera singer, I have even had to adapt my style of singing because of how COVID-19 affected my lungs and heart, but even in that I have found meaning” she says. “And even with this debilitating condition, I managed to complete my rabbinical studies and was elected to the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies. I’m determined that this chronic illness won’t bring my life to a halt.”

The ramifications of COVID-19 are never far off. “About four months ago, I started suffering from significant heart problems,” says Silbert. “They started early in my COVID-19 infection, but have become more apparent. It has resulted in me being admitted to ICU. But COVID-19 gave me the final impetus not to let my dreams pass me by. I have found renewed meaning in serving my community.”

Debbie Cohen couldn’t attend her son, Jeff’s, wedding in Israel in May 2020 because of COVID-19 restrictions. Seven months later, she and her husband, Ian, decided to take a very cautious holiday in Plettenberg Bay to be with their grandchildren. It was the height of the second wave, and they kept an extreme social distance.

But somewhere along the way, they contracted COVID-19. Ian drove them home from Plett, but then began to feel unwell. Both he and Debbie tested positive. Their daughter, Robyn, a doctor visiting from London, treated her father until he had to be admitted to hospital on 5 January 2021.

There he was soon ventilated but contracted an infection from a “superbug” in the hospital. “By 18 January 2021, he was gone,” says Debbie. Their son, Jeff, whose wedding they had been unable to attend, couldn’t come to South Africa for his own father’s funeral because of COVID-19 restrictions.

However, the family has carried forward Ian’s love of life and family, and four grandchildren have been born since his passing. All of them are named after him in some way. “It’s like he made place for them,” says Debbie. The pandemic took away so many significant family milestones for the Cohens, from a wedding to a funeral. In fact, Debbie and Ian had been on their way to Israel to celebrate Jeff’s engagement when lockdown hit and they had to turn back. Yet just more than a year later, in May 2021, after Ian had passed away and Jeff’s baby girl was due to be born, community members and Israeli officials moved heaven and earth for Debbie to be there. “I was one of the few grandparents allowed into Israel at the time,” she remembers.

“Ian was hale and hearty before he died, although he was pre-diabetic,” she says. “In the end, being cautious wasn’t enough. But he got to spend time with his grandchildren that holiday.” She wasn’t allowed to take Ian to hospital because she had COVID-19, so her daughters took him, but she later saw him in ICU, holding the phone to his ear so he could hear messages from his family.

“At the time, we never knew who would be hit, who would succumb,” she says. “After he died, I heard from so many people who I didn’t even know he had helped. He was so humble and so loved.” She continues to live life to the fullest, as Ian would have wanted. “It’s hard, but you have to get up and push yourself,” she says. COVID-19 also changed lives for doctors on the frontline. “Never did I believe in my lifetime that I would have to go to war,” says pulmonologist Dr Anton Meyberg. “How wrong I was. Initially, we thought it was everyone else’s problem and then – boom – it erupted in South Africa. Like a wildfire in the driest of bushes, it just decimated and destroyed. It was a never ending story until, thank G-d, the vaccines arrived.

“Now it’s there but under the radar, just another respiratory virus that we have the mechanism to deal with. Prior to that, there was no hope. “The pandemic taught us a different type of balance,” he says. “I learnt how to juggle and rearrange my life in such a way that I’m able to have equilibrium in which it’s not all work, but there’s an intertwining of family, friends, and other important things.

“Are we prepared for potential future pandemics?” asks Meyberg. “I would like to think so, but we can be sure only if we’re thrown back in to the fire. This time, hopefully, we’ll have our rescue gear waiting on the sidelines from all the lessons we learnt. Most importantly, hug your family and friends. Don’t take anyone or anything for granted.”

Belinda Silbert

Ryan Lipman

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# Farewell to Ann Harris, ‘the mother of South African Jewry’

TALI FEINBERG

Community leader Marlene Bethlehem usually spoke to her dear friend, Ann Harris, before Shabbat every week. So, when she didn’t hear from her this past Friday or after Shabbos, she was worried.

“I wrote to her asking if she was alright, and then heard she had died. It’s a huge shock. She was fine and even went on a trip to Eilat recently.”

Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft says that Ann, the wife of the late Chief Rabbi of South Africa, Cyril Harris, began to feel unwell on Friday, and was admitted to hospital in Israel where she had made aliya in May 2022. “At first, doctors said they had stabilised her, but then she passed away suddenly, at the age of 85.” He’s grateful she didn’t suffer, and knows that she wanted a private funeral with minimal fuss, which was conducted on Sunday, 12 March, in Jerusalem. She was laid to rest beside her beloved husband.

“It was her ultimate dream to be in Israel,” says Silberhaft. He feels her passing is the end of an era, which began when the Harris couple came to South Africa in the late 1980s. “I always say he was the right man for the right time, and she was the right partner for the right man at the right time.” Ann played a crucial part in leading the community through the transition to a democratic South Africa.

“She sacrificed a lot to be with us,” says Silberhaft, noting that she left her thriving law practice in England to join Rabbi Harris on what became their calling. “She and the chief rabbi rolled up their sleeves and actively got involved. They knew there was a lot of uncertainty, but they chose to become part of the solution.”

He says Ann symbolised “hands on” leadership. When she was with children at Afrika Tikkun, she was changing nappies and rocking them to sleep. When she was at shul, she was chopping food and laying out platters for the *brocha*. Whether she was meeting world leaders or Jews from all backgrounds, she would speak to them as an equal. “The greatest thing she taught me was how to engage with people.”

“Ann wasn’t a rebbetzin, she was the wife and partner of a rabbi,” says Howard Sackstein. “When she came here, she trained a generation of law students at the Wits Campus Law Clinic, giving them skills to become the best lawyers in the country.”

She also served on the South African Law Commission’s Committee on Jewish Divorce, which was led by her late husband. It led

Jewish community. It was a controversial move, but she had the foresight to realise its importance.

That meeting in Lusaka was the first of one of many throughout southern Africa and beyond in her role at the African Jewish Congress (AJC). Namibia, Mauritius, Botswana, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, and Kenya were just some of the countries where she had an impact on Jewish lives.

One example was when “Ann found the time to restore a Sefer Torah to the Maputo synagogue, and for her and Rabbi Cyril Harris to bring it to Maputo personally, with all the ceremony, and joy that a *hachnasat* [welcoming] Sefer Torah entails,” says Sam Levy, the president of the AJC, who lives in Maputo. “To Ann, there was no periphery.”

She represented the AJC at high-level international events, and was passionate about country communities. “When the country communities department of the SAJBD [South African Jewish Board of Deputies] was disbanded, Ann was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Small Jewish Communities Association of South Africa [SJCA], which stepped into the breach,” says SJCA chairperson Barney Horwitz. “Ann was the mother of the South African Jewish community, and losing a mother is always painful.”

She was indeed a matriarch to many, but first and foremost, a beloved mother to her sons. At her funeral, her son, Rabbi Michael Harris, said her passing was “a bitter and sudden loss” to him and his brother, Jon. “We will try to live as you showed us how to do,” he said.

Sackstein notes the close relationship that Nelson Mandela had with both Cyril and Ann, and that Madiba and Ann had a special bond.

She was the “fiery instigator that motivated my father, the late Bertie Lubner, and the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, to form MaAfrika Tikkun [now Afrika Tikkun], a community response to the hardships

caused by apartheid,” says Marc Lubner, Afrika Tikkun chief executive.

“Ann loved people,” says Lubner. “However, she wouldn’t tolerate corruption and in particular was enraged when she saw acts of human unkindness. She and her values will always be part of the guiding principles underlying all we do in Afrika Tikkun.”

Silberhaft remembers how Ann stoically endured the tragedy of losing her husband so young to cancer, and that she almost single-handedly cared for him during those months. She moved

ANN PLAYED A CRUCIAL PART IN LEADING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH THE TRANSITION TO A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA.

to Hermanus, where they had planned to retire, becoming a driving force in that Jewish community.

Ann eventually returned to Cape Town, where she threw herself into community life, addressing audiences and attending events, including Limmud, which she loved. In 2020, she was elected to join the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, receiving the most votes on the public ballot.

Silberhaft says that Ann was “fearless” and always spoke her mind, whether she was addressing the pope, an African head of state, or a rabbi. She was known for her sense of humour, oratory, skills, and love of the Premier League.

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein said Ann was “an icon, serving the community with great distinction and bravery alongside her husband”.

“I wondered why she didn’t go to London to be closer to her sons, but I think she chose to go to Israel because she wanted to one day be reunited with her husband,” says Bethlehem. “Now, she’s with him at last, on a hill overlooking Jerusalem. They will both always be part of our South African Jewish community.”



Ann Harris

Photo: Peter Fine

to the Divorce [Amendment] Act of 1996, which allows South African courts to prevent a Jewish husband from obtaining a secular divorce without giving a *gett*. “South Africa was the first country to get this law, thanks to Ann’s role, and so far, Canada is the only other country to have it,” says Bethlehem.

Sackstein says a moment which defined Ann was when she boldly went to Lusaka to meet the African National Congress in exile in 1989 as a representative of the

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## The loss of a tiny giant

This week, we lost a giant in our community. Ann Harris was the tiniest giant I have ever come across. In her latter days, she looked every bit the granny you wanted to cuddle, but she was tough as nails and made sure she was heard and her immense wisdom, integrity and morality shared.

There’s not a soul she touched who didn’t learn from her. And nobody messed with her. She may have been the wife of the late, great Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, but she wasn’t happy to be referred to as a “rebbetzin”. I totally understand why, but I’m sure there are many who may not.

She was an extraordinary human being in her own right. Though she was the wife of a great man, there was greatness in everything she did too. It didn’t always apply to her role as his wife, but to Ann Harris herself.

When we were both younger, and I was a newly graduated journalist working on a Jewish newspaper, the South African Union of Jewish Student (SAUJS) asked me to have a debate with a deeply observant woman about women’s rights and feminism. I thought it would be easy because I embodied an educated and independent woman who wouldn’t let anyone mess with my rights. When my so-called opponent turned out to be Ann Harris, I soon realised the debate wouldn’t be so simple. I learnt a great deal from her that day, as I did whenever our paths crossed.

She made so many of us women understand that nothing need get in the way of our personal and professional success. She also showed us that we didn’t have to give up our spiritual, religious, or familial obligations to follow our paths.

She was proof that, while it isn’t easy, it’s possible to be a great leader and set an example to so many, as well as to be a loving mother and wife.

She was truly a role model to so many of us women in this community.

Although she made aliya last year and was no longer living among us, her presence will be missed. I hope the lessons she taught us will live on forever, and will continue to be shared over generations.

I see her spark in a number of young women in our community.

I look at the young Hannah Katz (page 13), who took so many phenomenal lessons from a time when she was fighting to live. She was just a child, but has come out of her illness with energy and determination to help other people. This feisty teen is packing her days with bettering herself and being a beacon of hope to others.

What an example she sets! I look forward to watching what she does with her life. I’ve no doubt she’ll do great things.

Then, at the University of Pretoria, or Tuks as it’s commonly known, there’s a student called Sasha Said, who may look extraordinarily young, but is doing huge things for her fellow students. As Tuks SAUJS chairperson, she’s doing her best to ensure that the university is a safe space for Jewish and other students.

As is made clear on our front page, that’s despite the re-emergence of anti-Jewish hatred badly masked as anti-Israel sentiment.

Though she managed to persuade the Student Representative Council to work with SAUJS, she still faces haters – who are fortunately not large in number – who are going to try and make things tough for her. She’s clearly having none of it, and is going all out to make her university a good place for Jewish students.

She, too, has the Ann Harris spark.

And then there’s Emily Schrader, who is visiting from Israel to support Jewish students in the annual hate fest known as Israeli Apartheid Week. She has taken on the plight of Iranian men and women being persecuted by their own government. Those persecuted in Iran aren’t able to make their voices heard. They have no way of fighting for their own rights, so it takes someone like Emily to do so.

Why would she take this on as it clearly isn’t her fight? She does it because she can, and human rights are that important to her. “The more I see what goes on in repressive regimes, the more I find myself unable to be silent,” she said this week. (See page 9)

Now in South Africa, she wants to tell our government why it’s abominable that it allies itself to the Iranian regime. For many, it seem to be a laughable cause, because members of government aren’t waiting for her to visit them.

However, the guts displayed by this woman makes me question whether she’ll let anything get in her way. Let’s see what happens.

I cannot sign off this week without reiterating my concern about what’s happening in Israel. I know we have our own problems here, and they aren’t small, but I have never in my lifetime witnessed the kind of battle going on in the Jewish state.

I’m grateful to Rolene Marks for writing the opinion piece on page 7, in which she so clearly explains that what’s happening there isn’t about a left-wing versus right-wing situation, it’s the population fighting to maintain democracy.

It’s hard to watch what seems to me to be the government’s apparent disregard of what the protesters – who include heads of the army and legal experts – are saying. There has to be another way!

I cannot help going back in my mind to a chilling point that Biko Arran made a while back, long before these protests began, about how Israel has never before lasted more than 70 years as a Jewish state. This is, for me, the most frightening thought.

It’s time for us to locate our Ann Harris backbone and integrity, and find a solution to the problems at hand.

Shabbat Shalom!  
Peta Krost  
Editor



## It’s time to grow a pair!

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



A few weeks ago, I was sitting at a lavish dinner celebrating a remarkable family who had donated yet another borehole, solar panels, and pumping system to a rural village which had never experienced clean water before. The project was secret because it was delivered by an Israeli nongovernmental organisation (NGO) using Israeli technology. Today, close to 500 000 South Africans, whom government forgot, get their clean drinking water and irrigation systems courtesy of this Israeli NGO. No-one will talk about it for fear that if it was revealed that fresh drinking water was being provided to impoverished South Africans by Israel, the South African government would end the project.

On Tuesday, 7 March, the National Assembly of the parliament of South Africa convened to vote on a motion to further downgrade the South African embassy in Tel Aviv to the status of a minor liaison office. The motion was supported by the African National Congress (ANC), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and a few, mostly irrelevant, parties that litter the halls of parliament. The vote passed overwhelmingly.

The vote means little to Israel, which views the ANC as a criminal kleptocracy that has brought South Africa to the brink of disaster. The latest public opinion polls show the ANC polling at less than 40%.

But the vote to downgrade the South African embassy in Tel Aviv is the third slap in the face targeting Israel in a few weeks. In February, at the urging of South Africa and Algeria, the accredited Israeli observer at the African Union (AU) was summarily escorted from a meeting of the AU in Ethiopia by security guards.

This followed the cancellation of an invitation issued by SA Rugby to the Tel Aviv Heat rugby team to participate in the Mzansi Challenge, reportedly at the urging of the South African minister of sport. As minor as these actions are, each humiliation has an accumulative effect.

There are some in the Israeli foreign affairs ministry who have simply had enough of South Africa. For them, our country is a minor irritation, but ultimately irrelevant. It holds no sway in international politics, it’s irrelevant in mediating the dispute between Israel and Palestinians, and South Africa’s fast deteriorating economy supplies nothing that Israel couldn’t easily source elsewhere. They support

An Israeli company turns South African water from toxic to drinkable



built South Africa.

There’s little doubt that South Africa needs Israel much more than Israel needs South Africa. Besides water, Israeli drip irrigation, farming techniques, and seeds, feed millions of South Africans. Many thousands of mining jobs depend on Israeli imports. Israeli technology protects most of the banks and, at a time when most of the beaches of KwaZulu-Natal are closed because of untreated sewage, Israel is providing a number of municipalities around the country with sewage and water purification technology. The South African chapters of Israeli NGOs are working on environmental protection and teaching maths, science, and computers in South African schools.

One cannot expect Israel to offer unrequited love. Isn’t it time for Israel to hear the voice of the ANC and state, “We have no desire, any longer, to feed your people, protect your financial institutions, educate your students, clean your water, or save you from disease, thirst, and malnutrition. Let us take our solar panels, our water pumps, our textbooks. Let’s fill the boreholes we have dug, let’s rip out our irrigation. It’s time to recall our advisors, and turn off our software license.”

While South Africa sits in darkness, Israel has built the largest solar fields in Africa. Israeli teams bring sight to the blind in Africa, created the avocado industry in Ethiopia – today one of the country’s greatest exports – and have brought water, sanitation, and food to millions of Africans.

Israel has diplomatic relations with 42 of the 44 sub-Saharan African states. Quite simply, South Africa doesn’t deserve the enormous benefits that Israel can bring to the country. Maybe South Africa can replace its loss with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, which has so far brought nothing but death threats, intimidation, and cool Palestinian scarves for its “woke” politicians to wear.

It hasn’t escaped me that the ANC wouldn’t care. As a government it has repeatedly demonstrated that it’s deaf to the needs of all South Africans, it has made corruption, maladministration, and incompetence the new core South African values.

Of course, as a loyal, patriotic South African who has spent his entire life fighting for freedom and democracy in South Africa, I’m horrified at the thought that South Africans will suffer and may even die as a result of this action. But does Israel have a choice if it no longer wishes to be a party to this abusive relationship?

Many of the projects which Israel has rolled out in South Africa have been funded and promoted by members of the South African Jewish community. We need to proclaim our presence, our identity, and our beliefs proudly in this country.

Many of these donors were the same people who believed that Cyril Ramaphosa should be given a chance to mend our broken nation. But Ramaphosa has proven to be a dithering Nero, fiddling as South Africa burns. He has proven indecisive, incompetent, and tolerant of corruption. Under his leadership, the rand has lost 50% of its value.

It’s time for South African Jewry to tell the ANC that we have had enough! We don’t want it at our conferences or our dinners, we don’t want to donate to its failing political party, and we don’t care for its antiquated, Marxist, Cold War beliefs that have hollowed out our nation and stolen its future.

The very survival of our community and of South Africa depends on our ability to unseat the ANC and its corrupt, corpulent, criminal mafia from power.

If you believe you can sit on the sidelines and do nothing, watch as the ANC and the EFF form an alliance with Paul Mashatile and Julius Malema as our new leaders. If that happens, I’ll see you at OR Tambo International Airport as we depart the country and turn off the lights – as if there were still lights to turn off.

Or, we can get off our butts and do something! Join a political party, volunteer your time, donate money, provide resources, protest in the streets, write letters to newspapers, use social media. We need to fight for the future of South Africa and the future of our community before it’s lost forever.

There, I’ve said the unspeakable. I’ve said what was in your head all this time, and now you can crucify me. I won’t be the first over-opinionated Jew to be hung from a cross.

- *The views in this piece are those of the writer, and aren’t necessarily held by the SA Jewish Report.*

# Israeli protest is not about right or left

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



Since 7 January this year, Israelis have been taking to the streets every Saturday night to protest against the proposed judicial overhauls. Armed with Israeli flags, which have become the symbol of the protests, and chanting “*democratia*” and “shame”, Saturday night protests have become a fixture in the weekly calendar.

From Eilat in the south to Haifa in the north, Israelis are exercising their democratic right to protest. It doesn’t matter if you support or object to the judicial overhaul, watching this display of democracy in action is extraordinary.

This is a pivotal moment in Israel’s history. Though there have been small pockets of scuffles between protesters and police, the protests have been peaceful. Israel’s protest movement has inspired similar action in cities across the world including Rome, London, Paris, New York, Washington, and others. One could even say that the call to save Israel’s democracy is a bold reclaiming of Zionism, as these protests galvanise many who may disagree on a variety of issues, but have clearly united for this.

Most are of the opinion that this isn’t just a battle to save Israel’s democratic values but essentially, to save her soul.

There’s no doubt that the chasm between those who support the reforms and those who are protesting against them is growing wider. The most common misconceptions is that these protests are a rebellion against election results, or that it’s a “right versus left” battle or even a religious versus secular showdown. Some detractors have labelled protesters as “anarchists”, in an attempt to downplay the veracity of their claims.

In reality, the protesters represent a microcosm of Israeli society. They are young and old, religious and secular, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, from the left to the centre, and even traditional Likud supporters and national religious citizens who live in Judea and Samaria.

Tel Aviv may be the epicentre of the protests, but on Saturday night, hundreds gathered peacefully in Gush Etzion and Givat Shmuel in Judea and Samaria, bearing the blue and white and singing “*gesher tzar meod*”. “All the world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing to recall is to have no fear at all,” say the lyrics. This isn’t the image of the anarchistic, anti-government group many perceive the protesters to be.

Moreover, these protests aren’t a rebellion against election results. There are many who say that this is an

expression of the majority who voted in the coalition government, but the parties who form the coalition received only small percentages of the vote – with the exception of Likud. There isn’t consensus in the Likud party either on the issue of judicial reform.

Likud stalwart and former speaker of Knesset, Yuli Edelstein, cautioned against the reforms, appealing to the government “to but the brakes on and compromise”. He emphasised that this was a concern of several Likud MKs. Edelstein wasn’t present for the first readings of the controversial override bill earlier this week, and has been sanctioned as a result.

The voices of dissent and caution are

turning up the volume. One of Israel’s staunchest supporters, philanthropist Miriam Adelson, called the proposed reforms “hasty and irresponsible”. Israel’s allies are also expressing their concern. The United Arab Emirates has warned that it won’t purchase Israeli defence systems unless Prime Minister Netanyahu “reins in his government”.

One of the most vocal groups have been reservists from a host of different units in the army, navy, and air force. Israel’s military and security sector could be the most severely impacted by judicial reforms that could remove the Supreme Court’s ability to overrule any activity that could result in soldiers facing charges in

the International Court of Justice. Israel’s military welcomes the necessary checks and balances.

The Netanyahu name is synonymous with the heroic actions of Yoni Netanyahu during the Entebbe operation in 1976. The soldiers who participated in the legendary operation wrote an open letter to Netanyahu and summed up the diversity of the protesters, saying, “We did the impossible together with brothers in arms, soldiers from Golani, paratroopers, intelligence, medicine, and media and Mossad agents. And again now, we’re all together in the protests while you do all in your ability to crumble the Israeli people.”

The hundreds of thousands of Israelis

who are taking to the streets love their country. They are Zionists and patriots who want to see the state of Israel not only flourish, but continue to be the beacon of democracy it has been since its birth as a modern state 75 years ago. They are cautioning against reforms that would erode the civil rights of many and be to our economic detriment. Israelis are speaking up and increasing the volume. If only the ruling coalition would listen.

• *Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV, and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.*

## SA community expresses opposition to Israeli judicial reform

STEVEN GRUZD

The heated debate on Israel’s judicial reform played out at the South African Zionist Federation’s webinar, “Courting controversy: the debate on Israel’s judicial reforms” on 9 March 2023.

But our community made its feelings plain in an online poll during the debate, in which only 8% of viewers supported the controversial judicial reforms, 72% opposed them, and 20% were undecided.

The debate between Ran Bar-Yoshafat and Professor Yuval Shany, moderated by political commentator Jamie Mighti, was over Israel’s new far-right-wing government and its supporters who are pushing hard to have the Knesset enact a raft of judicial reforms before its Pesach break in early April.

The ruling coalition maintains that the Israeli Supreme Court is too liberal, overreaches its mandate, and interferes too much in government business. The prospect of these reforms has sparked huge (mostly peaceful) protests across Israel.

Analyst Rolene Marks set the scene, calling these protests “one of the biggest issues for Israel outside of a wartime scenario, and one of the most important since the [1993] Oslo Accords. There’s a real worry, a fear for the future of Israeli democracy. It’s a lot more complicated than the losers not accepting election results.” She remarked on the diversity of those protesting outside the justice minister’s house every Saturday night. “Protesters feel that the government isn’t listening. The Israeli public isn’t going to take these overhauls lying down. Media coverage tends to be loaded, and it’s difficult to be impartial,” she said.

Ex-South African David Benjamin, who served as a legal advisor to the Israeli Defense Forces from 1989 to 2009, explained what was at stake from a legal perspective. He said democracies depend on majority rule but need effective

checks and balances to prevent “the tyranny of the majority”. Israel lacks a written Constitution but does have what are termed “Basic Laws” dealing with issues like human dignity and the freedom of individuals. Citizens are allowed to take government decisions to the Israeli Supreme Court (acting as the High Court of Justice) for judicial review. The court may strike down a decision after determining its “reasonableness”.

Benjamin outlined the current slate of six proposed judicial reforms. First, it’s about how judges are selected for the bench, with a proposition to give the ruling coalition the ultimate say in these appointments. Second, the reforms want a threshold of 12 of the 15 Supreme Court justices for a judicial revision to overrule a law. Third, if at least 12 justices do decide to overturn a law (apart from Basic Laws), the proposal would allow the Knesset to reverse this if just 61 of 120 Members of the Knesset agree.

Fourth, by preventing a judicial overrule on Basic Laws, the legislators could then just make any law a Basic Law by inserting the words “Basic Law” into the legislation. Fifth, the reformers want to do away with the reasonableness test. Finally, they want to change the system of all legal advisors being subordinate to the attorney-general, making these positions of loyalty to the government ministers who appoint them.

Bar-Yoshafat is deputy director of the Kohelet Policy Forum, a conservative Israeli think tank. He’s a proponent of the judicial reforms, and said that even though he disagreed with the protesters, they were “patriotic”.

Bar-Yoshafat said to calm down the tense atmosphere in the country, the pace of the reforms should be slowed down, “The right-wing for 40 years have won elections, but have been unable to push policy forward,” he said. “Who should have the final word on laws? I disagree that it should be the judges. People ask, ‘Why now?’ We say

we have been waiting 15 years for this. The will of the people must prevail. The right is a hunted majority that can’t express itself.”

Shany, the deputy president of the Israel Democracy Institute, outlined what’s at stake in this ideological clash. “The proposed reforms give a very narrow vision of democracy, revolving almost all around majority rule. A court in a democracy is meant to uphold the law, protect human rights, and minority rights. It’s there to challenge bad laws and strike down legislation that violates these rights.”

He said the problem in Israel is it that it has insufficient institutional safeguards or checks and balances essential to democracy besides regular elections and the Supreme Court. It lacks a Constitution, a presidential veto, a second house of parliament, or appeal to a regional court as many other states have. “This is an all-out blitz to dismantle judicial and legal protections,” Shany said. “The reforms would alter the system to allow the government to interpret the laws itself, and make changes at its whim. We see the same process of deterioration of democracy in Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Turkey.”

Shany said the Israeli left was also dissatisfied with the Supreme Court, for example, on settlement policy in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). Calling it an extreme, leftist liberal organisation is “very exaggerated”, he said. It has become much more conservative over the past 20 years. “This push for judicial reforms is completely wrong-headed. It has left a large chunk of Israeli society opposed to it and determined to resist it with all its force. These reforms would damage the economy and Israel’s international reputation and status.”

Tampering with the judiciary is all the more questionable, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself faces fraud and breach-of-trust charges. The “Deri Law” – named after Shas Chairperson Aryeh Deri, who was ejected from the Knesset by the court because of a previous conviction – seeks to block the High Court from intervening in the appointment of ministers.

According to Shany, “When a government feels at ease to appoint a corrupt minister for obvious political reasons, the court must move into the fray in the absence of other checks and balances to protect the public interest.”

Bar-Yoshafat said he hoped a compromise could be found soon.



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# No ‘trading backwards’ for former prisoner Greg Blank

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Convicted of 48 counts of fraud and given a jail sentence, Greg Blank, a once legendary stockbroker, took his fate and used it to transform one of South Africa's most dangerous prisons. Innately positive, Blank argues that one needs to take accountability and then press on when facing adversity.

“In life you can’t trade backwards, you have to go forwards,” he said, speaking at this week’s *SA Jewish Report* webinar, “Bouncing Back from Scandal”. The webinar, which also featured formerly disgraced entrepreneur Rael Levitt, revealed the power of learning from mistakes and forging a better future. Building his reputation as a high-flying trader on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange while working for Frankel Pollak, Blank became adept at securing institutional investors in the late 1980s and early 1990s. That’s how he got involved with a crime syndicate working as portfolio managers at Old Mutual who came to him with “a great idea”.

“Institutions don’t want to buy a thousand shares at a time, they want to buy 500 thousand or a million at once to make it easier,” Blank said. “These Old Mutual fund managers would say, ‘We’re looking to buy x number of shares, we don’t guarantee that we’ll take those shares but there’s a good chance.’” So, Blank would buy the shares at his own risk and then offer them to Old Mutual. If the syndicate purchased the shares for Old Mutual, they did so at an inflated price, and would share the profits with Blank. If not, Blank would sell them to someone else.

“As a stockbroker, you couldn’t act as an agent and a principal,” Blank said. “So, if you were selling stock that you had a share in, you had to disclose that you were the owner of that stock.” The practice became legal six months after Blank’s conviction, but by then it was too late.

“In those days, the stock exchange was a plethora of everyone doing something that was incorrect,” said Blank. “And because everyone was doing it, it wasn’t deemed to be wrong until I was seen to do it, and then all hell broke loose.” Initially told that if he pled guilty, he would receive only a fine as had happened to others in similar cases, Blank was in fact convicted of fraud of non-disclosure, and sentenced to eight years in prison.

His biggest regret, he said, was the pain it caused his parents. “When you go to jail, it’s not you, it’s the people who are left behind that face it,” he said.

It was while serving time, which ultimately amounted to 22 months at Krugersdorp Prison, that he confronted his guilt. “The scary part is that when you’re doing it and everyone in the exchange is doing it, you actually don’t feel it’s wrong,” he said. “The first time that I really understood that it was wrong was when I was sitting in my jail cell at Krugersdorp – it took that shock of sitting in a cold cell. You’re so subjectively involved in the situation that you don’t see it. But when you remove yourself from it, you can see things more clearly.”

Yet Blank consistently took accountability,



Greg Blank

refusing well-meaning friends’ offers to help him flee the country since he held an Irish passport. “I never ran away from it; I made it very clear that what I did was wrong. Even in court, I said to the judge, ‘You found me guilty. I made a mistake. I’m here to face the penalty.’ In this day and age, everybody blames everybody else. Yet the sooner you take responsibility, the easier life becomes.”

That’s not to say he didn’t face an unimaginably difficult road. “I can’t explain going to jail. The loss of freedom is too abhorrent to really understand until you’re there,” he said. As a Jewish guy from the northern suburbs, the reality of prison was petrifying. “At the one and only breakfast I attended, two guys were stabbed to death in a gang fight. Yet, you face the situation

you’re in – you have to handle it.”

Blank soon befriended two other inmates, and they worked together to start a recreation programme at the prison. “Step by step, I started bringing stuff into the jail with the help of my loyal friends and contacts who were unbelievable.” They donated everything from televisions to soccer boots to wood and grain. With this help, Blank and his friends built a gym, set up a hairdressing salon, and ultimately managed to help create 21 businesses to keep the prisoners busy.

Yet, as he became more powerful, he became more of a target of prison gangs. Blank and his friends therefore enlisted gang members to work with them, involving them in the prison transformation. He worked on building their self-esteem, awarding donated prizes for boxing and soccer matches, and even arranging for Jomo Sono, the coach of Cosmos, to bring his team to play a friendly match against the

prison team.

“I’ve always been consistent,” Blank said, reflecting on his can-do attitude. “I get up every morning trying to be the best person I can be, and being in jail didn’t change that.” Though the Old Mutual crime syndicate never faced convictions, Blank chose not to be bitter. “I didn’t take the fall for anyone, I did what I did, it was my fault. Jail teaches you about yourself.”

Blank feels that his prison experience strengthened him for what he had to handle later in life, including a nine-year cancer battle. He’s now cancer free and working on the stock market. He also buys and races horses, a passion that comes with wins and losses, something that has taught him more about handling failure.

“I refuse to see negativity in anything, it’s a wasted emotion,” said Blank. “Adversity gives you a chance to reinvent yourself. The trick is how you handle it and go forward.”

## Zaidel-Rudolph’s composition in UN concert

ROBYN SASSEN

It’s not every day that a South African composer’s work is chosen to be performed in the International Women’s Day programme in the United Nations (UN) concert, which was the forerunner to the UN’s conference focusing on the status of women in the world.

Contemporary composer Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph was the only South African included in the concert, and she was hand-picked to be showcased globally.

Zaidel-Rudolph has enjoyed a prolific career and is no stranger to this kind of celebration of her work. But for Zaidel-Rudolph, emeritus professor of music at the University of the Witwatersrand, these moments are a bit of a “cherry on top” of a lot of hard work.

Earlier this year, her piece, *At The End of the Rainbow*, composed in 1988, was selected as the key work to be performed at Global Women in Music, an International Women’s Day event on 8 March. The event was hosted by United Voices 4 Peace and the United Nations Symphony Orchestra, and conducted by Maestra Anoa Green from Baltimore.

Performed to a live audience of more than 600 people – and a considerably larger international audience who watched it through live-streaming – at the imposing BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center in Manhattan, New York, the work is significant in Zaidel-Rudolph’s repertoire.

It engages with the power of water in Jewish mystical thought, blending the narrative of the biblical flood with man’s spiritual odyssey from a natural state of sin to a promised state of grace, brought to resonant life with orchestral sound rich in incident and full of colour.

Characteristic of Zaidel-Rudolph’s approach, it’s replete with irregular polyrhythms, which link it to an African sound, uniquely blending threads of her Jewish values with her African context.

Born in 1948 in Pretoria and educated in South Africa, London, and Hamburg, Zaidel-Rudolph was the first woman in South Africa to obtain her doctorate in music composition.

Popularly celebrated for having been instrumental in developing South Africa’s new national anthem in 1995, she was already well-respected in international avant-garde music circles by the 1970s.

The UN concert organisers placed Zaidel-Rudolph’s work, which, at just over 16 minutes,

was considerably more substantial than all the other works on the programme, just after intermission. This is a special programming trick which ensures a warmed-up freshness on the part of audiences and performers.

The founder and chairperson of United Voices 4 Peace, the Spain-based Veronica Sabbag, who was one of the core decision-makers of this concert, has, throughout her career, been privileged to connect an interest in music with experience in conflict management, defence, and security. In 2018, Zaidel-Rudolph’s work, *Oratorio for Human Rights*, was performed in Rome at a gala concert in honour of the 70th anniversary of the UN’s declaration of human rights. It was at this event that Sabbag met Zaidel-Rudolph and experienced her music, and the impact was unforgettable and electric.

With a mandate to celebrate the work of women composers, the UN International Women’s Day programme chose 10 of the world’s unequivocal best, also including 19th century French composer Louise Farrenc; early 20th century American composer Florence Price; Syrian film and concert music composer Suad Bushnaq; multimedia performer and composer, Masha Brodskaya, who hails from Ukraine; and Sussan Deyhim from Iran, who specialises in dance, music, and theatre, to name a few.

Unable to be in New York at the time, Zaidel-Rudolph watched the concert’s live stream during the early hours of 9 March. “I was contacted by Serbian Predrag Vasić, the orchestra’s musical director who trained the orchestra,” she says, acknowledging that the UN Symphony Orchestra isn’t a professional orchestra as such, but one comprising musically skilled UN staffers.

“My score is challenging. It has the energy of contemporary work of the late 1980s. It’s neither easy nor straightforward to perform.” The orchestra, substantially sized at between 50 and 60 performers did, in Zaidel-Rudolph’s opinion, “a masterful job” under the balanced and thoughtful baton of Maestra Green.

Born with the remarkable gifts of perfect pitch and a flawless aural memory, Zaidel-Rudolph has honed an extraordinary and intelligent music career and repertoire over several decades. She mixes her characteristic humility with candid awe regarding the magic of music.

“The experience of having my work performed by the UN again reminded me how uniquely wonderful it is that music can travel over continents and still speak well to different audiences and ensembles,” she said. “That’s the beauty of music as an international language.”



Professor Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph

Photo: Joffie Berkowitz



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# SA’s warm relationship with Iran ‘perplexing’, says activist

NICOLA MILTZ

Visiting American Israeli journalist and social media influencer, Emily Schrader, has spent the past six months bringing the world’s attention to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s persecution of its own civilians. Somehow, she hopes to share what she knows with the South African government.

“South Africa is being used as a pawn” by the Iranian government, she said. “The Islamic Republic’s values are completely antithetical to the values that South Africa purportedly has. South Africa is a constitutional democracy, Iran is an autocratic theocracy.”

Schrader has been involved in organising peaceful demonstrations, solidarity rallies, and has taken part in several social initiatives to gain support for every day Iranians seeking greater freedom.

She has garnered thousands of signatures in a change.org petition to Twitter Chief Executive Elon Musk calling on him to ban the Ayatollah Khamenei from the social media platform.

“The more I see what goes on in repressive regimes, the more I find myself unable to be silent,” Schrader, 31, told the *SA Jewish Report*. She has a following across social media of more than 180 000, including 70 000 in Iran.

“Iranians were never enemies of Israel, they were allies before the Islamic Revolution,” Schrader said.

“Someone with no filter must stand up for women in Iran because so many people cannot,” she said.

The Tel Aviv-based human rights activist engaged legislators, civil society, non-profit organisations, and students on campuses during her visit to South Africa this week.

Alongside her Arab Israeli fiancé, Yoseph Haddad, 37, an Israel Defense Forces combat veteran and pro-Israel activist, the pair have offered solidarity, support, and guidance to Jewish students on local university campuses during Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW).

“It’s difficult for Jewish students during IAW. We wanted to be here to create content and education regarding some of the misconceptions and misunderstandings, to have it not all fall on the heads of students,” she said.

“Most of the time, students want to learn. They don’t want to go to university to be targeted for who they are and be forced to have endless political debates, especially when it’s not their area of expertise or passion,” she said.

The pair have engaged with Jewish students to empower them to be able to answer questions posed to them “but above all, to encourage them to stand strong and be proud of their identity because there’s no alternative”, Schrader said.

Schrader is a correspondent at *Ynet News*, and the founder of Social Lite Creative, a digital marketing firm. She’s the former digital director of StandWithUs, and a regular commentator in international media on issues of antisemitism, Iran-Israel relations, and online hate speech.

She was integral to the campaign pushing for the adoption on social media of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association’s definition of antisemitism. She has advised legislators in numerous countries in the West on effective policies to combat online antisemitism, and was recently named one of the top-100 people positively influencing Jewish life in 2023 by the *Algemeiner Journal*.

“I didn’t grow up in a religious Jewish home, and didn’t really think about Israel,” she said. Her social activism began when she attended University of Southern California as an undergraduate and encountered an obsessive, hostile anti-Israel environment.

“I started to speak out and over time,

standing up for Israel and educating people about Israel became part of my focus,” she said. She made aliya in 2015, where her Israel advocacy work broadened to include global human rights issues including women’s rights.

It’s baffling to her why certain countries including South Africa are sympathetic towards the Islamic Republic given its well documented persecution of its own people. “The regime has also overseen the funding and arming of violent proxy terrorist organisations in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Gaza, and is responsible for the deaths of thousands of Muslims, Christians, and Jews throughout the region,” she said.

“Within Iran, the Ayatollah is responsible for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps which is a United States-designated terrorist organisation, and the morality police, which routinely harasses and arrests women for not wearing the mandatory hijab.”

Schrader is the spokesperson for an American think tank called the Institute for Voices of Liberty, a non-profit educational public policy institute dedicated to reflecting the aspirations of the people of Iran.

“Iran is also terrible when it comes to workers’ rights, which is something the South African

government feels strongly about,” she said.

Last week’s agreement brokered by China between Iran and Saudi Arabia to re-establish diplomatic relations was “concerning and disappointing”, she said.

Describing Israeli politics as “messy”, she said her support for Israel wasn’t based on the government of the day, but on the belief that the Jewish people have a right to self-determination and a homeland.

Though



Photo: Saskia Pantell

the move to the right-wing makes things more difficult, she said, “It’s inspiring that almost half a million Israelis are protesting peacefully throughout the country week after week. It’s impressive, and though I don’t agree with the proposed judicial reforms, it’s testament to democracy and the resilience of the Israeli people that you see such a strong push back.”

Schrader is also involved with Together Vouch for Each Other, an organisation set up to promote peaceful dialogue between Jews and Arabs in Israel of which her partner, Haddad, is the founder. Their shared values and passion for truth about Israel and its diverse population brought them together.

“It’s ok to condemn policies of the state of Israel,” said Schrader, “What’s not ok is to condemn the fact that Israel has a right to exist. Anti-Israel activists aren’t talking about specific policies, their interest is the elimination of the state of Israel, and that’s something we cannot accept.”

## ‘Pure Jew hatred’ behind protest at Tuks

>>>Continued from page 1

issue of Israel remains important to the ANC [African National Congress] and its alliance partners, the majority of South Africans don’t resonate with the half-truths being disseminated by the BDS movement. The general South African population has many other things to worry about.”

In addition, he points out that on campuses, IAW has in general been uncoordinated and chaotic, with different universities hosting events at different times, “which also isn’t the norm”. He believes this points to miscommunication and disunity between anti-Israel groups on campuses this year.

Meanwhile, IAW was cancelled at the University of the Witwatersrand because of ongoing protests on campus. SAUJS National Political Officer Gabriella Farber says, “We need to look at these things critically: who is it coming from, to whom is it aimed, and in what context is it happening? Then we can properly assess the risk and severity of the anti-Israel

sentiment. And we can clearly see that it’s coming from a very small minority.

“SAUJS has done a fortune of work to show fellow students what a true Jew and Zionist is – that we don’t want hatred, that we want peace,” says Farber. “And this has changed sentiment among students because they are interacting with real Jewish Zionists, not a perception.”

There were no IAW events at the University of Cape Town [UCT] this week. Next week, the UCT Palestine Solidarity Forum plans to highlight “the crimes of ‘Israel’” (the organisation’s inverted commas), calling for “the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea”. A documentary screening, a rally, and a “vigil for martyrs” is planned. Haddad, a StandWithUs delegation, SAUJS, and community organisations will be on campus to counter the hatred.

Meanwhile, Tuks’ SAUJS and the SRC are dedicated to maintaining their working relationship.

## SA Grammy winner brings heat to desert festival

>>>Continued from page 2

morning. Captioning his Instagram reel, he said, “They said, ‘Your set in the desert is at 07:30 – 10:00’. I said you mean pm? They said no sir, am. The party starts at midnight, and ends at 10:00 with your closing set. And the rest is history.” More than 22 000 people liked the post.

A reel followed, showing him arriving in Tel Aviv and then partying in the desert with fans. The clip demonstrated the diversity and freedom of Israeli society, where women and people from all backgrounds are free to dress and express themselves as they choose. As the desert festival was a Purim event, ticket holders had to dress up to gain entry, and they went “all out” in their Purim attire.

Bantwini has a million followers on Facebook and 891 802 followers on Instagram. He shared his videos and photos of his Israel trip on both platforms, which were in turn shared widely by fans on social media.

“The fans enjoyed the music, and I was pleasantly surprised to see just how much they connected with my sound,” he says. “Our music is finally being consumed across the globe, which matters most to me and to the growth of our South African music industry.

“I enjoyed my time in Israel. I look forward to being invited out there again, and thank my supporters and those who make it possible to spread our music far and wide. It’s my hope that my music spreads love and inspires unity and happiness amongst all people.”

## DO YOU NEED AN ATTORNEY WHEN APPLYING FOR LITHUANIAN CITIZENSHIP?

The first step in the reinstatement process is to assess your eligibility for citizenship by descent. This requires not only an understanding of the eligibility criteria but also legal expertise to assess your circumstances correctly.

The second challenge of restoring Lithuanian citizenship is gathering the legal documents required to justify the application. While consulting Lithuanian archives may be necessary, it is often not enough. Applicants may need to undergo legal procedures such as court applications, which can be difficult without the assistance of a legal professional. This is especially true for those whose ancestors changed their names and dates of birth upon arrival in their country of emigration.

The third challenge is keeping up with changes at the Migration department (Lithuania). Amendments to the interpretation of criteria for documentary proof can significantly impact the outcome of an application. An experienced attorney will provide the additional evidence needed to keep the application on track, ensuring that any changes are promptly addressed.

Lastly, with an attorney assisting in the application process, the applicant does not need to be well-versed in legal matters or other

prerequisites, as the attorney offers guidance on any exceptional circumstances that may complicate the application, such as incomplete or missing documentation. Ultimately, this guarantees that no crucial elements are overlooked, resulting in time and cost savings for the applicant.

In cases where the application is rejected, the applicant has the right to a court appeal, which is barely possible without the assistance of the attorney practicing in the Republic of Lithuania. IN JURE, Law Firm (Lithuania) actively and continuously specializes in restoring Lithuanian citizenship for the last 12 years and provides a 100% success fee policy, meaning that applicants will only pay a pre-arranged fee if their case is approved, regardless of the number of working hours the attorney puts in to achieve this outcome.

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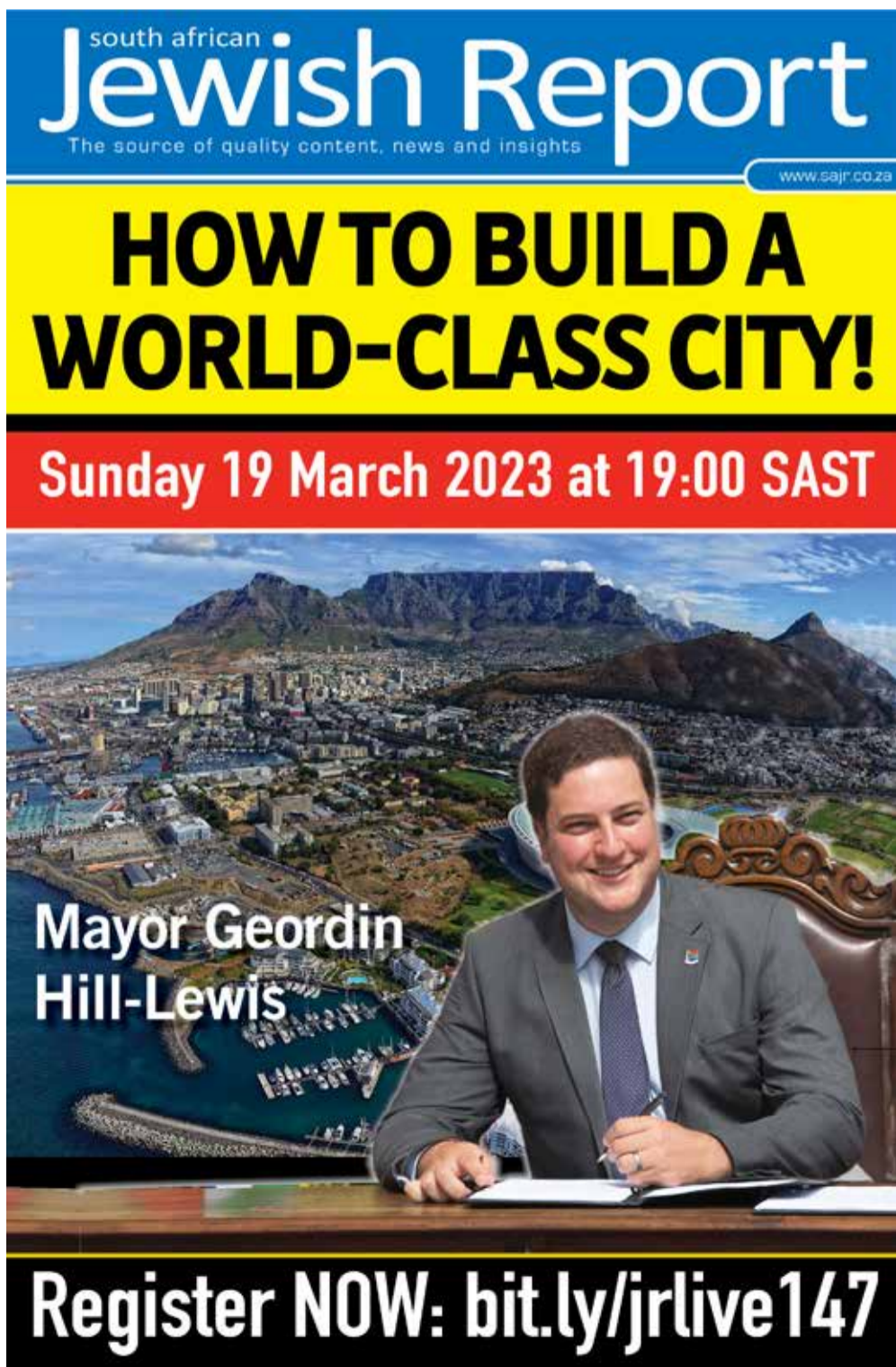
**HEATHER DJUNGA**

Abrahamsohn said he had also noticed an increase in levels of anxiety and depression

He said the negative impact on the economy and the difficulty in running businesses, as well as the overwhelming traffic people face daily during load shedding, all added to psychological fragility and fatigue. "Aggression is often a

Cohen further advised that parents set up some form of routine for children. "Children

Abrahamsohn said he believed the answer to these concerns lay in the value of community. He said as a Jewish resident, he felt incredibly blessed to be part of such a strong community. “Spend time with fellow community members, and don’t be afraid to share anxieties and concerns. And reach out for help. There’s no shame in speaking out.”



# Farewell to SA Cricket’s ‘Papa Joe’

LUKE ALFRED

Joe Pamensky – or “Papa Joe” as almost everyone knew him – died last Wednesday, 8 March, in Johannesburg after a long and uncomplaining battle with dementia aged 92. As benefited a former opening batsman and cricket administrator, his reputation grew in singles, few of them cheeky.

He was never one for the flamboyant heave over mid-wicket or the lofted cover-drive when singles and judicious twos would keep the scoreboard ticking over.

As an accountant who specialised in tax and estate issues according to one of his two sons, Kevin, “Papa Joe” was meticulous. Even more important than his attention to detail, was his calm. He dampened down many a heated situation over the years with his steadiness and sheer unflappability – a true opener.

He not only played the avuncular elder statesmen role to perfection but he lived it, bringing gravitas and integrity both to his professional life and his 55-year tenure as one of South African cricket’s truly great administrators. “With Joe in a meeting,” said his fellow administrator, Lee Irvine, “there was always a sense of decorum, nothing petty was allowed to rear its head.”

According to Kevin, Joe told him that the harder you work, the luckier you’ll get, but also warned mildly “that life is no dress rehearsal”. Kevin remembers his father as a creature of habit with a remarkable appetite for hard work. “I could even phone him at two or three in the morning and knew he’d pick up because he was at his desk,” he says.

The son of Sam and Florrie Pamensky who

owned a jewellers on Loveday Street in central Joburg, Joseph Leon Pamensky was born in Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) on 21 July 1930. He attended Grey High, excelling in maths and playing first team cricket, where he opened the innings and kept wicket. Unusually, he was a school prefect for not one but two years.

Pamensky studied at the University of the Witwatersrand after World War II, and played his club cricket first for the university and, later, at Pirates in Johannesburg. “He loved the game enormously,” said his lifelong friend and colleague, Ali Bacher.

The signs that “Papa Joe” was well on the road to becoming a dedicated cricket administrator appeared early. He sat on the Wits All Sports’ Council while still a student, and was elected onto the Transvaal Cricket Union’s junior board as a 23 year-old in 1953 before being elected onto the full board two years later. On the Transvaal board, he wore many hats, including that of vice-chairperson, chairperson, treasurer – a position to which he was well-suited with his accounting background – and, eventually, president.

His election onto the South African Cricketers’ Association board duly followed in 1967. He was one of the “main drivers”, according to the Central Gauteng Lions President Anne Vilas, of the short-lived unity process in the mid-1970s and, as honorary president, was supportive of Bacher becoming Transvaal cricket’s first full-time chief executive in 1981.

The 1980s weren’t an easy time for cricket administrators in South Africa, with the national team banned from international competition after the cancellation of the proposed tour to Australia in 1971/2. Pamensky, Bacher, and

fellow administrator Geoff Dakin’s response was to initiate the controversial “rebel tours”. This resulted in English, Sri Lankan, West Indian, and Australian tours to the country, a necessity, believed Pamensky, if South Africa was to keep abreast of standards in the world game.

The tours were hugely popular with white South Africans but controversial with the oppressed majority and those supporting the sports boycott outside of the country. For Pamensky’s sons, Kevin and Martin, and his daughter, Beverly, the tours had an upside – regular international guests at the family home, 27 Limpopo Road in Emmarentia, where they were wined and dined.

“Donald Bradman was my dad’s hero, and they did so much together in supporting the development of the game, supporting cricket at grassroots level, and in disadvantaged communities around the world,” said Martin from San Diego, where he lives.

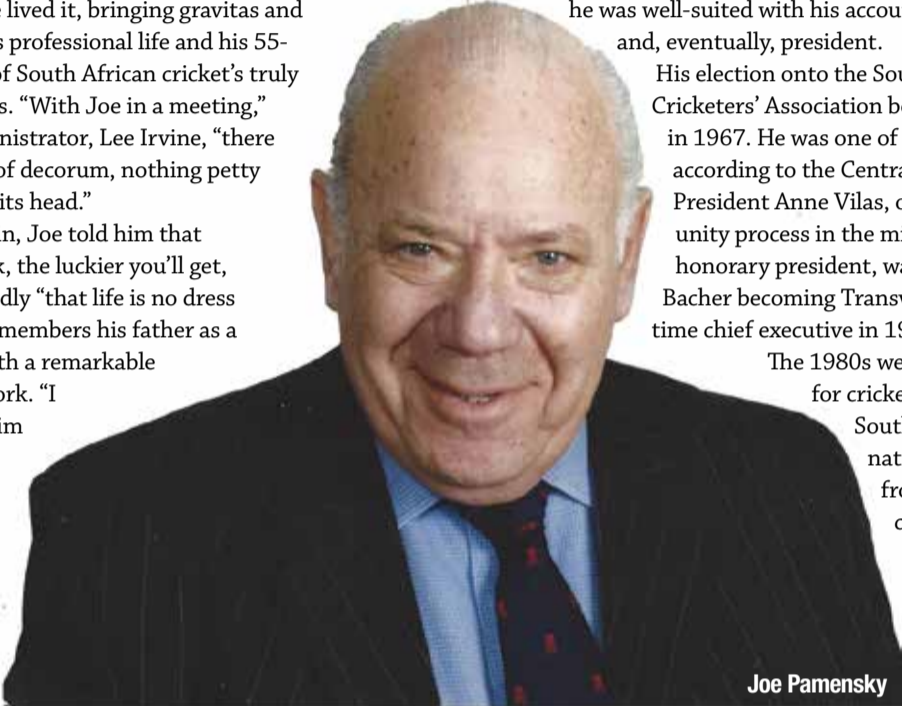
As challenging as the 1980s were – both within cricket and the country at large – so the early 1990s brought South Africa’s back into the fold. Pamensky and Bacher were at the forefront of the re-integration process not only within but without the country too.

He handled these exciting (and sometimes fraught times) with gravitas and dignity. “Joe’s name was good throughout the world,” said Bacher. “He was trusted and highly regarded wherever he went.”

Seven years ago, Pamensky was diagnosed with what Kevin refers to as “semantic dementia” and he and his new partner, Jackie, moved into the Livewell care facility in Bryanston after the death of Joe’s first wife, Pam, 14 years ago.

Pam and Joe were married in 1958 with 800 people invited to the wedding as guests.

A little-known fact of Pamensky’s life was his sensitivity to those around him, including servants and retainers. One of these was Morgan Ncube, who worked for the Pamensky family as gardener, cook, and cleaner at 27 Limpopo for 38 years. Pamensky helped Ncube buy his home and complained, according to Martin, that things were never quite the same with him gone.



Joe Pamensky



## Ann Harris

### A Tribute to Afrika Tikkun’s formidable Matriarch

**A**nn Harris was the fiery instigator that motivated the late Bertie Lubner and her late husband Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris to form Afrika Tikkun (formerly known as Ma Afrika Tikkun), 29 years ago, in response to the hardships caused by apartheid on underprivileged township communities. Ann was a formidable iron lady with dignity, strength and courage and was always prepared to roll up her sleeves and make a difference.

At the inception of Afrika Tikkun, Ann was part of the management team, which started with an initial funding capital of R90 000. Today it has over 700 employees and is recognised as one of South Africa’s leading NGOs servicing over 20,000 beneficiaries. With preservation, determination, and a keen understanding of the needs of disadvantaged communities, Ann was part of the team instrumental in developing the strategy and being

out in the field to implement, refine and achieve sustainable impact. There are many stories to be told of Ann’s exploits, especially in the feeding, after-school programmes, primary health care and family intervention initiatives. Nothing held her back and she lead from the trenches of poverty. Ann loved and equally respected people who committed good deeds and she worked tirelessly, advocating for human rights at the most basic level. As Afrika Tikkun Group CEO, Marc Lubner, fondly remembers: “Her tough exterior belied an enormous heart that loved selflessly. She and her values will always be part of the guiding principles underlying all we do at Afrika Tikkun.” She will always be remembered as our fearless beacon of light and we sincerely appreciate her contribution. Her memory will remain an indelible part of us and she will never be forgotten as the mother of Ma Afrika Tikkun.

# KDL’s *A Musical* a trip of the best kind

REVIEW

HANNA RESNICK



King David Linksfield's *A Musical* was a trip down memory lane through school stories and musical theatre classics.

The show, performed from 12 to 14 March, featured an original script crafted around everyone's favourite Broadway songs. It painted a picture of students past and present in order to commemorate 75 years of King David schools.

Directed and produced by Owen Lonzar, Sharon Spiegel-Wagner, and Meryl Malkin, featuring a group of King David alumni and a large ensemble of students, and assisted by the student sound and lighting team, this memorable tribute was truly a team effort.

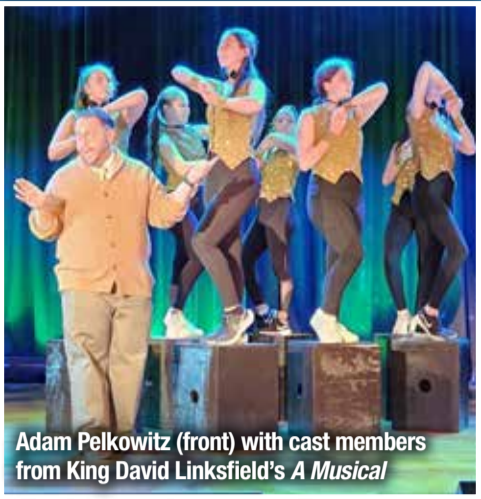
The show begins with six high school students in detention, a la *The Breakfast Club*. The audience is introduced to Maddie, the popular girl (played by Layla Kayle); Rachel, the goth girl (Leah Kerr-Phillips); Sarah, the introvert (Ariella Gnesin); Jodan, the "indie" rockstar (Jaxon Cohen); Ryan, the geek (Ben Ginsburg); and Troy, the jock (Ashton Mervis). The supervising teacher (Gary Allen) falls asleep, and the group starts to quarrel and interrogate one another. Suddenly, music starts to play and an ensemble of dancers appears on stage. They go on to perform a witty rendition of *Cell Block Tango* from *Chicago* explaining why each student is serving time in detention. Changes to the original song such as replacing the "uh uh" with "oy vey" kept the audience

amused.

From then on, the Broadway hits keep coming. A mysterious box calls out to them with the song *There's a Light* from the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The box is full of old yearbooks and documents from past students and teachers. The ensemble joins the students for a *Time Warp* through the school's history. The students discuss the importance of looking back at the past and how to move forward into the future, followed by a rendition of *Seize the Day* from *Newsies*.

High-spirited performances of *Aquarius* from the musical *Hair* (Tali Rome), and *Welcome to Nowhere* from *The Band's Visit* (Arianne Kinkel) not only highlighted comical anecdotes from the documents but also felt like whole productions within themselves. The dramatic, colourful lighting created a magical atmosphere that distinguished the musical numbers from the rest of the narrative. Other blasts from the past included a snippet of *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* featuring a group of girls from the 80s going outside to smoke (receiving strange looks from the group of modern-day students for smoking rather than vaping).

The set was kept relatively simple, featuring a few desks and boxes, allowing the talented students to hold the audience's attention. Costumes were also minimal, allowing for quick changes between the world of various musicals. The primary cast wore school uniforms, while



the ensemble wore black or white outfits with one or two easily identifiable costume pieces per character/scene they were playing.

The exuberant, elaborately choreographed pieces were interspersed with more intimate moments, such as an acoustic performance of *Shallow* from *A Star is Born* and a romantic rendition of *Hopelessly Devoted To You* from *Grease* (Demi Cohen).

The show also featured a variety of interesting mash-ups of well-known numbers. The progression of *Popular* from *Wicked* into *Omigod You Guys* from *Legally Blonde*, featuring JennaBabes (alumnus Jenna Berkowitz)

showed the transformation of the alternative goth girl into the "perfect kugel". *Waving Through a Window* and *You Will Be Found* from *Dear Evan Hansen* (featuring Gia Salkow) highlighted the importance of mental health and feeling heard. And the mash-up of *Memory* (*Cats*) and *I See the Light* (*Tangled*), juxtaposed the feelings of loss and hope in two of the students.

The group numbers were undoubtedly a highlight of the evening, particularly, *A Musical* from *Something Rotten* as the show stopping finale of Act 1, led by alumnus Adam Pelkowitz and Peter Szewach, and *Revolting Children*, featuring the stand-out vocals of Luke Mostert and lively ensemble choreography. The choreography was well executed and the vocal arrangements allowed the talent of the entire group to shine. The heartwarming performance *Seasons of Love*, featuring alumni Eitan Malkin and Gary Allen, and the upbeat finale of *You Can't Stop the Beat* (*Hairspray*), left the audience feeling elated and hopeful.

This show was geared towards parents, students, and alumni of the school, with stories and inside jokes that resonated with the intended audience. That being said, its wonderful celebration of various musicals as well as its commentary on current issues in our schools made this production one that every audience member could enjoy.

## Fabelmans flops at Oscars, but Hollywood’s Jewish history spotlighted

ANDREW LAPIN – JTA

With seven nominations for his most personal film ever, this could have been Steven Spielberg's biggest year at the Academy Awards. But the hot-dog fingers had other plans.

*The Fabelmans*, the director's highly personal dramatisation of his Jewish upbringing, didn't win a single one of the Oscars it was nominated for on Sunday night. Spielberg's film lost out on the biggest categories, including best picture, director, actress, and original screenplay, all to the same movie: chaos-theory multiverse comedy *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, where the aforementioned hot-dog fingers play a starring role.

But while the most Jewish movie came up empty-handed, other Jewish stories played out on the movies' biggest night.

**Getting loud for *All Quiet***

*All Quiet on the Western Front*, Netflix's gruelling drama about German soldiers on the frontlines of World War I, ended the night with four Oscars: international feature film, original score, cinematography, and production design. In addition to having a Jewish producer, the movie was also adapted from a novel and 1930 film that both met the ire of the Nazi party and were tarred as Jewish plots to destroy the German state.

**A Jewish "Goonies brother for life"**

One of the most heartwarming moments of the evening was the best supporting actor win for Ke Huy Quan for *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. Quan, a former child actor, had abandoned his onscreen career for decades before his big comeback role last year. Quan gave a special shout-out to "my *Goonies* brother for life", Jeff Cohen, a Jewish former child star turned entertainment lawyer. Cohen and Quan appeared in *The Goonies* together in 1985, and when Quan landed his big *Everything Everywhere* role, Cohen negotiated the terms of his deal.

**Jamie Lee Curtis and Sarah Polley**

There were a couple of big-name Oscar winners with Jewish parents. Immediately after Quan's big moment, veteran actress Jamie Lee Curtis picked up her first-ever Oscar, also for *Everything Everywhere*.

Tony Curtis, Jamie Lee's Jewish father, was one of the biggest stars of golden age Hollywood, yet received only one Oscar nomination, in 1959 for *The Defiant Ones*. Another winner with a Jewish father was the writer-director-actor, Sarah Polley, who won best adapted screenplay for *Women Talking*.

**Navalny and the neo-Nazis**

The winner for best documentary went to a profile of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, whose

2020 poisoning by KGB agents after he publicly criticised Vladimir Putin was an international scandal. Navalny is imprisoned in Russian solitary confinement, and the filmmakers dedicated the award to him. The documentary also details a controversial aspect of Navalny's campaign: his onetime support of the "Russian march", a gathering of Russian neo-Nazi organisations.

**Diane Warren's no-win situation**

Diane Warren, who is Jewish, joined in the performance of *Applause*, her composition from the feminist documentary *Tell It Like A Woman*. She has never won an Oscar, and unfortunately for her, the streak continued on Sunday, 12 March, as the viral sensation *Naatu Naatu*, from the Indian film *RRR*, took the prize.

**Another Jew-ish shutout**

Also drawing blanks was *Tár*, the cerebral classical-music psychological drama with somewhat inexplicable Jewish themes.

**Hollywood's Jewish history gets a nod**

The broadcast included a promotional video for the Academy Museum, which opened last year, which stated that one of its roles was to "bring important film histories to light, from the Jewish immigrants who founded the Hollywood



studios to the early innovators of African-American cinema". The museum drew criticism when it first opened for giving short shrift to the industry's robust Jewish history.

## Topol his game – Fiddler star a hero on and off stage

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

Chaim Topol won a Golden Globe for his portrayal of an immigrant to Israel, stepped off the stage in London to fight for his country, and had his sketches of Israeli presidents turned into postage stamps.

But the actor was by far best known for his embodiment of Tevye the Dairyman in *Fiddler on the Roof*, first in the Israeli and London stagings and then in the 1971 movie that brought the musical about poor shtetl Jews to the masses.

Topol died on Thursday, 9 March, in Tel Aviv at 87, a day after his family announced that he was near death. He had suffered from Alzheimer's disease for some time.

Born in 1935 in Tel Aviv, Topol served in the Israel Defense Forces entertainment unit before embarking on a career in stage and screen that took him around the world. In 1967, he appeared as the lead character in London's staging of *Fiddler on the Roof*, which had been a breakout hit on Broadway three years before. In his early 30s at the time, he wowed audiences and critics with his portrayal of a character decades older.

But it was when he turned his character over to an understudy that his profile truly exploded. It was June 1967 and Israel was locked in a war with several Arab states. Topol was called up as a soldier, and returned to Israel to serve in what would ultimately be known as the Six-Day War. Israel's swift defeat of an alliance of enemies caused the world to notice the young country and the actor who took part in its victory.

"He had left London as a star; he returned as a hero," Alisa Solomon wrote in her 2013 book, *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof*. "Fiddler became a site for celebration, drawing Jews as well as gentiles to the theatre – some for repeat viewings – to bask in Jewish perseverance and pay homage to Jewish



survival. The show didn't change, but the atmosphere around it did."

In one sign of Topol's breakout moment, his recording of *If I Were a Rich Man* hit No. 9 on the British charts – besting Aretha Franklin's *Respect* in July 1967.

From there, Topol was cast in the film production of the musical, beating out Zero Mostel, who put an indelible stamp on Tevye as the star of the original Broadway production, as well as a host of Jewish and non-Jewish movie stars.

Using only his last name – purportedly because his first name was easily mispronounced by non-Hebrew speakers – he ultimately starred in more than 30 films in English and Hebrew, publish two books, and release multiple albums.

In Israel, Topol was perhaps best known for his breakout role as the lead character in the 1964 film *Sallah Shabati*, about the difficulties faced by a Mizrahi immigrant family. The Ephraim Kishon film was Israel's first Academy Award nominee in the foreign-language film category, and earned Topol a Golden Globe for best new actor. The casting of an Ashkenazi actor as a Mizrahi character – and one who embodied many of the stereotypes held at the time by Israel's Ashkenazi elite – would prove controversial, although the film is still regarded as a touchstone.

Topol won Israel's top prize, the Israel Prize, for his lifetime of achievement in 2013.

"From *Fiddler on the Roof* to the roof of the world, Haim [sic] Topol, who has passed away from us, was one of the most outstanding Israeli stage artists, a gifted actor who conquered many stages in Israel and overseas, filled the cinema screens with his presence, and above all, entered deep into our hearts," Israeli President Isaac Herzog said on Twitter.

Herzog noted Topol's contributions to Israel not just through the arts but through his service in the army and his dedication to a non-profit camp for children with medical needs in Israel's north. Topol was board chairperson of the Jordan Youth Village, modelled after Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Camp in the United States, until his death.

He's survived by his wife, Galia, an actor he married in 1956; three children; and their children.

# Beating cancer created a calling to help others live

ALISTAIR ANDERSON

"I wouldn't be who I am if I hadn't beat cancer," says Hannah Katz, now a happy, energetic, and healthy 17-year-old King David Linksfield (KDL) scholar.

Instead of leaving her illness behind, she has lent her dynamism to helping to develop projects for DL Link, a Jewish organisation that helps cancer patients, and working in KDL's outreach programme.

"I want to do my best to improve other people's lives. After returning from the United States [US], where I received support from my family and all kinds of people [during treatment], I have found that bringing light and love to people who are sick makes me feel good. I have a purpose," she says.

Katz, who is in Grade 11, has made a full recovery since being diagnosed with embryonal rhabdomyosarcoma cancer at the age of 11. This is a rare type of cancer that occurs mostly in children.

Treated in Memphis, Tennessee, she says, "I feel differently about my health now, on all sorts of levels. Ever since I came back, I've done speeches for DL Link and promoted fundraising. I'm now coming up with my own stuff to do with it."

DL Link offers lifestyle support for patients with cancer, providing hands-on assistance, emotional care, and concierge services.

This Friday, 17 March, is the Jerusalem Marathon, which DL Link uses to raise funds for Jewish cancer survivors by getting people to participate in the name of someone with cancer, raising donations and runner sponsorships. DL Link hopes to raise R200 000 through the marathon this year.

Katz's parents, Hayley and Julian, will participate in the marathon, "walking as much of it as they can. My parents were really cool about this. It was something they just wanted to do," she says.

"It's an amazing opportunity to send a powerful message and show everybody that we're still with them," Katz says. For this young cancer survivor, the Jerusalem Marathon makes her feel more fulfilled spiritually, something which has become so important to her. "Each time a runner completes four steps, they will have done a *mitzvah*," she says.

Katz is also excited about another DL Link project she is working on, which is changing the way people see the cancer ribbon. "We're turning the ribbon around. A 'V' on top will now stand for victory, and will recognise survivors. A teardrop below will remember those who we have lost," she says.

The ribbons will be sold at schools and other organisations for R18 each, which she says is a symbolic number because it represents *chai* (life).

Katz also spends time volunteering at a crèche on behalf of KDL. She has helped Cupcakes of Hope, Kids Kicking Cancer, Woodrock Animal Rescue, and



Hannah Katz

other charities.

When she isn't in class or working on charity projects, she's wearing her karate black belt and training or teaching other kids the martial art.

Katz is a 1st Dan in karate, having been practising karate almost daily since she was four years old.

"Karate is a part of me. It's something I couldn't lose even when I was going through my treatment in the US. I went to competitions in the US. It was like from bed to karate and back to bed. It was amazing working on my passion in America. This is where they make the show *Cobra Kai*, of which I'm a huge fan," she says.

Her love for karate hasn't waned. "I like to teach with my sensei and attend competitions. It's the sport I do after school and then I do my homework. What karate teaches about discipline is really powerful. It's a part of my recovery, and helped maintain my physical health. I'm a teenage girl, and I have my ups and downs, and karate helps me manage this too," she says.

Katz's approach to life is to do her best at everything, and she has managed to catch up on all her school work, having missed a year at KDL while undergoing treatment.

"We had tutors at St Jude Hospital in Memphis where I got treatment. I learned there about how recovery must be a holistic thing. To get better, you must heal in each part of your life. When I got sick, I learned I had cancer, but I learned that I needed to improve other parts of my life too," Katz says.

She plans to do an undergraduate degree in South

Africa, and then go to Cambridge in England. "I used to want to be a doctor, but I'm tired of hospitals," she says. So, she's decided she wants to be a quantum physicist.

"I want to do something which helps doctors and medical people. I can research and help people help those who have cancer and other diseases. This could involve developing machines to treat cancers better by fighting tiny parts of the disease."

Having recovered from cancer is a "hard-to-describe feeling", she says. "I'm thankful every day that I got through so much, and couldn't have done it without my support structures."

Katz's successful cancer treatment was made possible

by her family and the likes of DL Link. Her type of cancer can be aggressive, but most cases respond well to intensive treatment. In her case, though radiation therapy was available in South Africa, there was highly effective specialised treatment in Memphis which would lessen the risk of side effects on her small and developing body. Had she stayed at home for treatment, traditional radiation therapy could have led to the impairment of her cognitive abilities.

Her parents packed up their lives and moved to a city where Katz had access to Pencil Beam Proton Radiotherapy, a technology which focusses the radiation precisely, so that her illness could be treated with the minimum risk of side effects. This therapy had a lower risk of damaging her body.

Only three cities in the world offered the treatment, one of which was in Memphis. It caused a huge upheaval for the Katz family. Her brother, Jonah, who had just turned nine, had to be home-schooled.

"I don't think I really understood how sick I was. What I've been through might be unusual and scary, but I think I've been incredibly lucky," she says.

"The things that we go through shape us, and I'm now at a stage where I can put energy into giving. I don't want to be seen just as a kid who survived an illness, but as someone who is making a difference. It takes a village to do good things, and I had a lot of help.

"Whenever something doesn't go right, I always think to myself, 'Hashem must have a reason.' This helps me deal with my challenges. I just put all my faith and my heart there, and then I know things will be okay," she says.

Katz believes she is who she is because she experienced intricate and focused care, and she hopes these can be brought back to South Africa.

"My disease was a wake-up call to change my life. You don't just push buttons, and you're better," she says. "To heal from these diseases, you have to change your lifestyle. Everything must heal – your soul, your body, your mind, and your heart."

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## WIZO wheelchair gives Junior a lift in life

Junior Smith, aged five, of Noupoot in the Northern Cape, was recently donated an Israeli made wheelchair specifically designed for children thanks to WIZO Durban, generous donors and organisers, and an effective social media campaign.

The donation came about after a representative of WIZO Durban had a conversation about philanthropy with a fellow passenger on a flight to Joburg, and discovered a crowdfunding campaign for Smith titled “A Leg Up for Junior”, initiated by Brennan Williams. Smith, who lives in a remote township in the Northern Cape, had tragically lost a limb because another child had put him inside an industrial food mixer. The campaign aimed to raise R270 000 for a series of prosthetic limbs (increasing in size as he grew). She contacted WIZO Durban co-chairperson Laurienne



Junior Smith

Baitz, who agreed to offer a WIZO wheelchair to Smith, but it would be difficult to get it to him as he lived a 10-hour road trip away. The chair was located in KwaZulu-Natal, and WIZO Durban's funds were limited. In response to a request to courier companies to assist, a kind individual named Derek offered to cover the courier costs.

Baitz's husband took care of the packaging. Two days later, young Junior in Noupoot sported his bright new wheels.

“Let's hope the crowdfunding campaign

succeeds for Junior,” WIZO Durban said. “And in the meantime, we know that this WIZO Wheelchair of Hope will bring mobility and independence to this bright little boy and his loving mum, Natasha Smith.”

Donate to WIZO so that it can procure more wheelchairs and bring more joy into more children's lives. One wheelchair, including freight, costs only R3 500.

## WIZO helps Rotara school children get mobile

WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) Johannesburg volunteers Andrea Wainer, Brenda Trope, and Jill Suttner, and driver Johnson Mavhanga delivered three Wheelchairs of Hope to three children at Rotara School in Carletonville on Monday, 27 February.

The school, which caters for mentally and physically disabled children and focuses on abilities not disabilities, has minimal government funding and is supplemented by fundraising which enables it to provide an excellent education to students from Grade R to Grade 7. Each class is kept small to ensure that the teacher and teaching assistant can give each child maximum attention. The school also has a variety of therapists and social workers to assist it. It offers various extra-curricular activities, dependent on the funds available, like embroidery classes, cooking lessons, and horse riding. The students are prepared for life after school, and many of them have jobs in various businesses in town.



WIZO volunteers and students of Rotara School

Wheelchairs of Hope were developed by specialist Israeli doctors and engineers from ALYN Hospital, Israel's leading paediatric and adolescent rehabilitation centre, with the wish to “empower education through mobility”. Aimed at children from five to nine years old who have upper-body strength and weigh up to 40kg, these colourful, ergonomically-designed wheelchairs are lightweight and robust enough to handle urban and country terrains.

# Help us (or any of the other phenomenal organisations) help others this Pesach.

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## Jewish medics to give back on Alex Wellness Day

Joburg Jewish health practitioners will take part in an Alex Wellness Day offering on Human Rights Day on 21 March in which free medical services will be offered to the Alexandra community. The event is organised and sponsored by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Gauteng Council along with the Greater Alexandra Chamber of Commerce.

Three clinics will provide measles vaccinations; health screenings through Workforce Healthcare; hearing screenings through the South African Association of Audiologists; and an educational workshop combined with the distribution of reusable sanitary products to teenage girls.

This is the first of three such programmes envisaged for this year, with the next scheduled to take place on 18 June (known as “Alex Day” in memory of the Alexandra victims of the 1976 Soweto Uprising), and Women's Day on 9 August.

The brainchild of Gauteng Council member Nick Selamolela, the Alex Wellness initiative will take place on the premises of the Greater Alexandra Chamber of Commerce at Galxcoc, 17 Arkwright Avenue, Wynberg, just off Louis Botha Avenue. Between 500-800 children from the local community are among those expected to attend.

There has been an enthusiastic response to the initiative from organisations and individuals in the Jewish community. Chai FM will join Alexander FM and the *Alex Times* in publicising and reporting the event. Through the SAJBD, Clover has agreed to come on board by sponsoring water, juices, and ice cream for participants on the day.

SAJBD Gauteng chairman Harold Jacobs said the initiative was a vehicle for Jewish medical practitioners to give back to the community, in a public setting, and at the behest of the Board.

## Yeshiva soars at volleyball



Under 19A team



Under 16A team

Yeshiva College Boys High School claimed its place as the number one volleyball school in Joburg after its u16A volleyball team claimed the Goliath Cup trophy at the competition, held from the beginning of February to 5 March at Fourways High School. The school's u19 team won gold, and claimed the title against Lycée Jules Verne (the French international school). The u16B team finished sixth in the league.

### Friday 17 March

- Cape Jewish Seniors Association hosts a webinar for people wanting to learn Yiddish. Time: 10:00. Contact: admin@cjsa.org.za or 021 434 9691

### Sunday 19 March

- New Beginnings hosts a talk by Dr Devorah Wineberg on the rescue mission in Turkey after the earthquakes. Time: 10:00. Cost: R50. Venue: Union of Jewish Women House, 77 Sandler Road, Percelia Estate. Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za
- Hatzolah and the South African Bone Marrow Registry hosts a blood drive. Time: 09:00. Venue: 29 Durham Street, Raedene. Contact: www.linktr.ee/Hatzolah or info@hatzolah.co.za

### Thursday 23 March

- ORT SA hosts a leadership bootcamp talk by Janet Goldblatt. Time: 08:30. Cost: R200 (R100 for members). Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za
- The South African Jewish Museum hosts the exhibition opening of *Women of Action – A History*

of The Union of Jewish Women. Time: 18:00. Venue: The South African Jewish Museum Cape Town. Contact: events@sajewishmuseum.co.za



### Sunday 26 March

- The Jewish Women's Benevolent Society hosts its R30 book sale. Time: 09:00. Venue: Genesis Shopping Centre. Contact: 011 485 5232 or gloria@jwbs.co.za
- The Jewish National Fund South Africa and Israel Centre Hiking Club hosts its first monthly hike. Time: 09:30. Venue: Modderfontein Nature Reserve. Contact: liorag@jafi.org or 060 618 6710
- Women's International Zionist Organization Johannesburg hosts its *Bingo Fun* event. Time: 14:00. Cost: R200. Venue: Linksfield Shul. Contact: wizojohannesburg011@gmail.com or 076 040 9614
- Second Innings hosts a violin and guitar performance by *The Cherry Pill Duo, Kristel Birkholtz and Rory Gaddin*. Time: 10:00. Venue: Golden Acres. Cost: R40 (R20 members). Contact: 082 561 3228 or greciagabriel1@gmail.com

## Letters

### TOPOL'S RETURN TO FIDDLER FROM WAR

When *Fiddler On The Roof* opened at Her Majesty's Theatre in the West End, it received rave reviews. I was living in London at the time. Chaim Topol played Tevye the Milkman, and the rush to get tickets was phenomenal. I queued and bought tickets well in advance for 13 June 1967. It seemed like an eternity away.

At the time, at the end of May, there was a dark cloud on the horizon. The situation in the Middle East was worsening by the day. Egypt, with President Gamal Nasser in charge, led daily verbal threats against Israel, and the news networks were full of visuals of anti-Israel marches and screams of “Kill the Jews”, “Destroy the Zionists”, and so on. With the surrounding states joining in, the anti-Israel hatred really looked ominous – small Israel, solo, against the rest!

I remember going to Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park on Sunday, 5 June, and the anti-Israel vitriol being spewed was unbelievable. Practically all the speakers were heavily and harshly against the “Zionist state”, with listeners applauding. There seemed to be more police than usual about, and they were busy trying to calm tempers.

I saw one Muslim man screaming hatred when a young girl, with dark hair and quite lovely, walked up to him and punched him in the face. Three policemen surrounded her and led her away. Hopefully to safety.

On 6 June, the war in the Middle East began, with Israeli air attacks on Egyptian airfields.

In the evening papers, tucked away within the theatre section, was a notice that Chaim Topol had left *Fiddler on the Roof* and returned to Israel to take part in the war. He was replaced by an English actor.

Six days later, the war was over! Thankfully. A miracle had occurred. Israel had triumphed, her enemies had been routed. Unbelievable!

Fast forward to 13 June and while I was still looking forward to seeing *Fiddler on the Roof*, it wasn't so enticing with the Englishman as Tevye.

The theatre was packed. The overture was played, the curtains opened, and it was Topol playing Tevye! Back from the war!

Chaos erupted in the theatre. People stood up, others rushed towards the stage shouting, screaming, waving their arms, “Topol, Topol. You're back! You're back!” Some people managed to get onto the stage itself and they hugged Topol, touched Topol, kissed him. People were laughing, yelling, crying. Chaos.

It took some time to restore order and get the audience settled so that the play could begin.

Everything Topol did was wildly cheered. it was a night to remember. It was 49 years ago, and I'm still moved by the memory of it all and grateful I was there.

- **Lionel Slier, Johannesburg**

# Digital nomad makes us long to stay home

It turns out that there's a name for them. I hadn't heard of the concept, but it's apparently a real thing around the world. And now, they have arrived here in South Africa where, unbeknown to us, they walk and even live amongst us. In Glenhazel. Of all places. On the surface, they look like anyone you might bump into at Frangelicas or Urban Grind.

But they are not of us.

They are called "digital nomads", and I met a few live ones this past Shabbat.

Across the table from us sat a couple, probably in their late 30s. Both Israeli, born and educated, they had no real links to South Africa. They had been in the country since September, and were now deciding if a year would be enough for them to experience the country and complete their adventure. They were employed by Israeli firms, and were allowed to work remotely. Which is what they had chosen to do.

They are digital nomads.

Ariel Levental, 35, explained that they had been living in a 90m<sup>2</sup> apartment near Tel Aviv before coming to South Africa. Although as professionals they were earning well, the cost of living meant a curtailed and limited lifestyle. The fact that they were able to work remotely gave them the idea of experiencing another country.

When he and his wife contemplated their options, there were a few criteria. There needed to be a Jewish school, a community, and the time zone shouldn't make it impossible to function in terms of work. South Africa met all the requirements, and in little time, they had rented a house with a garden, pool, and tennis court, enrolled their children at Maharsha, and

**INNER VOICE**  
*Howard Feldman*

were living their best life.

Before arriving in the country, they were concerned about their children's English. Without knowing South Africans, they warned them not to take to heart any teasing they might encounter from others at school. They needn't have bothered. The kindness and acceptance, along with tolerance and hospitality was something they couldn't have anticipated or expected.

While all the children played in the garden, conversation swirled around the table. Some of the adults lamented load shedding (even though they had solar), others worried about water (and the size of their JoJo tanks), and the nomad couple debated if it would be possible for them to stay longer.

It was surreal. The couple might well be in the honeymoon phase of their adventure, but to them, South Africa is a wonderful and exciting place. They spoke of the fact that he didn't need to wear a cap because he doesn't "feel" the antisemitism here at all, excitedly considered the best time to visit Cape Town, and laughed at the naivety of their friends who wanted to go to Kruger over Pesach.

Their positivity was infectious and in a way sobering. For once, it felt silly to spend so much time on the problems we face when there's an alternative. And when returning to a hard life lived in 90m<sup>2</sup> is not nearly as attractive an alternative.

Sometimes it takes a digital nomad to remind us we what we have.



The Levental family at the Pinesberg National Park

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Flagrant attack on Jewish rights at Tuks

At the time of going to print, a "peaceful protest against the presence of Zionism on university campuses" has just taken place at the University of Pretoria (UP). The event was organised by the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) as part of an ongoing campaign at that institution to silence and exclude Jewish voices, even on matters that don't concern Israel at all.

It began when the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) and the Student Representative Council (SRC) decided to partner in a fundraising initiative on behalf of needy students at UP, as was done with much success by SAUJS and the SRC at the University of the Witwatersrand last year. Though entirely aimed at helping fellow students, the project elicited a virulent backlash from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) lobby, which demanded that the SRC break off relations with SAUJS. Statements released on the issue have included a number of repellent references to "Zionist" (in other words, Jewish) money being used to bribe and corrupt the SRC while at the same time purporting to be a defence of democratic, human rights values of the Constitution.

For those present, it was frankly sickening to be confronted by two rows of placards demanding the exclusion of the Jewish representative union from university affairs. Let it be clear what the PSC and its fellow travellers are objecting so strongly to. It has nothing to do with Israel but is about one of our Jewish organisations wanting to participate and contribute to South Africa. This has always been seen as a positive thing by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). We encourage our students to engage positively in the broader South African society. By agitating for SAUJS to be shunned and effectively banned from our campuses, BDS agitators are in point of fact seeking to exclude the umbrella representative body for Jewish students throughout South Africa, and therefore Jewish students as a whole, from normal university activities.

**ABOVE BOARD**  
*Karen Milner*



The SAJBD has been working closely with SAUJS and the UP administration to address this unprecedented attack on Jewish students' rights and freedoms. We thank UP for taking this issue so seriously by ensuring that there was sufficient security on the day, and further welcome the reassurance that action will be taken against those responsible for this hate campaign. The SAJBD will continue to support our students against this outrageous attempt to outlaw their representative body and effectively turn university campuses into Jew-free zones. We further applaud SAUJS for the restraint and resilience it has shown in the face of all the ugly smears and intimidation it has been subjected to. We'll continue to engage with the university administration to ensure that this matter is properly dealt with.

**Tribute to an esteemed colleague: Ann Harris (1938-2023)**

It was with much sadness that we learned over the weekend of the passing in Jerusalem of our dear friend, colleague, and mentor, Ann Harris. Whether as a Jewish communal leader, human rights campaigner, social-upliftment activist, or in her chosen field as a lawyer, Ann left an indelible mark. Perhaps what most readily comes to mind is how, together with her esteemed husband, the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, she was from her very arrival in this country at the forefront first of leading South African Jewry into the new democratic era, and thereafter of active involvement in the healing and nation building that followed the transition. Her memory will be cherished, and those who follow in her footsteps will continue to be inspired by the example she set.

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

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