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Guardian apologises for ‘antisemitic’ cartoon



The Guardian on 29 April deleted and apologised for a cartoon of outgoing BBC Chairperson Richard Sharp, widely criticised for channelling multiple antisemitic tropes.

Meanwhile, the cartoonist, Martin Rowson, issued a lengthy statement in which he said, “The cartoon was a failure and on many levels. I offended the wrong people.”

On 28 April, Sharp, a former banker who is Jewish, announced he was resigning in the wake of a scandal after just more than two years in his BBC role. Rowson, a prominent political cartoonist, drew a dark caricature of Sharp holding a box with the label of Goldman Sachs, his former employer. Inside the box were a squid and a head with an elongated nose.

To many who viewed it, the imagery offered echoes of historical antisemitic caricatures, including those published by the Nazis, as well as references to contemporary antisemitic tropes.

“All the component parts were there: the large nose, the lips, the Fagin-like sneer, and, of course, what appears to be money. It’s a racialised depiction of a Jew,” Dave Rich, the head of policy at the Community Security Trust, which advocates for British Jews, wrote on 2 May in a *Guardian* op-ed.

Sharp, 67, is a Conservative Party ally, and was formerly the boss of current British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak at Goldman Sachs. His resignation follows an investigation that found Sharp hadn’t properly disclosed his role in helping Boris Johnson, Britain’s prime minister at the time, secure a loan worth close to \$1 million (R18.4 million).

Polish attack on Holocaust historian causes outcry

A Polish political feud over Holocaust history has widened into an international condemnation of the government’s attempts to silence a leading scholar on Polish-Jewish relations during World War II.

More than 300 academics and institutions around the world, including Yad Vashem, issued a statement condemning the Polish government-led attacks against Polish historian Barbara Engelking, the director of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research, for stating that Poles “failed” during the Holocaust and Jews were “unbelievably disappointed with Poles during the war”.

One letter in support of Engelking released on Thursday, 27 April, and signed by 11 Israeli organisations, such as Yad Vashem, the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum, and Massuah Institute for the Study of the Holocaust, decried her critics’ attack on “academic freedom and historical facts”.

The dispute reflects the governing Law and Justice party’s ongoing

push for a patriotic narrative of the past that scholars such as Engelking say erases Polish crimes against Jews during the war.

The latest fracas began on 19 April, the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when Engelking made an appearance on the country’s largest private television station, TVN.

“Poles had the potential to become allies of the Jews, and one would hope that they would behave differently, that they would be neutral, kind, that they would not take advantage of the situation to such an extent, and that there would not be widespread blackmailing,” she said, adding that Poles today exaggerate how much they helped Jews during the war.

In response, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki lashed out in a nearly 900-word tweet, accusing Engelking of expressing an “unwarranted opinion” that distorted reality. He emphasised that Nazi Germany’s destruction of the Polish state was what enabled the murder of 1.1 million Polish Jews during the Holocaust, and suggested that those who didn’t sufficiently acknowledge Polish efforts to aid Jews during the war “commit a crime on human valour, heroism, on good”.

In addition, the government’s broadcasting regulator announced that it would conduct legal proceedings against TVN, which is owned by Warner Bros. Discovery, over the Engelking interview.

Polish Education Minister Przemysław Czarnek threatened to defund Engelking’s research institute, which is part of the Polish Academy of Sciences, claiming that he didn’t wish to support her insult to the Polish nation. Joining the chorus of critics was a member of the European Parliament from Poland’s ruling Law and Justice party, Dominik Tarczyński, who said he would file for a request for Engelking to be criminally prosecuted for insulting the Polish nation. Tarczyński made headlines in 2019 when he told CNN that antisemitism didn’t exist in Poland.




Barbara Engelking

Photo: Adrian Gajduk Wikimedia Commons

• All briefs supplied by JTA

The King of kings



Rabbi Yossi Chaikin,
The Oxford Synagogue
Centre

This weekend, the eyes of the world will be focused on the pomp and ceremony in London, where King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla will be formally crowned king and queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The coronation, months in the planning, will involve elaborate rites and attention to minutiae.

The ceremony follows strict protocols that are centuries old. The order of the proceedings is highly regulated as is the list of participants in the rituals. There are rules about the psalms and prayers to be recited – and the language to be used in each case. There are specific garments and regalia to be worn by all participants; the monarch himself will need to change robes, crowns, and sceptres repeatedly. An essential component of the crowning is the homage of the people, with his subjects declaring their fealty.

Being Shabbat, we will, of course, not be watching the proceedings. (Check with your local rabbi whether it would have been permissible to watch this religious service taking place in an abbey, even if it weren’t Shabbat, and about the appropriateness of viewing a recording after nightfall.) We will be in shul at that time, engaging in a coronation service of our own.

“Earthly kingship reflects heavenly kingship.” (Talmud Shabbat 58a). This is where the attention to detail, the intricate rituals, and the strict rules become a real teachable moment for us. For we, as the King of King’s subjects, have the duty to crown Him as the ultimate ruler of the world. The main coronation takes place annually, on Rosh Hashanah, when we do so

Torah Thought

formally in our prayers, even blowing a horn to add solemnity to the process.

But this isn’t just a once-a-year ceremony. It’s something we do every single day. “There can be no king without a people” is a key teaching of Jewish mysticism. Hence our role, paying homage by declaring our fealty, annually and daily.

Yes, Jewish practice is filled with minutiae. Special clothing and regalia (tallit and tefillin), a special hymn book (siddur/machzor/tehillim) and an ancient book of rules, detailing the divinely ordained 613 mitzvot

(Shulchan Aruch). We dare not challenge the protocol any more than a self-respecting British royalist would question the rituals of a royal coronation.

We have the great privilege of reciting numerous *brachot* on any given day. We actually aim to reach the number 100. So accustomed are we to the formula, that we sometimes don’t realise what we’re saying. “Blessed are You ... King of the world,” we say, addressing Hashem in the second person.

Long live the King!

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A Prime moment – and the kid who nailed it

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

The story of Prime, an international range of sports drinks initially selling for upwards of R800, began in South Africa with King David High School Linksfield pupil and successful “kidpreneur”, Daniel Krawitz, now 15.

This week, the launch of Prime Hydration for R39.99 at selected Checkers stores was a viral sensation, dominating social media feeds on 1 May, with people queuing for hours to buy a couple of bottles.

Yet, long before the Checkers deal came about, one teenager recognised the brand’s money-making potential. Forming part of Prime’s core target market, Krawitz, then 14, used his already considerable entrepreneurial prowess to investigate ways to bring Prime into South Africa last year. Immersed in a world where stars are born on YouTube and largely fuelled by their tween and teen followers, Krawitz was determined to tap into the opportunities their frequent brand-extensions offer.

Prime, launched by former boxing rivals and YouTube megastars, America’s Logan Paul and England’s KSI (Olajide Olayinka Williams “JJ” Olatunji) in early 2022, is the embodiment of this trend. A range of sports and energy drinks “where great taste meets function”, Prime has captured the hearts and minds of millions of children – and the wallets of their parents. By offering limited stock and tapping into the pair’s combined reach of more than 40 million YouTube subscribers and 100 million social media followers, Prime has become a hot commodity around the world.

“When Logan Paul and KSI launched Prime in January 2022, I just knew that if it was here, it would do amazingly well,” says Krawitz, a young entrepreneur who has been investing in the stock market since he was 12. “All my friends and people everywhere were talking about it.”



Photo: Ariel Katzen

After months of research, Krawitz found an international supplier, and received his first order of just 12 bottles in September, which he swiftly sold to his friends at R150 a pop. “Initially, I used my Barmitzvah money to order, and then I reinvested my profits,” he says. “Everyone went crazy for it.” Ordering progressively larger batches of stock, he was soon supplying the likes of Spar, Tasko Sweets, and Takealot, and exporting to sweet shops in Mozambique and Zambia.

Attracting customers through TikTok, Instagram, and

designing his own website, something he does professionally in another of his multiple businesses, Krawitz bought an additional phone specifically for Prime-related work. “I didn’t approach anyone, they all approached me,” he says. “People were messaging me constantly; I would have to put my phone in aeroplane mode so I could sleep.”

Krawitz knew that customers might initially not take him seriously. “I had to get my dad to answer the phone when these companies called me as I don’t sound like a successful businessman,” he says. “Then, when I’d meet them, I’d explain that it was my project. Most people were shocked but impressed.” When other suppliers entered the market charging excessive amounts, Krawitz also upped his rates, but remained below their price points, adding to his market appeal.

As the Checkers Prime Hydration deal loomed, Krawitz was contacted by KSI and Logan Paul’s lawyers and began to prepare for the inevitable. “I knew that I should just push it out as much as I could before it officially launched here,” he says. He’s now sold all his stock and is keeping just two bottles as a reminder of his journey. He has saved and invested his profits, and is now focusing on procuring what he anticipates will be the next YouTube product craze – chocolates called Feastables from YouTube phenomenon MrBeast (sic).

“I think Hashem plays a huge part in my success,” Krawitz says. “I also make my own opportunities. I don’t want to work a nine-to-five job, I want to build my own empire. I don’t think you have to wait until after school to start a business.”

Prime itself has given rise to multiple kidpreneurs, with kids from various demographics selling sips and even empty bottles at high prices. But now that Checkers has made the product more affordable, they may not be as successful. As the Prime craze swept Checkers stores across the country on Worker’s Day, with queues amassing outside from the early hours, even *SA Jewish Report* Chairperson Howard Sackstein was rendered powerless. “I have no idea what this is or why it’s so ridiculously expensive, but the little kid at #checkers told me I had to buy bottles,” he posted on Facebook.

Yet compared to initial price points, Checkers is bringing Prime Hydration in at what it calls “supermarket prices”. An eight-bottle limit per customer and gradual store rollout add to its skilled marketing strategy. “It’s strategic of Checkers as it’s using Prime as a way to get the younger market,” says Lori Weiner. The founder of agency Brand Influence, Weiner was charged with successfully creating a countrywide social media buzz around the Checkers launch through the reach of 150 nano influencers – each with about 1 000 followers – who have Generation Z kids.

You’d be hard pressed to find a Gen Z parent who hasn’t been subject to months of what Cape Town-based tween mom Jenna Bloch calls “pester power”. Though she refused to give in to her 11-year-old son’s pleas when bottles cost hundreds of rands, she decided the Checkers launch was the ideal way for him and her less enthused daughter to finally be part of the hype.

“For me, it’s more a case of kids enjoying the experience of something amazing coming from overseas, like how we used

to get excited about an upcoming music concert, standing in line to get tickets,” she says. “It’s the modern-day version of that, trying to get in to order on the Checkers Sixty60 app,



Daniel Krawitz

and just being part of the hype.” Yet, Prime itself was an anti-climax, she says, and after one day, no single bottle in her home was finished.

Renowned investigative journalist and 702 talk-show host Mandy Wiener also hasn’t been immune to her nine-year-old son’s begging, admitting that she almost lost her resolve not to drop hundreds on the drink. “I had a moment of sanity, though, thanks to my husband,” she says. “As parents, we get torn between wanting to make our children happy and indulging them, and teaching them about values.”

Happily purchasing Prime after the price drop, she decided to make it a teachable moment about marketing. “I made a point of explaining to my son that the only reason he wants it is because of supply and demand. I’m not sure if he had a blind tasting, he’d like it more than any other drink. Checkers was very clever about seeing a gap in the market and making it accessible. Hopefully, he learns that if he’s clever about marketing, in the future he can also make money from it.”

Prime, however, has sparked health concerns. In contrast to Prime Energy, which has 200mg of caffeine per can and isn’t recommended for pregnant women or kids under the age of 18, Prime Hydration is caffeine free and available to all. Yet, it too has created waves because it contains artificial sweeteners and branched-chain amino acids that promote muscle growth but haven’t been adequately tested for children and pregnant women. Yet the craze continues, with legions of consumers clearly undeterred.


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Noreika plaque flies in face of Holocaust apologies

PETA KROST

One of Lithuania’s most controversial plaques – for Litvaks (Jews descended from Lithuania) anyway – was overnight no longer in its pride of place in Vilnius, Lithuania. It had been quietly removed.

The plaque, on the façade of the Vilnius Library of Academy of Science, honours General Jonas Noreika for his fight against the Soviets. However, there’s clear evidence that Noreika was one of the leaders behind the wholesale slaughter of Jews in Lithuania during the Holocaust in 1941.

That year, a large percentage of the 220 000 Jews murdered in Lithuania during the Holocaust were killed at the hands of mostly local Lithuanians.

According to Dr Efraim Zuroff, chief Nazi hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC), there were only 1 000 Nazis in the country in the year that most Jews were shot. It would have been impossible for them to have shot that many people without the help of the local population, he says. “We estimate there were about 25 000 Lithuanians involved,” said Zuroff, who co-ordinates SWC Nazi war-crimes research worldwide. They exterminated 94% of the Jewish population, known as the “most successful Holocaust in Europe”, he said.



The façade of the Vilnius Library of Academy of Science where the Noreika plaque had been positioned

Zuroff was adamant that any celebration of the killers of Jews was unacceptable, and any such plaques should never have been there in the first place.

In the case of Noreika, his own granddaughter, Silvia Foti, wrote an autobiographical account of how she had sought to clear his name by writing his story but couldn’t because she found evidence to prove his guilt. She, too, called for this plaque to be

removed. And South African-born Grant Gochin has had numerous court cases against the Lithuanian government to remove this plaque, among other commemorative plaques in Noreika’s honour, because he was “a murderer of Jews, and so clearly no hero”. Both Foti and Gochin’s stories and battles were documented in *J’Accuse*, an award-winning documentary by Michael Kretzmer that was shown on a

SA Jewish Report webinar recently. Two weeks ago, the plaque was seen to be covered, apparently to protect it as there was scaffolding on the wall around it. Over this weekend, though, without any fanfare or coverage, it was removed. However, there’s no cause to celebrate, as Library Director Sigitas Narbutas said on 2 May that the board was removed due to repair work on the library’s façade, and would be replaced once the work was complete.

Back in July 2019, the plaque was also quietly removed one night by the Vilnius City Municipality. The then mayor of Vilnius, Remigijus Šimašius, said he made the decision to remove the plaque based on the fact that Noreika, as chief of the Šiauliai district, confirmed decisions of the Nazi administration to establish a Jewish ghetto and confiscate their property. His decision caused outrage among many Lithuanians, who refuse to see Noreika as anything but a hero. They protested in front of the presidential palace in Vilnius against the decision.

The General Prosecutor’s Office (GPO) found that Šimašius had

exceeded his power in ordering the removal of the plaque. The mayor responded, saying that he was worried that this decision would be seen to be “justifying the worship of persons who contributed to the Holocaust in Lithuania by their actions”. Long before the GPO’s decision was made, a new sign had been hung in place of the first one on the façade of the library.

Ultrnationalist Holocaust-revisionist organisation Pro Patria had a new plaque made and, to great fanfare, put it where the old one had been. This past weekend, that plaque was handed over to Pro Patria for safekeeping until it could be reattached. The hero worship of Lithuanians who were involved in the killing of Jews during the Holocaust is a bone of contention for Litvaks around the world, not least those living in South Africa. There are said to be numerous plaques, statues, street names, and other honours in their names. However, the most well-known are Noreika and Juozas Krikštaponis, who led the shooting of Jews in Rudensk, Belarus. There’s a statue of him in the centre of Ukmerge, Lithuania.

The deputy chancellor of Lithuania and advisor to the prime minister, Rolandas Krisciunas, told the *SA Jewish Report* that it was “impossible to sidestep these issues because of the horror of what was done to Jews in this country – the tragedy is mind blowing”. He said he was aware of only two such cases of plaques and statues commemorating such people, namely those of Noreika and Krikštaponis. With the latter, he said there was agreement about his involvement in the mass killing of Jews, but the government was yet to be convinced about Noreika, and awaited confirmation by its own historians.

However, Krisciunas said he and the government believed there shouldn’t be any statues or plaques to honour people involved in the killing of Jews. But it wasn’t the jurisdiction of national government to order the removal of these statues and plaques as it fell in the ambit of municipalities or local government. “As for Krikštaponis, it won’t be long before his memorial comes down, and I believe the rest will follow. I don’t want to overpromise and under deliver, but it will happen, because people who were involved in killing Jews cannot be held up as heroes.” Viktorijos Čmilytės-Nielsen, the

speaker of Lithuanian parliament, told the *SA Jewish Report* that she believed that “no matter what you may have done in one area, you’re disqualified from ever being called a hero if you took part in the killing of Jews”. She maintained that the issue of Noreika was in the hands of the Lithuanian historians to ascertain his role, and the rest would follow. “Such things take



The Noreika plaque

time to change, but, of course, I’m not in a position to make a promise when it will happen because it is not in my hands,” she said. The Lithuanian Ambassador to South Africa, Dainius Junevičius, was adamant that the Noreika plaque should stay down. “Although the biography of Jonas Noreika is well researched, the debate between the public and historians about his place in Lithuanian history will probably never end. For some, the facts on the memorial plaque outside the building where he worked [now the library] will be important: he organised armed resistance to the Soviet occupation, and was killed by the Soviet authorities for this. “However, his admirers mustn’t turn a blind eye to the fact that he was involved in the murder of Jews while working as a head of the Šiauliai district of the German occupation civil administration in 1941-1943. “In my opinion, this is completely unjustifiable, and no other real or perceived merit can wash away this sin,” the ambassador said. “We Lithuanians cannot be unconditionally proud of such individuals, and the memorial plaque is an example of such pride.”

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Pothole pandemic

An esteemed medical expert was killed last week trying to ensure that nobody was hurt driving into a pothole in Sandringham that had been there almost six weeks.

Dr Simmy Waner must have been so frustrated at seeing that hole in the road for weeks on end with nothing done about it. We all know that feeling. We all know the frustration.

And he paid the ultimate price for trying to help others by attempting to put a traffic cone in the path so that people didn't drive into it. It's a bizarre and desperately sad story, one that could literally only happen in South Africa. It seems so small a thing for someone to do, and such a massive price to pay. However, there's no question, this doctor is a hero!

He's a hero in a crazy city where potholes abound and other areas of our infrastructure are falling apart at the seams. It's a sorry situation, and nobody should ever lose their lives trying to protect others from the result of infrastructure failure.

How do we make sure that Dr Waner didn't die in vain?

Look around you, there's hardly a street without a pothole or two. Even trying to navigate myself around Johannesburg on Waze, the potholes are pointed out to me. I often wonder if there's anything like that in other countries in which people use Waze.

This problem isn't new in Johannesburg. I recall years back when I bought a car and within a month, went through two tyres in quick succession – a week or so apart – driving into potholes in the rain. Only now it's worse.

Many activists in our society have gone out to fix the potholes in their areas themselves. But they do it at their peril. Just this week, I read an article in *BizNews*, in which the Johannesburg Roads Agency (JRA) – whom I assume is meant to ensure we don't have potholes – warned Johannesburg residents that they were breaking the law in fixing potholes themselves. I'm not joking!

The JRA says it's illegal because they are not using the correct material. That's rich, coming from an organisation that clearly is out of its depth or simply not doing what it's meant to do, leaving potholes for ages all over the place.

I don't know a single soul who would willingly spend their days filling potholes if they didn't believe the situation was desperate. Nobody does something like this for fun.

People are doing it so that we can have a semblance of normality and, as South Africans, we're the "make-a-plan" nation. We have a horrible pothole crisis. I know the JRA pooh-poothed the estimate of 25-million potholes in South Africa, saying it was a total exaggeration, but it doesn't seem to have the facts and figures to back this up.

Whatever the numbers, even if it's thousands, it's an untenable situation. And it's a situation based purely on sheer neglect of road maintenance.

So, if the government or, in this case the JRA, isn't doing its job properly and we need something done, we do it ourselves. Simple!

But instead of saying thank you, and ensuring that it supplies the correct material to those civilians who are willing to take time to do this task themselves, it issues a warning: "Stop doing this good deed or else!" Only in South Africa!

The JRA is also threatening to prosecute those, who also out of sheer frustration, have taken to circling potholes with luminous paint and spray painting "ANC" or "DA" alongside the pothole.

I so understand their frustration and, though they are making a strong point about who is responsible, they are also alerting drivers to where the potholes are to avoid accidents. This is more than the authorities responsible are doing.

Instead of getting the hint, the authorities are threatening to fine those responsible. Isn't it amazing, they seem to be able to find time to find people to fine, but not to fill in potholes. Only in SA!

In response to the threats of fines, one woman tweeted, "When your guy comes along with our fine notice, please tell him to bring a spade and some tar, and he can help us fill a few potholes. As if an agency that can't find and fill holes in the first place is capable of prosecuting anyone!"

Another problem deriving from infrastructure failure is traffic lights not working during loadshedding. To counter this problem (and potentially make a buck at the same time), many beggars have taken to directing traffic at busy intersections. To be honest, I was wary at first, but they don't seem to be doing too bad a job. I even wondered if perhaps the authorities had done the clever thing of finding beggars and training them to take on this sorely needed job. I mean, obviously, if the traffic officials were there, the beggars wouldn't feel the need to help.

Having done a little homework, I discovered that, in fact, the metro police hadn't trained anyone, instead it was threatening to arrest all the beggars directing traffic.

Evidently these beggars aren't trained, and who knows if they have caused accidents or not. I have no idea how complicated it is to direct traffic, but it doesn't make sense to me for traffic officers to come and arrest these people for doing something they wouldn't be able to do had there been officers doing it themselves.

Are there insufficient traffic officers for this task? Well, there are lots of unemployed people who could be trained to take this on. It doesn't need to be beggars, but having such people at busy intersections that require traffic lights is a no-brainer.

I would like to suggest to the metro police that instead of threatening beggars with incarceration, they do something positive to remediate the situation. Train people to do this job because we, the motorists who you are supposedly safeguarding, are in danger at complicated traffic intersections where the lights aren't working during loadshedding.

It's way past time for our authorities to wake up and do what they need to do to support our city's infrastructure. Please don't let Dr Simmy Waner's death be in vain!



Power and patronage: why reform won't happen under ANC

STEVEN GRUZD

"Everyone is gloomy and unhappy about what's going on in our country," said analyst, author, and businessman Moeletsi Mbeki. "Almost 50% of the economically active are unemployed. Nearly 50% of South Africans go to bed hungry. We have the highest murder rate for a country not at war."

Mbeki was speaking about "South Africa in a dire situation" at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre in Oaklands, Johannesburg, on 26 April.

He maintains that though the country is governed by a black middle class (essentially the African National Congress – ANC) that doesn't own any property or industry, it uses its political power to enrich itself from the state through consumption. It milks the productive economy, and threatens to take away assets.

"They can do this if they want with the stroke of a pen. The 'expropriation without compensation' debate is part of the ANC's programme," Mbeki said.

South Africa had been dominated by nationalism for the past 100 years, Mbeki said. First it was Afrikaner nationalism under the National Party, and later African nationalism under the ANC.

He characterised this as "a grievance-driven movement. It's angry people blaming someone else, and it's not constructive. People want reparations and compensation. Black economic empowerment is one of the manifestations of grievance. Nationalists, therefore, don't fight to change the socio-economic structure of the colonial system. They fight to be included in it."

Mbeki showed a graph indicating that South Africa had the most expensive civil service in the world – at more than 14% of gross national product. He said 30 000 public servants earn more than R1 million a year. "Backbenchers in parliament are paid R1 million to sleep, and get told how to vote. The more committees they sit on, the more they earn.



President Cyril Ramaphosa earns more than the German chancellor! There's no money left to invest in hospitals, roads, railways, or electricity."

Mbeki argued that the nationalist elite looked after itself and not the people. He showed how South Korea and South Africa were on the same economic level in 1960, but now South Korea's economy is five times larger than South Africa's.

"Why? Because they invest in the skills of people. "We don't invest in people, we have one of the lowest levels of human capital in the world," Mbeki said. Singapore leads the Human Capital Index, Israel is 28th, South Africa is 135th. "We are consumption-driven and lack the human capital to build the economy, to set up new enterprises. Only about 40% of high school students graduate in South Africa. In Russia and Japan, it's nearly 100%."

He showed a graph he had constructed with the statistician general in 2014, which mapped the social structure of South Africa. Those earning above R60 000 made up just 0.44% – about 105 000 people at the time. The middle class – earning R11 550 to R60 000 – comprised just below 10%, and blue-collar workers made up 38%. The unemployed underclass made up a full 50% of the economically active population. "Inequality is very real," Mbeki said. "This partially explains upheaval and crime. We're sitting on a powder keg."

Mbeki described the almost two weeks of violence, looting, and killing in July 2021 that ensued after the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma as "the edge of the abyss". He said security enforcement agencies were "incompetent", and "The rioters were ANC voters, especially those on social welfare. The poor are the main voters of the ANC; when they riot, the state sits back. R50 billion was destroyed in eight days. About 350 people were killed. The ANC won't antagonise its voters to protect other people's property."

A commission of investigation had attributed the violence to a combination of the hollowing out of already weak state institutions; high unemployment; inherited high levels of poverty; poor special planning; rampant corruption; sponsored state capture; and despair brought on by COVID-19 restrictions. Warnings of this explosive mixture were given to government, but were consistently ignored.

Mbeki's solutions start with reforming the

proportional representation electoral system to include constituencies to enhance accountability. He said the ANC opposed anything which would promote greater transparency. The country needed to redesign its education, health, transport, and electricity systems, and halve the cost of the public service. South Africa also needs to restructure its relations with its neighbours as well as institute throughgoing reforms to the economy.

"But as long as the ANC is in power, there's no chance of this reform," Mbeki said. "If the ANC doesn't get 50% in the 2024 elections, the opposition could unite and form a government. Five years after that, there will be no ANC – it will

collapse like long-time ruling parties in Kenya and Zambia. All it has to offer is patronage, and it won't have access to this if it's not in government."

"The problem is opposition parties fighting themselves. If they could be persuaded to work together, we'd have a very different South Africa in two years' time."

Tragic death spotlights Joburg's crumbling roads

>>Continued from page 1

Waner was born and raised in Springs, and attended Springs Boys High School, matriculating at Damelin College. After school, he studied medicine and thereafter became a pathologist with an interest in travel medicine. He married his wife, Susan, a maths teacher, when he was 52, and he cared for his late mother with a quiet devotion.

In a moving letter to the family, Pinchas Goldberg wrote, "When I worked for the Johannesburg kashrus department, I had to travel substantially and frequently into Africa. Dr Simmy would advise me on when to take anti-malarials, when to have a flu shot, which water I could drink, how to clean the water if needed, and many other travel-related medical questions. Dr Simmy never took money for his time and the vaccines he arranged for me. He told me that because I enabled him to learn

with Yitzhak, and the other work I did for the community, he felt so indebted to me, he wanted to help me. People like this are few and far between."

One of his closest friends, Steven Katzew, said, "His ability to heal and care for people was profound. I felt the full benefit of this throughout our enduring friendship."

Tributes continue to pour in for the man who mentored fellow doctors, lectured and inspired students, and above all saved the lives of ordinary South Africans.

"These stories have been a source of comfort which we'll hold on to," said Yitzhak, who intends to study engineering in Israel later this year."

Waner is survived by his wife Susan; children Yitzhak, 18; Ashira, 16; and Yaira, 14; and his two brothers, Trevor and Harold.

A second Passover – A second chance

OPINION

Success is sweet. We feel fulfilled when everything falls into place and our dreams are achieved to perfection. But life includes moments of missed opportunities. We fall and fail. There are those days of disappointment when we have made the wrong choice, or when we're disillusioned by circumstances that deny us success.

What do we do when we confront a disastrous situation at work, or when a relationship has taken a bad turn? How do we react when our dreams have been dashed by the pain and sadness that comes with failure or loss?

A year after we were liberated from Egypt, G-d instructed our people, Israel, to relive the exuberance of the exodus and the joy of our emancipation by celebrating a pascal banquet with our families. It was an opportunity to express our gratitude and national joy on the anniversary of our newfound freedom.

The Torah tells us that a group of people were denied the opportunity of participating in the *mitzvah* and the celebration because of a technicality. They had contracted ritual impurity, which precluded them from bringing the pascal offering. They were deeply pained and disappointed.

They turned to Moshe Rabeinu and Aaron the high priest, and cried, "Lama nigara?" (Why are we denied the opportunity of participating in the pascal offering amidst our people?)

G-d responded to their cry from the heart. He presented a new commandment. In the event that there were any people who were ritually impure, who had been far away, or who had erred or sinned, resulting in them not participating in the pascal celebration, they would be afforded a second opportunity to bring the Pesach offering. Thirty days after Pesach, on the 14th day of Iyar, they would be able to celebrate the festival of Pesach Sheni, the second Passover.

The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe derived a broader life message from this plea to Moshe, and G-d's response. Pesach Sheni, he said, teaches us that it's never too late, we're never trapped in the despair of loss. We always have a second chance.

The *mitzvah* of Pesach Sheni is unique in that its origin didn't emanate from Hashem's instruction, as do the other commandments of the Torah. This *mitzvah*, which symbolises the fact that we have a second chance and we can always pick up the pieces of failure, emanated



from a cry from the pained hearts of those who had been excluded from the Pesach experience. Their cry, "Lama nigara?" turned the tide. This *mitzvah* was born in their desire and determination to be involved and not lose the responsibility and opportunity of participating in a national experience alongside their brothers and sisters.

On Friday, 5 May/14 Iyar, we celebrate Pesach Sheni, a day to focus on our response to lost opportunities. We take strength in knowing that there's always a second chance. We're never defined by failure. We can and

must pick ourselves up and turn disappointment into stepping stones of growth.

Pesach Sheni reminds us that G-d is always waiting for us to care enough. When it bothers us to the core and we're really committed to investing in a relationship that's on the rocks or to realise that our dreams are slipping away, we can and must – with G-d's help – muster the strength to turn a negative situation around and take a second chance to succeed.

• Rabbi Dovid Hazdan is the rabbi at Great Park Synagogue and the dean of Torah Academy.



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Honoured at 99: Ruth Weiss recalls fight against apartheid

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish writer, poet, and educator, Ruth Weiss (née Löwenthal), escaped Nazi Germany and grew up in South Africa, where her first-hand experience of fleeing persecution compelled her to speak out against oppression in South Africa.

She was a journalist and activist in the anti-apartheid movement, interviewing Nelson Mandela when he was on the run from the police, shortly before his incarceration. A short time later, she was forced to flee the country to avoid imprisonment. She never returned to live in South Africa, but remained an outspoken voice against hatred in any form.

Now, for the first time, she has been publicly recognised in South Africa for a lifetime of activism. On 28 April, President Cyril Ramaphosa bestowed the Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo on Weiss because “her prolific writing shone the light on injustice in South Africa. She has been a source of knowledge for other journalists and activists”.

Weiss, who was born in 1924 and will turn 99 in July, told the *SA Jewish Report* that she felt “overwhelmed” on receiving the award. “It was so unexpected and yet so wonderful,” she says. “South Africa was my second home – I continued my involvement even after I’d been deprived of my South African citizenship and couldn’t return until the 1990s. It was great to feel welcome after that.”

Regarding the current state of South Africa, she says, “Nothing in life ever is as one had hoped. Equality and justice are now for all, but there’s the ever widening gap between rich and poor, the many issues of government, also the antisemitism, which is disappointing. Still, it’s no longer apartheid, which couldn’t be overcome within a few decades. The heritage is inevitably still a burden. Hope flickers on to fulfil Mandela’s hope that casting off the chains also means ensuring the freedom of everyone, a goal to be fought for until it’s reached.”

Weiss was born in Fürth, which adjoins Nuremburg. “The Nazis wanted to make it free of Jews as quickly as possible,” she says. “As a result, my father lost his job in 1933. Fortunately, he could immigrate to Johannesburg, where he had relatives. My mother, sister, and I followed in 1936. The years in Germany with the humiliation, fear, attacks on the way to school and one Shabbos to shul, marked me for good.”

So, when she came to South Africa, her eyes were wide open to the realities of apartheid. A self-taught journalist, she was business editor of *Newscheck*, before joining the *Financial Mail*. In 1966, she became *Financial Mail’s* bureau chief in then Salisbury (Harare) in what was then Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), but was declared *persona non grata* by the white regime because of her critical reporting and “sanction busting” stories.

“The pen, properly wielded, has its effect,” she says. “The injustices of the world can be objected to only by constantly publishing the truth and openly protesting against all racism and discrimination.”

“During the Nazi era, Germans kept silent – that is neutral – in the face first of German Jews, then the mechanised massacre of European Jews. One must not turn away in the face of injustice, racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, antifeminism, and homophobia, one has to speak out and fight fascism in all shapes and forms.”

Weiss moved to *The Guardian* in London, returning in the 1970s to Africa as business editor of the *Times of Zambia*, and as correspondent for the *Zambian Financial Times*. From Lusaka, she moved to Cologne as an editor in Voice of Germany’s Africa-English department, before turning freelance in London in 1978.

After covering the 1979 Lancaster House talks on Zimbabwe, she was invited to Zimbabwe to train economic journalists and was co-founder of the *Southern African Economist*. From 1987 to 1991, she worked on the staff of the Zimbabwe Institute of Southern Africa, which facilitated secret meetings of white and black South Africans ahead of official talks, which began in 1990 and led to the dismantling of apartheid. Starting in 1992, she wrote on the Isle of Wight for a decade. She moved to Germany in 2002, where she continued her research and writing of historical novels on anti-racism themes. She currently lives in Denmark.

Her novels explore the lives of Jews in different eras, and the lives of women in Africa. Her work includes the novel, *My Sister Sara*, which tells of a four-year-old, blonde, German war orphan adopted in 1948 by an Afrikaner parliamentarian who sympathises with the Nazis. The family falls in love with the child, but when her papers arrive from the orphanage six months later and the father discovers that Sara is Jewish, she’s rejected by them. The story was selected as compulsory matriculation reading in the German state of Baden-Württemberg in 2007.

“South Africa means a great deal to me,” says Weiss, who was involved in the Jewish community when she lived here. “I was a member of Habonim and later of Hashomer Hatzair. The leader of Hashomer Hatzair was Baruch Hirson. I later met him briefly before I left South Africa, and when he came out of prison we communicated, as I did with Ramon Eisenstein. I was always sorry that I lived in countries other than my South African friends, my itinerant life being what it was.”

Weiss came from an Orthodox family and first lived in Mayfair in Johannesburg, “then a poor-white suburb, where my father had a shop. I went to shul on the first Saturday to find myself, at age 11, the only female. There were few Jews left in Mayfair at that time, so the following Shabbat, I walked to the Wolmarans Synagogue, but it was a long walk through Fordsburg. My family by then had joined Etz Chaim, the German Jewish congregation in Hillbrow. When I was transferred for my final matric year to Parktown Girls High, my friends were Jewish girls whose economic status differed from my family’s, but not our beliefs.”

She recently completed a manuscript together with a friend “who had been unaware his mother was Jewish. The title we chose was *Tikkun Olam*. It was my Jewish background that made me feel it was important to fight against discrimination, humiliation, and antisemitism. That’s the reason I have written about 20 novels on Jewish history.”

Her hope for South Africa is that “all the issues can be resolved, and a new generation will fight for a better life for all. The young shouldn’t accept their inheritance, but question it and work out new ways of dealing with the huge problems facing this multi-people society. My advice to the young is always the same, ‘Don’t remain neutral – get involved and fight for equality’. There’s no ‘we and them’ only ‘us’, as we’re all human beings.”



Photo: Superikonoskop

Ruth Weiss

SA poet gets stellar recognition with Order of Ikhamanga

TALI FEINBERG

When Keith Gottschalk heard he was to receive the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver on 28 April, “I was stunned! It was like a fairy tale. When I saw how many of the national honours were awarded posthumously, I felt happy that I’m still alive at 77 years old to enjoy it,” the poet, academic, journalist, and activist told the *SA Jewish Report*.

The award was given “for using his creativity to call critical attention to oppressive and unjust laws through performative political poetry. His work provided strength and motivated many people to fight for liberation”. President Cyril Ramaphosa bestowed it personally.

Gottschalk’s first collection of poetry (1992) was titled *Emergency Poems* – a play on all the states of emergency during the 1980s. “The most challenging moments of my life and career was having the apartheid censors ban all the readings I prescribed for my University of Cape Town [UCT] students on Angola and Mozambique; having the Special Branch repeatedly raid my home and confiscate books from my library and confiscate my passport for decades; having my phone tapped and

African Writers, which through its workshops, writing groups, readings, and publications gave voice to previously unpublished writers and mentored many younger, aspiring writers.

He’s passionate about many things between heaven and earth, including space. “Highlights of my life and career include watching Sputnik launch the space age in 1957; outliving the apartheid police state and witnessing South Africa achieve democracy in 1994; getting a tenured post at UWC; being wedded to a lovely person, Bernadette; publishing my two poetry collections *Emergency Poems* (1992) and *Cosmonauts do it in Heaven* (2022). *Cosmonauts* includes an elegy to Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon, published bilingually in English and Hebrew.”

Says Colleen Higgs of Modjaji Books in Cape Town, “I wanted to publish Keith’s latest collection of poems, *Cosmonauts*, for many reasons. It’s a highly innovative collection put together over a 20-year period. I love the way he combines social and political consciousness into poetry that’s about science and technology. Keith has a sensitivity to those he writes about that’s remarkable, and the way he weaves the concerns of the humanities

into poems about advances in space exploration is unusual in South African literature.

“It was a pleasure to publish this collection by Keith, who has put so much energy and effort into supporting the writing and creativity of others, and wonderful to see him honoured by the president in this way,” Higgs says.

Gottschalk is a member of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa, the British Interplanetary Society, and The Planetary Society (in the United States). “I felt privileged to witness the space age: Sputnik; Yuri Gagarin; Project Apollo landing

12 Americans on the moon; the international and other space stations; and a fleet of planetary probes fly past every planet in our solar system.”

For seven years, he ran a space association on the campuses of UWC and adjacent campus of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology to excite students about astronomy and astronautics. He was also on the advisory panels which helped draft South Africa’s space policy and space strategy during the 2000s.

Jewish values are vital to his outlook, he says. “Rabbi Sherman and others at *cheder* led us through universal ethical values in the Tanach and Talmud, which were the opposite of racist apartheid and its oppressive police state.”

Regarding the current state of South Africa, he says, “Democracy isn’t a destination but a journey. The depth of our democracy and its institutions is vital, including freedom of the media. Democracy works best with active citizens – so choose your causes, nongovernmental organisations, and political party, participate, and support them!”

He “absolutely” still has faith in the country. “The grass isn’t greener on the other side of the fence – it’s just that their problems are different to ours. The *Cape Jewish Chronicle* reported that a recent international conference ranked South Africa as one of the safest countries in the world for Jewish people.

“My favourite Talmud quote is Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers) chapter 2:16: Rabbi Tarfon used to say, “It’s not up to you to finish the task, but you aren’t free to avoid it.” So let’s all continue to build a better South Africa!”



President Cyril Ramaphosa and Keith Gottschalk

Photo: South African government Facebook page

my letters opened; and being detained without trial in Pollsmoor Prison during the 1985 State of Emergency.” He has also fought back against four different types of cancer.

Gottschalk was born in Cape Town in 1946, and raised in the Mother City, where he still lives today. He studied politics at UCT, where he would later begin his academic career as a lecturer.

Gottschalk’s grandfather fled from tsarist Latvia “because he couldn’t get his *propiska* [similar to the apartheid *dompas*] signed for the only place that offered him work”, says Gottschalk. “My father was a general practitioner, and my mother a full-time housewife, as was the norm in their generation. We were in the Progressive congregation of Temple Israel, with Rabbi Dr David Sherman then in charge.”

He went to Wynberg Boys schools. About one-third of his matric class was Jewish. He lectured in politics for three decades at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), was head of the political studies department from 2004 to 2006, and a Fulbright scholar from 2009 to 2010. “This year, UWC gave me the retirement honour of promotion to adjunct professor,” he says.

Much of his poetry has political themes, and he has been an activist since his student days against apartheid and social injustice. He was a member of several democratic organisations, including the Civil Rights League and the United Democratic Front. In the 1980s, he performed several of his poems at political rallies.

In the late 1980s, Gottschalk was a founding member of the Western Cape branch of the Congress of South

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Cape Israel haters left out in the cold

TALI FEINBERG

A small group of Israel haters yelled slurs at Jews entering the Cape Town Jewish community’s Yom Ha’atzmaut celebration on Wednesday, 26 April. They also hoisted flags of terrorist groups Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, showing that their aspiration was for violence against Jews, not helping Palestinians. To press the point, they yelled, “One Zionist, one bullet!” and “Death to Israel!” at Jewish men, women, and children. One protester revealed his antisemitism by saying that Jews weren’t “the chosen ones” but “the cursed ones”, tying into the age-old trope of Jews being associated with the devil.

Waving terrorist flags and calling for violence now appears to be the norm in Cape Town. The flags were displayed at the Palestine Solidarity Forum’s hosting of terrorists at the University of Cape Town. Calls for violence were also heard at a protest in Cape Town while burning Israeli flags.



Another protester outside the Yom Ha’atzmaut event, Haroon Orrie, shot a 15-minute livestream video on Facebook, begging Israel haters to join him and his compatriots. He said Zionists were “evil”, and shouldn’t be allowed to live in South Africa. “Why are Zionist [sic] allowed to roam freely in our country, while they are killing innocent people throughout the world,” he wrote alongside the video on Facebook, tying into an antisemitic trope of

Jews being murderers. He complained about the large security contingent at the event, including an extensive police presence. Jews walking in and out of the venue refused to stoop to the protesters’ level, holding their heads high. Ultimately, the protesters were left out in the cold, while inside, the community enjoyed a unified and joyous celebration. As the sun set, electronic band GoodLuck took to the stage, refusing to bow

to pressure from SA BDS (the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Coalition) not to perform at the event. “We love the melting pot of different communities that make up Cape Town, and the Jewish community is one that’s close to our heart, also they really know how to put on an incredible event, so it was easy for us to say yes [to performing at Yom Ha’atzmaut],” band member Ben Peters told the *SA Jewish Report*. Saying that they “didn’t experience any negativity”, Peters said it was lovely to see that a cultural celebration could be safely and respectfully held in the city. “Whenever we play our songs, the greatest gift is seeing people singing along. Even if it’s songs off our first album from ages ago or the latest single, it’s a magical feeling. We had everyone dancing, from young kids to grandparents, and the vibe was just incredible! It made us feel like we were

back in Plett [Plettenberg Bay] at our annual Get Lucky Summer concerts.” To the community, he said, “Thank you so much for supporting local music, for giving us the opportunity to perform at such a special occasion, and for being such a warm and welcoming community. The appreciation we felt for our participation was inspiring, and a massive shout out to Leora Hessen for co-ordinating and looking after us.” The Kiffness and DJ Sona also went ahead with their performances at the Yom Ha’atzmaut celebration in Johannesburg – which didn’t have any protesters – in spite of the SA



Electronic music band, GoodLuck

BDS Coalition calling on them not to participate. BDS said that Israel shouldn’t have existed for the past 75 years, making it clear that it believed Jews have no right to self-determination. And though the SA BDS Coalition aligns itself with the international BDS movement that claims it’s “nonviolent”, it was clear that those protesting outside Yom Ha’atzmaut in Cape Town were calling for violence against Jews, Israelis, and Israel.

Debt-limit bill sparks concern over Israel support

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

As the 2024 election gets into gear, both Republicans and Democrats are again using Israel as a wedge issue. A lot has changed in both countries since the last presidential election, but in the halls of Congress, the battle over Israel is playing out in familiar ways. Republicans have accused President Joe Biden of snubbing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he has yet to invite to the White House amid policy disagreements. Democrats, meanwhile, say that the Republicans’ proposed spending cuts endanger foreign aid to Israel. And leaders of both parties have indicated that, even amid a high-states fight over the debt ceiling, displaying support for Israel remains a priority. Representative Kevin McCarthy, the Republican House speaker, took time this week to lead a bipartisan delegation to Israel, where he addressed the Knesset. That was just a week after Representative Hakeem Jeffries, the Democratic minority leader from New York, led his own delegation to the country and laid a wreath to mark its Memorial Day. Also visiting the country recently to demonstrate his support was Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is expected to launch his bid for the GOP (Grand Old Party) presidential nomination this month.

McCarthy’s speech in Israel’s parliament was nonpartisan, but his remarks to reporters were less so. McCarthy told *Israel Hayom*, a right-leaning tabloid, that Biden was wrong not to invite Netanyahu to Washington, saying Netanyahu had waited “too long” since returning to office in December. “If that doesn’t happen, I’ll invite the prime minister to come meet the House,” McCarthy said. “He’s a dear friend, as a prime minister of a country that we have our closest ties with.” Amir Ohana, the speaker of Knesset and a member of Netanyahu’s Likud Party, had hinted that his invitation to McCarthy was a sort of rebuke to Biden. The United States

president has indicated that he’s not interested in seeing Netanyahu until the Israeli leader limits the influence of his far-right coalition partners and walks back his controversial effort to weaken Israel’s judiciary. Biden has said the judicial overhaul would undercut Israel’s democracy. As McCarthy was getting ready to leave Israel, Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a senior Democrat, was telling colleagues that Republican budget manoeuvres were imperilling US assistance to Israel.

McCarthy made the pledge explicit in his Knesset speech the following day. “As long as I’m speaker, America will continue to support full funding for security assistance in Israel,” he said. Wasserman Schultz hasn’t been the only one to seek assurances that aid to Israel would be left alone. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a pro-Israel lobby group, has also asked that Israel cuts be taken off the table. “We’re continuing our work with congressional leaders to ensure full funding of security assistance to Israel without additional conditions,” Marshall Wittmann, AIPAC’s spokesman, told JTA. “This is a top legislative priority, as it’s in the security interests of the US and our ally, Israel, and we’re pleased that many members of Congress have already written to senior members of the appropriations committee in support of this funding.” Wasserman Schultz said that though she welcomed McCarthy’s reassurance on Israel, she worried that Republican cuts could have an impact on foreign aid overall. AIPAC and other

pro-Israel groups have also said that foreign aid generally – not just to Israel – is essential to preserving US influence internationally. “Words matter, but the actions in the House Republican Default on America Bill that passed the House doesn’t match the rhetoric,” she said in a text message on Monday, using a derisive name for the Republican bill. “But even if his caucus allows him to follow through on those words, the drastic cuts called for in the Default on America Act would decimate support for our partners and diplomatic efforts in the region, and undercut Israel’s overall security.” Asked in Jerusalem about the debt-limit negotiations, McCarthy said that in at least one respect, he and the prime minister were in the same boat. “The president still hasn’t talked to me,” he said, just hours before Biden invited him to the White House to launch debt-limit negotiations. “I’m a little like Netanyahu.”



Representative Kevin McCarthy and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Photo: Amos Ben-Gershom, Israel Government Press Office



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Chief rabbi’s Shabbat book gets starry endorsement

HANNA RESNICK

Acclaimed international actress Mayim Bialik is more than just a neuroscientist, *Jeopardy* host, and Emmy nominee, she’s also a proud Jew who regularly shares aspects of her identity online.

On 3 April, the actress posted a video on social media expressing her thoughts on Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein’s new book *Shabbat. A Day to Create Yourself*, which highlights the importance of the Sabbath in encouraging personal, spiritual, and societal rejuvenation.

“It’s not often that you get to interact with the chief rabbi of a country,” said Bialik in the video, “but there’s a chief rabbi of South Africa, his name is Rabbi Goldstein, and I’ve gotten to speak to him. And he wrote a really, really beautiful book about Sabbath and the importance of powering down literally, physically, and also spiritually. It’s just a really awesome guidebook.”

Said Goldstein, “I first connected with Mayim Bialik when the Shabbat Project spread around the world in 2014. Mayim emerged as a proud, vocal ambassador.

“In a series of posts, she called on her many fans around the world to “try one Shabbat”, and said that it would ‘be awesome in the most peaceful, quiet, restorative, and unifying way possible;” the chief rabbi said.

The social media post followed Bialik’s official endorsement, published with the book, in which she



Mayim Bialik

described it as “an essential for any home ... the start of creating peace, wholeness, and holiness”.

In an exclusive interview with the *SA Jewish Report*, Bialik said she was “really honoured and thrilled to be included in anything surrounding the book”, explaining that she decided to share her thoughts online because “a lot more people are resonating with the importance of a Sabbath, and the importance of not constantly being attached to one’s phone and in particular, focusing on a day that has the power also to bring us closer to our families and also to G-d, if we so choose to call that power in the universe, and also closer to ourselves”.

Goldstein was touched by her enthusiasm to share the book on her social media – where she has more than four million followers – saying, “In today’s hyper-transactional culture where celebrities and influencers are paid exorbitant sums to endorse products, it’s so inspiring and refreshing that Mayim would volunteer to do something like this for the cause simply because she believes passionately in the message of the book and in the ideals of Shabbat.”

“Over the years, Mayim has been a wonderful champion and public spokesperson for Shabbat, and her vocal support is part of a growing movement of influential voices in the Jewish world recognising the central importance of Shabbos in today’s world, and seeing its resurgence as a major calling of our times.”

“Shabbat has meant a lot of different things to me

throughout my life,” Bialik said. “I went to a reform synagogue as a child, so often we would go to services on Friday nights, but we didn’t really have a Shabbat observance on Saturdays.”

She “grew up in an unusual home” in that her mother had been raised Orthodox, but she hadn’t, she said. “My mother had a lot of remnants from her childhood that we didn’t really talk about, meaning we had two sets of dishes, but it was never explained to me that those were, you know, our *milchik* and *fleishik* dishes ... and we did light candles on Friday night.

“I started going to Jewish Federation programmes in middle school, and that’s really the first time that I interacted with traditional, conservative Jews and learned more about what the actual Shabbat experience entailed,” she said, explaining that her own observance increased in her college years.

She has continued to adapt her relationship with Shabbat throughout her life. “I’ve been divorced for 11 years, and observance has definitely been a challenge as a divorced woman. It’s a different kind of culture. [And] COVID-19 changed our synagogue going, and that was really hard. It’s been an interesting rhythm to get back into, but I will say that what I most appreciate about Rabbi Goldstein’s book is its relevance, especially to our culture in the past handful of years, in which so many of us are consumed by the pull of electronics, in particular cellphones.

“We’re seeing a lot more conversation even in secular circles about powering down and the importance of a break. And so, Rabbi Goldstein’s book is coming to

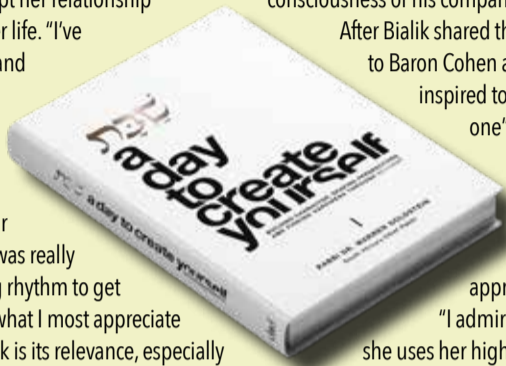
our lives at a point where this is so much part of our consciousness, and we need those kinds of reminders. For me, it’s really helped, I guess, with a reaffirmation of all of the things that for thousands of years the Jewish people have held so sacred.”

Along with her praise for the book, she also mentioned in her video that she had sent the book to fellow Jewish actor Sacha Baron Cohen. Bialik recalled the time she had a meeting with his company, held in an office on his property on a Friday. “I remember I received an email before saying that this is a Shabbat observant home, so please plan to leave by, you know, whatever the time was.

“I wasn’t planning on trying to invite myself for Shabbat,” she joked. “I mean, I respect him tremendously as a comedian and as an artist, but I was really touched that Shabbat observance is part of the consciousness of his company.”

After Bialik shared that she had given the book to Baron Cohen as a gift, Goldstein was inspired to launch a “buy one, gift one” campaign. In it, he calls on people to buy two books, one for themselves and another as a gift for someone who would appreciate it.

“I admire Mayim for the way she uses her high-profile platform and enormous influence to promote Shabbos,” said Goldstein. “She has openly shared her views on the importance of face-to-face time with family and how Shabbos provides an incredible opportunity once a week for family bonding without the interference of technology, work schedules, and errands.”



Jew-hatred in SA has sustained history

TALI FEINBERG

“The tenacity of antisemitism and its ability to mutate and survive cannot be underestimated,” writes prize-winning author and academic Professor Milton Shain in the final book of his trilogy on the history of antisemitism in South Africa, titled *Fascists, Fabricators and Fantasists: Antisemitism in South Africa from 1948 to the Present* (Jacana).

“We know that antisemitism takes on the coloration of the period in which it operates,” says Shain. “More recently, anti-Zionist discourse has added a new layer to what Robert Wistrich referred to as ‘the longest hatred’. In other words, anti-Zionism – at least for some – is a hygienic form of Jew-hatred. This is not to suggest all anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel is synonymous with antisemitism. For many, however, it is a fig-leaf for simple Jew-hatred.”

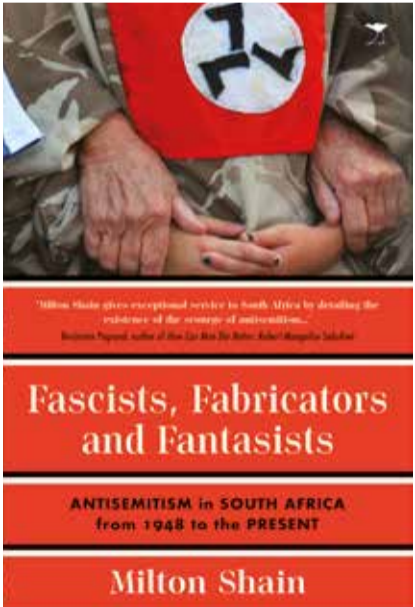
Shain is professor emeritus of historical studies at the University of Cape Town and the former director of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research. He has written and edited several books on South African Jewish history and the history of antisemitism.

“With the normalisation of South African society [in the post-apartheid era], we have a window into attitudes towards the Jew beyond the white community,” Shain says. “In the past, we had only glimpses, but it has now become evident that the anti-Jewish stereotype has penetrated across all sectors of the country.

“We see this in surveys and in particular, in the tropes of anti-Zionism. Again, I must stress that hostility towards Israel doesn’t have to be driven by Jew-hatred. But we often

see an old hatred in a new guise in the language and tropes of condemnation. A good example of this was at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001 where *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* – a foundation document of antisemitic hate – was on sale.”

He notes that “Antisemitism certainly exists in South Africa, but in many ways, our celebration of cultural diversity and the notion of a ‘rainbow nation’ militates against ethnic hatred. It blunts divisions. We also have a range of Chapter Nine institutions that make antisemitism and other forms of prejudice a



Jew-hatred is operating.”

Shain’s interest in antisemitism began in the mid-1970s, “when I examined Jews and politics in the old Cape Colony. I was struck by the amount of hitherto unknown anti-alienism that targeted eastern European Jews. This led me to challenge the conventional idea that the ‘Jewish question’ of the 1930s in South Africa was an import from fascist Europe. Rather, I saw it as the maturation of a long gestating anti-Jewish stereotype that burst into public politics under the right conditions.”

This long history is now complete in his three volumes. “Exhuming the underbelly of an aspect of South African culture and history has been a challenge. But there’s nothing rewarding in hatred.”

Shain explains how antisemitism has mutated over the ages. “In pagan days, the Jews were the classic ‘other’, identified by their monotheism and distinctive practices. In the Christian Medieval world, the Jew was characterised in religious terms, that is to say they were charged with deicide, killing Christian children for ritual purposes and so forth. With the rise of race-thinking during the Enlightenment, they were defined as racially distinctive with an immutable essence.”

Meanwhile in South Africa, antisemitism ebbed and flowed. “If one takes the rise of apartheid as concurrent with *völkisch* Afrikaner nationalism, it’s apparent that the contours are visible from the 1930s. Indeed, the 1930s and early 1940s displayed the high point of antisemitism in South Africa in the emergence of a ‘Jewish question’,” says Shain.

“However, once the National Party

came to power in 1948, antisemitism subsided significantly. Prime Minister DF Malan reached a *modus vivendi* with the Jewish establishment and the old canards of hate were rapidly discarded. Nevertheless, fringe extremists, often with neo-Nazi ties, persisted in circulating hostile ideas about Jews. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, for example, was disseminated, and the Holocaust denied. Importantly, right-wing extremists had little traction. A rising Afrikaner bourgeoisie, enjoying the benefits of race-exploitation, no longer saw the Jew as a competitive threat.”

But Jew-hatred gained some momentum in the 1970s in South Africa. “As the National Party under BJ Vorster began to consider smoothing the rougher edges of so-called ‘petty apartheid’, purist Nationalist ideologues like SED Brown and Ivor Benson saw the hand of international finance, in sinister collusion with Communists, undermining the country’s racial order and stability,” says Shain. “Fortunately, these ideas hardly resonated, but they did ensure the persistence of ugly anti-Jewish stereotypes. The Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging under Eugène Terre’Blanche employed these in the 1980s. He was not alone.”

His book is the only sustained examination of the subject available. “It seeks to investigate, trace, and unpack hostile attitudes towards Jews and irrational fantasies about them in apartheid



Professor Milton Shain

and post-apartheid South Africa. It’s not a blow-by-blow account of every instance of antisemitism. Rather, the focus is on the evolution, survival, and resurfacing of anti-Jewish ideas and the ways in which these intersect with one another in diverse ways.”

Ultimately, the book warns that “one should never downplay the ability of antisemitism to survive”, says Shain. “We should never be complacent. A range of surveys over the past five decades have shown a sustained level of anti-Jewish stereotyping. We also know that history has demonstrated unequivocally that ideas precede action. For now, however, the possibility of hostile ideas mutating into public policy [in South Africa] is highly unlikely. But things can change. Black swans do appear. For one thing, if viewed historically, the current politics of pessimism could conceivably provide fertile ground for the targeting of Jews.

“It would be prudent to heed the wise words of historian Hugh Trevor-Roper whom I quote in the book: ‘History teaches us that even the most tenuous phantoms can come to life if objective circumstances change. The fantasies of one generation can provide the mental furniture, even the life-blood, of another.’”

- *Fascists, Fabricators and Fantasists: Antisemitism in South Africa from 1948 to the Present is available in all bookstores as well as an electronic edition via Amazon. A print version will be available later this year in Britain and the United States.*

South African kids shine in Netflix’s *Rough Diamonds*

TALI FEINBERG

When one speaks to Aurelie (8) and Samuel Licht (12), their confidence and zest for life shines through. This is probably one of the reasons they were chosen for roles in the new Netflix series, *Rough Diamonds*.

The siblings, who hail from Johannesburg, say they were thrilled to hear they got the parts, and loved every minute of filming the series, which focuses on the lives of haredi Jews in the diamond district of Antwerp, Belgium. Samuel played Aharon Wolfson, the son of Yanki, and Aurelie was Perla Glazer, the youngest of Adina’s children.

So how did two Jewish children from Johannesburg end up being cast in a Netflix show in Belgium? “My husband is originally from Belgium, but left with his family when he was 15 to live in South Africa. He works for a company that opened an office in Antwerp, and he was heading up the operation, so we moved there. We’re now in Dubai for him to do the same thing,” says their mother, Sharna Licht, who grew up in Johannesburg and who has family still living there.

In Johannesburg, Samuel attended Sydenham Hebrew Pre-Primary School, and then started at King David Linksfield. Aurelie also went to Sydenham Hebrew Pre-Primary School. In Belgium, they attended Tachkemoni Antwerp, the same Jewish school their father attended as a child, which has existed for more than 100 years. It was at the school that the series’ producers called for children to audition for parts in *Rough Diamonds*. Even though they had never done drama before, both were chosen. Aurelie’s favourite actor on set was Ini Maseez, who played Adina, and Samuel calls Casper Knopf, who plays Tommy, a good friend.

“Filming started in October 2021 and finished in early April 2022,” says Sharna. “Then we had voiceovers in November 2022. The time they had to be on set varied depending on how many times they had to do a take. When it was long or went on until late they would have the talent coach stay with the children and look after

them. It was incredible to see how they film all the scenes on different days and different locations, and put it all together.”

Speaking in Johannesburg accents from their home in Dubai, both children say the long hours were the most challenging part. “I would be on set from, say, 16:00 until 22:00, and then still have to get up for school the next day, and then miss some of that day. But I loved the experience, meeting new people, and acting,” says Samuel.

“I tried out because I thought it would be a great experience,” he says. “I was extremely excited when I heard I got the part. Acting’s really fun – you can express yourself in different ways, and you have to show different emotions. I felt quite nervous knowing that millions would be watching, but I think we did well.

“It sounded like an interesting thing to do,” says Aurelie. “I thought, ‘Why not try?’ I was so happy to hear I got the part. The whole thing was fun.” She hopes to act again.

Her mother thinks audiences will enjoy the show because it has a bit of everything – “action, drama, lots of genres”. Says Aurelie, “What’s a show without drama?”

Samuel believes that people will enjoy it as there’s “good acting and a good story – something that could happen or could have happened”.

“It’s an interesting look at life in Antwerp, the diamond district, and how much is changing there,” says Sharna.

The show reached number nine in the top-10 Netflix



Aurelie and Samuel Licht



Aurelie Licht with Ini Maseez (who plays Adina Glazer)

Israelis Rotem Shamir and Yuval Yefet (who worked together on *Fauda*), the series centres on the Wolfson family – Belgian haredi Jews who have worked in the diamond business for generations. When the youngest Wolfson sibling, Yanki, takes his own life, his estranged brother, Noah, returns to Antwerp 15 years after he left the ultra-Orthodox lifestyle behind, to help the family business which is under threat from all sides.

In the first scene of the show, Yanki checks on his sleeping children, including Samuel, who plays his son.

Aurelie is clearly seen in the show’s official image of the family sitting around a crowded Shabbos table.

Another South African connection is that the patriarch, Ezra Wolfson, is played by Dudu Fisher, who once spent four years as a cantor in South Africa. “I couldn’t have been more blown away by the charisma that this guy has upon the camera,” says Shamir of working with Fisher, best known for playing Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* in the 1990s. “You don’t have a lot of these actors, definitely not ones that can speak English, Yiddish, and Hebrew so well.” Fisher, who has had a long cantorial career, also brought his “amazing religious background” to the show, in particular in a traditional Shabbat dinner scene.

The show paints a challenging picture of the community, as troubles with the family business drag some of its members into questionable ties and behaviour. There’s casual antisemitism expressed by several non-Jewish characters and dubious comments from Jewish characters.

Yefet and Shamir say they were always conscious of the potential for antisemitic reactions to the show – in particular when it shows Orthodox Jews with ties to organised crime – but also worked to present a nuanced portrayal of the community. “When you see their life, that is just like yours in many ways, I think it’ll be exactly the opposite of supporting antisemitism,” says Yefet. “And as much as there’s a lot of business in the show, there’s never greed as part of it.”

Samuel says he would love to act again, “with my favourite actor, Ryan Reynolds, or with Casper Knopf who played Tommy. I would love to go to another country like America and act in a big movie. If you want to do something and are passionate about it, then go ahead and do it. I never thought I could be an actor, and now I am. So if you want something badly, don’t give up.”

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Community pulls out the stops for Chaiyanu Hope Tour

SHELLEY GLASER
AND TALI FEINBERG

South Africa may have its problems, but for young Israelis with cancer on the Chaiyanu Hope Tour, which treats them to everything the country and the community has to offer, it's a wonderland.

Nothing is too much for the community, which comes out in full force to treat the children, from rides in sports cars along the Cape coastline, to sailing on yachts, going on safari, elephant rides, and quad biking.

This year was the first Hope Tour since the COVID-19 pandemic. For many in the community, hosting the children (alternating boys and girls each year) is an annual highlight, and their return was celebrated by community members and this year's visiting boys.

Chaiyanu says it fights "illness with love" through the creation of the best possible experiences. Chaiyanu Chief Executive Elad Maimon personally organises the programme, which is then brought to life by him, the boys' carers, other volunteers, and the South African Jewish community.

Shulamit Amar has been volunteering for Chaiyanu for 19 years. She's an ICU (intensive care unit) nurse from Jerusalem who gives up her vacation time so that she can come on the tour. "The depth of the children's joy in their amazing experiences in South Africa as well as their tenacity inspires me," she says. "The children teach us every day how not to complain, and how to care for each other."

Amar needs to know the details of every patient's illness and medical requirements before she embarks on the two-week tour of South Africa. If, for example, a child has a brain tumour or has had brain surgery, she'll know not to allow him on the boat or jet skis as the "knocks and bumps" can have a negative impact on his health.

At another point, she gave a child medicine through his nasal

"Just last night, a boy had to call me at 03:00 because he was having problems with his colostomy bag, and he apologised for disturbing me," Amar says. "For me, it's what I

everything". The life-affirming experience makes him ready to "go home and fight".

Generous benefactors and members of the Jewish community who host meals often add a theme to make it more exciting, such as a superheroes breakfast in Glenhazel. For entertainment, "silent-disco" headphones were given to each boy, and there was a large empty frame decorated with superheroes in which the boys could have their pictures taken.

At the Vaal Dam, they were treated by Gary and Shira Cohen to boat rides, jet skis, and an acrobatic fly-by.

They were also able to swim in their pool and enjoy a sumptuous braai. At both of these events, two of the boys played guitars and sang. "The power of the boys' dancing and singing in spite of the gravity of their illness was inspiring," says community member Melinda Chazen.

Carers who join the tour help with smallest to biggest things, such as helping a boy go down a small step, drying some of the boys off after a swim, accompanying them on rides, bringing them food, and offering encouragement and solace at any given opportunity.

One of the carers, Yehoshua Arbeter, says the boys "teach me not to give up, that giving is a reason to get up every morning, and that the more you give, the more you get".



Avraham Babayan

Photo: Yossi Rozenboim



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



Photo: Yossi Rozenboim

Yitzchak Shapiro, Chaim Yaakov Yakobovitch, and Aharon Sigler



Neria Harkham and Sienna Diamond

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



Elior Levy and Shuey Arbeter

Photo: Yossi Rozenboim

do and there's no need for apologies. I'm their mother for two weeks, so their mother at home can take a vacation herself and also give more attention to her other kids."

Adir Bezalel, one of the older children on the trip, says the tour makes you "forget

In Supermarket of Nations, are Next Gen'ers buying Israel?

OPINION

JOANNA LANDAU



Imagine you're walking into a supermarket. Your shopping cart is empty, and the shelves are bursting with products. But this supermarket isn't like the one

"Travel Destinations". Its shelves are brimming with places to visit abroad, enticing you to pick one for your next vacation. The "Made-in" aisle is where you may find, out of

hundreds of other products made around the world, a car, for example. But what you see is much more than the VW, Mini Cooper, or Lexus cars themselves. You see Germany, Great Britain, and Japan's unique styles and traits welded into the machine. Then there are the "Real-Estate Deals", "Business Investments", and "Universities" aisles. In fact, there's an aisle for everything here.

Welcome to the Supermarket of Nations, where people from all over the world shop every day – especially on its digital format,

social media. One of the countries they may come across as they're walking down the aisles that span as far as the eye can see is Israel. Now, ask yourself, would they pick

Israel over any other product? Though the Jewish homeland truly has so much to offer, especially to the "Next Generation" – food, tech, social activism, modern dance, the list goes on and on – we cannot ignore the efforts of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement to recast all perceptions of the country in the mould of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It's entitled to use this tactic – even if it's playing dirty, because its objective is different to ours. And we must respond. We would be foolish not to.

But we shouldn't let it dictate how we manage Israel's reputation in its entirety.

Unfortunately, many within our tribe fall into this trap, perhaps not without reason. Even those of us who deeply love Israel agree that it has an image problem. Traditionally, the focus has been on taking on the anti-Israel narrative directly, and countering it with rational, fact-based arguments. However, this is a sure-fire way to give BDS exactly what it wants. If we're investing most of our resources and energy explaining Israel's geo-political policies, our ability to showcase the country's most attractive features – in the other aisles of the Supermarket of Nations, where everybody else is happily filling their carts – is

significantly curtailed. The Hebrew expression for "Israel advocacy" is *hasbara*. Many people use the term, but non-Hebrew speakers often don't know that its literal translation is "explanation", "or the act of explaining". The assumption is, first you need to agree with us, then you'll like us. We think it works the other way around. Focusing almost all Israel's efforts on *hasbara* sidelines the fact that Israel isn't a conflict; it's a country. And countries need to thrive, not just survive.

Think of a non-Jewish teen or twenty-something who has no obvious connection to Israel. For them, Israel is nestled between hundreds of other place products, busy staving off its detractors, and placing little importance on highlighting its strengths and appeal. How will they see it for all that it has to offer? Now think of a young Jewish person, walking about in the Supermarket of Nations. Israel is there, but will they "buy" it? As we celebrate Israel's 75th year of independence, how shocking is it that the answer is no longer a clear and resounding "Yes!"?

With this fresh perspective, you are hereby appointed chief marketing officer of Israel (not, by contrast, its head of advocacy or crisis management). Your job is to make sure that the product,

Israel, is placed strategically in the right aisle in the Supermarket of Nations, in a prime location, and to make every effort to ensure that it stands out for all the right reasons!

When you think like a marketer rather than an advocate, the entire playing field changes, as do the strategies, the tools at your disposal, and your metrics for success. In the past 20 years, this is what almost every other country has recognised, investing tens – even hundreds – of millions of dollars in marketing and branding their offering to targeted audiences, shifting global perceptions in the direction of their choosing.

For the product Israel to remain competitive in the Supermarket of Nations, we need to think a lot more like chief marketing officers and a little less like advocates or crisis managers. There's room for both schools of thought and action, but it's high time we give the former a fighting chance to prove itself. The future of Jewish peoplehood depends on it.

• This is an abridged excerpt from a new international book, *Ethical Tribing: Connecting the Next Generation to Israel in the Digital Era*, co-authored by Joanna Landau and Michael Golden.



In the Supermarket of Nations, Israel needs to find new ways to stand out

around the corner from where you live. Immediately, you notice the difference: instead of the "Breakfast Cereals" aisle, you see one called

Supremely talented and extremely ill – Sim twins fight on

TALI FEINBERG

If you look at David and Nathan Sim’s paintings and drawings, you would be amazed to learn that the artists are 11-year-old twins. It’s clear that they are talented and have so much to offer the world. Indeed, “art is their happy place”, says their mom, Loren Sim. Yet, at the same time, they and their family are facing an enormous challenge: both boys are very ill, with no cure and a poor prognosis.

“The simple explanation is that Nathan and David are in full intestinal failure,” says Loren. “Their digestive systems don’t work. They aren’t able to eat at all, not even a morsel of food, as they cannot digest it and it causes unbearable pain. They haven’t swallowed food for four years now.

“Their health is a journey that no parent should have to share and no human being should have to endure,” says Loren. But “we’re a strong unit, and we fight on as best we can”. The twins are essentially home-bound, but still see the world in all its beauty and dimensions.

Going back to the beginning, Loren says, “Russ and I are happily married. We’re blessed with three spectacular sons, Jesse (24), and our identical twin boys, who were a big surprise.” They live in Johannesburg.

Russ is a full-time karate instructor and international World Karate Federation referee, and Loren owns her own bookkeeping and accounting practice, “which allows me to work from home and be the full-time caregiver to Nathan and David, which is a 24/7 job”. Jesse is a South African national athlete who runs his own karate schools, teaches private karate lessons, and is studying for a BCom Financial Management.



Their health is a journey that no parent should have to share and no human being should have to endure. But we’re a strong unit, and we fight on as best we can.

The twins were born at 32 weeks, relatively healthy, with regular premature baby issues. “Once discharged, both boys struggled with their digestive systems and every doctor told us that it was purely a premature baby issue and would resolve itself. Thankfully, our phenomenal GP, Dr Michael Setzer, insisted that David, who seemed to be struggling much more, be biopsied. Nathan was biopsied afterwards.

“That biopsy literally changed our lives forever. It felt like we had been hit by a cricket bat,” she says. The list of diagnoses is long: Chronic Intestinal Pseudo Obstruction, Chronic Full Intestinal Failure, Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, Gastroparesis, POTS, Eosinophilic Gastroenteritis, and Osteogenesis Imperfecta.

Their systems don’t allow for the breakdown of food and “they are unable to absorb nutrients from either food or enteral feeding [through a peg into the stomach].



Jesse Sim and his girlfriend Tamzin Rowe with Nathan and David Sim

They have a central line through their hearts called a Broviac, and are nourished through their central nervous systems with TPN [total parenteral nutrition]. A Mickey button allows enteral medicated feeds to enter their stomachs to protect their livers from the damage of TPN.”

This process is extremely dangerous, and Loren has had to learn how to manage it and prevent sepsis, “which is a very real risk. The TPN bag has to be changed daily at home under sterile conditions. The twins have been on TPN for four years, and have had no line infections in that time.” The family has no nursing care or domestic help, and Loren is responsible for all their care.

David has had his large intestine removed, “as it was causing him immense pain and was swollen to more than twice the normal size. He has an ileostomy bag”, says Loren. “Nathan hasn’t yet progressed into needing this surgery, but it’s definitely a ‘when’ not ‘if’ scenario.”

The boys live in pain, which the family try to manage on a daily basis. “If we go out, which is very seldom as they have no immune systems, they are in wheelchairs with drips and their related pumps. Their ankles have collapsed because of Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, so walking is very painful, and they are also starting to have insufficiency fractures.”

For this reason, they spend almost every day at home or in hospital. Their days are filled with “procedures, doctors who have become like family, and hospital staff who love them as much as we do. We spend our days ensuring that, ultimately, every day we have with them is a happy one. They are two highly-intelligent little souls, who just accept the lot they have been dealt with grace, humour, and bravery.”

They are home-schooled with a tutor, and have an art teacher. “Nathan and David aren’t just talented artists, they are so talented, people request commissions from them,” Loren says.

During the pandemic, Reach for a Dream blessed Nathan and David with iPads, and their big brother bought them a PlayStation 4. “They spend many hours on these two

devices learning and keeping themselves entertained, safely wrapped up in their blankets with their beautiful cat, Ryo, who they adore.”

Meanwhile, “their big brother is a human like no other”, says Loren. “I know that Russ and I wouldn’t have got through some of the darkest moments without Jesse and his positivity, support, and absolute devotion to his family. He’s an extremely focused, hardworking, loyal, family-always-first human. His girlfriend, Tamzin, is also extremely devoted to our twins.”

A normal day in their home includes scrubbing up a few times a day, almost like going into an operating theatre. Each day includes medicine, pain relief, emotional support, enteral feeds, ileostomy care, little sleep, night shifts, and a routine that doesn’t change.

What keeps them going are “a strong marriage, and love and devotion to our three

boys. We gain our strength from each one of them. Special needs parenting is a life filled with solitude. It’s insular, lonely, and a life many don’t understand. Please teach your children love and kindness towards the special needs community,” Loren says.

“On many occasions, you will find me crying behind closed doors, but then you’ll see me singing and laughing with my boys five minutes later. We’re not a religious family, we’re a family of deep faith.”

Loren emphasises that she doesn’t want her boys to be known only for their illness, but also for their talent, personalities, and the bright light they bring to the world. “We have no idea what tomorrow will bring. What we do know is that we have a life filled with love. It’s a life built on morals, values, kindness, and a will to fight like no other.”

• To support the Sim family, contact Loren on landrsim@absamail.com or 083 601 1487.

“We do it for our dad,” say school sculling champions

TALI FEINBERG

When Kevin Williams passed away from a hepatitis variant in 2015, his son, Samuel, and daughter, Madison, started rowing to keep his memory alive. Now, both are excelling in the sport in Johannesburg, just as their dad did when he was a rower in the first eight at King Edward VII School.

Samuel, who is currently in matric, attended King David Linksfield until Grade 6, and then went on to King Edward VII Preparatory School and Kind Edward VII. “Rowing for my dad is very important for me,” he says. “I wear his army tags around my neck when I row.”

“I’m not sure there are many rowers out there who are Jewish, and Samuel has achieved phenomenal results in his school rowing,” says his proud mother, Terri Williams.

“Achieving rowing colours at King Edward VII was my dream since Grade 8, and on Friday [24 March] I achieved it,” says Samuel. He has also received a gold medal in the U15 South African Championships, a silver medal in the U19 Gauteng Championships, and U19 seventh place in South Africa for sculling 2023. His squad also received a bronze medal for U19 in the South African Championships 2023.

Madison is in Grade 10 at King David Linksfield, and began rowing only six months ago. In that time, she has raced at the Gauteng Championships 2022 and South Africa Championships 2023. She rows for Victoria Lake Rowing Club in Germiston.

“Learning to row was challenging as well as conquering the fear of falling off the boat,” says Madison. “I love how different the sport is, and following in my dad’s legacy and

my brother’s achievements. I know my dad is watching over Samuel and me as we row.”

Samuel says what he loves most about the sport is “being on the water and the peace I feel while rowing”. Terri, a single mother, has thrown herself behind her kids and their passion. “It’s hard work and long hours on the water for the kids. Travelling to regattas and water training – usually at the Roodepoort Dam – is a huge

dedication for any parent. But I love the schlepping and the dedication they show to the sport.”

While gliding along the water looks simple, it can be hard on the body. “The back can take strain if you’re not rowing correctly, and you get loads of blisters as you cannot wear any gloves,” Terri says.

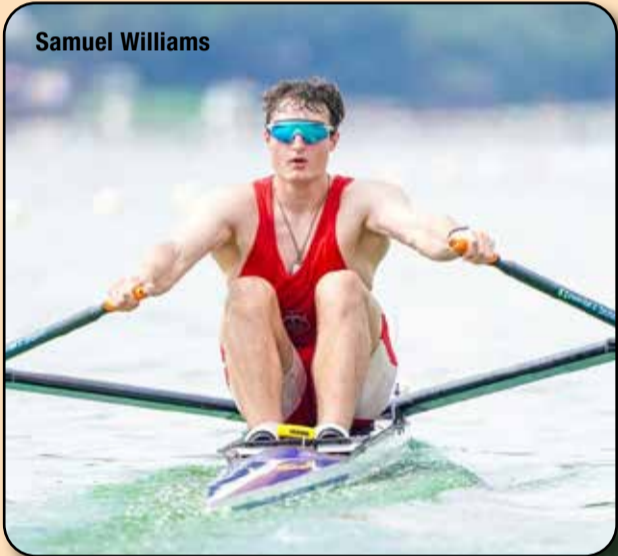
Samuel says the challenges of school rowing are being “strong and dedicated enough to make the first in each boat class”.

What keeps them motivated is the diversity of the other schools and people that row, the freedom of the water, and the challenge of rowing at regattas, where medals are up for grabs in different

categories.

Samuel hopes to row for a university next year, and Madison would love to get to a South African Championships final in March 2024.

Terri recommends that other youngsters try the sport. “It’s a wonderful way to meet new friends and interact with other schools and cultures, it’s great for overall fitness, and you get to take part in a unique sport on the water. With hard work and dedication, you can achieve your dreams.”



Samuel Williams



Madison Williams

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Theatre’s Bad Moms bring on the bling

Two Jewish mothers who have dedicated their lives to entertainment and their families (in various measures) will launch their first official production, *The Dress Code*, this month from within their newly formed production house, called *Bad Moms*. The SA Jewish Report catches up with **Lorri Strauss** and **Sharon Spiegel Wagner** about their show.

Why form your own production house?

Lorri and Sharon: We’ve been friends since high school, and we grew up together in show business. After collaborating and creating four award-nominated productions, the next logical step was to plunge into the crazy world of formal producing.

We draw from our most personal experiences and from our unique bond as friends. Lorri’s business savvy drive combined with Sharon’s kooky creative flair are the secret sauce of our success. Often on our school run, we’ll get on a call to each other and start the magical process of putting a show together.

What drew you to write this script?

Lorri: I’ve always found a creative outlet in fashion. I love putting beautiful, fun, or sparkly outfits together and expressing who I am through the clothes I wear. Our clothes tell the world a non-verbal story about who we are before we’ve said a word. I find this interesting, and it propelled the writing of *The Dress Code*.

Why do you think we’re so caught up with buying and wearing clothes?

Sharon: Big clothing brands market mostly to women, so it’s a social and cultural expectation for women to “dress up”. Of late, men are also making more decisions about their wardrobe, but there are more shoe and clothing shops for women out there. We’re caught up in buying and wearing clothes because they form part of our identity.

Some may say it’s about fitting in, looking better than someone else, or simply just finding something to cover your bits. Your thoughts?

Lorri: Fashion is often seen as something frivolous – only for kugels or shallow people. I’m passionate

about fashion because I believe our clothes are our personal billboard that tell everyone who we are. Life can take an entirely different trajectory by changing what one wears.

How did you find enough material to fill a musical show on this subject?

Sharon: With highly passionate, creative people in the room, we’re geared to tell stories. Once we were inspired by Lorri’s vision, it was a matter of doing research and writing stories and sketches. We wrote everything, even if it seemed invalid or uninteresting because it’s important to get all the ideas out on the page. Then, the gruelling process of editing begins and of structuring the show. Alan (Swerdlow) is a genius when it comes to finding the flow and putting things together. And, as director, he’s the outside eye, so it’s important that someone in an objective position can stitch things together (pardon the pun).

What was the process of putting this together?

Lorri: In our previous show, *Locked Upside Down*, we wore dressing gowns and PJs for most of the show. Anyone who knows me knows that I’m obsessed with anything that sparkles. Alan promised me that in our



Lorri Strauss and Sharon Spiegel Wagner

next show, I would get to wear fabulous outfits, and he hasn’t let me down.

In seriousness, I took the idea to my “dream team”, as I call them – Sharon and Alan – and they loved it. We started workshoping it. When the audience sees the finished product, I’m sure it will have no idea how many months and months have gone into writing the piece. We edit, change, and add, in about 100 drafts.

The final version you see on stage is draft 101. It’s become a running joke that I write five-page monologues and they (Sharon and Alan) cut and edit my work down to half a page. But they’re spot on. I have an English degree from Unisa, so Alan often says, “this sounds like BA English, I need your BA Musical Theatre”. The three of us have a lot of fun writing!

How important is fashion?

Lorri: I don’t believe it’s important to wear fashionable clothes (although I often do love what’s in fashion). It’s important to wear clothes that make you feel good and express who you are. I have always loved bling, sequined clothes, and bright colours! I wear them season after season, whether they’re in fashion or not.

While those on stage are all women, Swerdlow and Musical Director Clifford Cooper aren’t. What was their reaction to this idea?

Sharon: Men wear clothes too! They were intrigued by the idea. In centuries past, it was men who wore heels, makeup, and wigs, so getting dressed isn’t foreign to the opposite sex. Even though the men have an entirely different perspective on the subject matter, it’s an artist’s job to immerse himself in the content and be curious about story telling. So, we giggled a lot in writing and rehearsal. We dove into the ideas, and the things we wear.

Online shopping has become the norm, and in some cases, too much of a good thing. Your thoughts?

Lorri: As a working mother, I find online shopping to be an absolute lifesaver. I do a huge amount of shopping online, whether it be clothes for my kids and myself, groceries, school supplies, or gifts. There’s definitely an added element of fun when that online order gets delivered. We poke fun at my love of online shopping in the show. After all, my family would starve if I couldn’t order my Woolies and Moishes online, and if I happen to order a fabulous new dress to wear to Shabbos while online, it’s an added bonus!

• “*The Dress Code*” will run at the Theatre on the Square in Sandton from 9 to 28 May. Book at computicket.com, or contact 083 377 4969 or 011 883 8606.

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Barbra Streisand to get the next ‘Jewish Nobel’

JACKIE HAJDENBERG – JTA

The prize dubbed the “Jewish Nobel” will be going to Barbra Streisand later this year in a return to its tradition of honouring Jewish celebrities for their lifetime of achievements.

The iconic actor and singer is getting the Genesis Prize, which has been awarded since 2013, in recognition of her contribution to a number of fields, including the arts and philanthropy.

The prize was endowed by a group of Russian Jewish billionaires, three of whom stepped down from the board of a related foundation, the Genesis Philanthropy Group, after being targeted by Western sanctions last year for their ties to Vladimir Putin following his invasion of Ukraine. The most recent Genesis Prize, awarded earlier this year, went to Jewish activists and nonprofit organisations in Ukraine – the first time the prize hadn’t been given to a single individual.

Now, the prize foundation is signalling a return to normalcy by selecting Streisand, 81, who has been a symbol of pride for generations of women and men who saw themselves reflected in her brash, Brooklyn-bred, unapologetically Jewish persona. She has sold more than 100 million records; had more albums chart in the Top 40 than any other female recording artist; and is one of just 18 people to rack up an EGOT – an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony.

The prize’s goal is to stimulate Jewish giving by raising awareness of particular needs. Streisand will be donating her \$1 million (R18.4 million) award to four groups aimed at protecting the environment, promoting women’s health, combating disinformation in the media, and aiding the people of Ukraine, according to a press release from The Genesis Prize Foundation.

“I’m delighted to be honoured by the special 10th Anniversary Genesis Prize, and to work with The Genesis Prize Foundation to support organisations that seek to better society and our shared humanity,” Streisand said. “I’m proud of my Jewish heritage, and have always been

moved by the Jewish tradition of *tikkun olam*, to repair the world. I hope to join and inspire others in their own commitment to build a better world.”

The ceremony honouring Streisand, which will be held for the first time in Los Angeles, marks another change for the prize.

Before this year, the prize had been awarded at a ceremony in Israel. In the past, it was presented in co-operation with the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office, and in 2018, actor Natalie Portman, that year’s honouree, stirred controversy by declining to attend the ceremony in protest of “recent events” in Israel. The partnership with the prime minister ended in 2020.



Barbra Streisand

The award seeks to honour “extraordinary individuals for their outstanding professional achievement, contribution to humanity, and commitment to Jewish values”, according to the press release, and has generally gone to a celebrity who has worn their Jewish identity publicly. Many of its laureates have been involved in the arts – including actors Michael Douglas and Portman; sculptor Anish Kapoor; violinist Itzhak Perlman; and, in 2021, filmmaker Steven Spielberg.

“Her sense of responsibility to heal the world grows out of her Jewish values and her Jewish identity, which Barbra has displayed proudly since the very beginning of her extraordinary career,” Genesis Prize Foundation founder Stan Polovets said in a statement about Streisand. “Barbra’s innovative philanthropy has had a significant impact in so many areas, including health, the environment, and gender equality.”

Photo: Kevin Winter/Getty Images

Real heroes don't wear capes

It started with “thwack!”, then another “thwack!”, followed by “thwack, thwack, thwack!” “Howard!” screamed my wife, although it wasn’t necessary as we were already sitting on a couch across from each other chatting to my son who had popped in for a quick visit. “There’s a bird in the kitchen! Get it out!”

By this time, the dogs were delirious with excitement, and squealing with the delight of those who smelled blood. The “thwacks!” were getting more hysterical, and in the chaos, I was being commanded to remove a germ infested (and stupid) pigeon who had found its way into the kitchen. But that insisted that the only way out was through a solid pane of glass.

I’m good at a few things. Pigeon removal isn’t one of them. I consider them to be flying rats. And whereas as a person of faith, I know that G-d must have had a plan when He created them, I’m reasonably confident that He regrets His decision.

The screams and chaos induced an immediate fight-or-flight response in me. “We have to move.” I said out loud. “Start packing. We’re out of here.” The solution was simple. But my wife wasn’t having it. She looked at me in horror, but said nothing. There was no need. It was clear that this was a watershed moment.

I was being asked to slay the beast. And, apparently, moving houses wasn’t an option.

My son, although an adult, made no offer to assist and had managed to make himself practically invisible on the couch. He was clearly not going to help in my time of need, and I was very much on my own. It was one of my loneliest moments. And in what must have been an epiphany, I realised that the mountain of heroism is indeed a solitary place.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



The “thwacks!” along with the barking of the hounds startled me back. I grabbed a pillow from next to me from the couch, and marched with calm purpose to the kitchen, where the dogs and stupid bird were engaged in some sort of primal duel.

Although afraid, I was fuelled by adrenaline and managed to open the nearest window as much as I could, called for the couch sitters to come and get the dogs, and slowly, with the cushion (so as not to hurt the damn thing), slid the pigeon to the exit. It was having none of it, and insisted on returning to the glass panel that would never, no matter how many times it dramatically flung itself against it, provide an escape route.

Armed with a pillow (which not ironically was filled with down) and a disposable tin-foil “bakkie” I had found en-route to battle, I succeeded in setting it free, where, without so much as a glance back in gratitude, it flew off to its next home invasion.

With the bird gone, the dogs were quiet, and the house returned to blissful silence. Until, clearly not impressed by my selfless, swift, and brave action, my wife asked, “What am I meant to do with the cushion now?”

Marriages, not unlike warfare, can be complicated.

Sometimes real heroes don’t wear capes. They simply grab a down-filled cushion upholstered in Hertex fabric.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

A positive turn

To be a realist is usually interpreted as the ability to acknowledge where things are going wrong without sugar-coating matters, but the opposite can also be true. Sometimes, being realistic also means recognising the positive aspects of one’s situation, which are no less relevant. For South African Jewry, the positives were very much on display over the past fortnight in the high levels of community participation in all three annual commemorative gatherings that take place during this period, when Yom Hashoah is followed by Yom Hazikaron, and immediately thereafter by Yom Ha’atzmaut.

Well-attended ceremonies took place in all the main regions, and for the first time, Yom Hashoah and Yom Ha’atzmaut events were held under the auspices of the Small Jewish Communities Association, which was founded about four years ago to continue the work previously carried out by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies’ (SAJBD’s) Country Communities Department. It wasn’t just the high turn-out for the three events (including for the once relatively neglected Yom Hazikaron) that impressed, but the commitment and enthusiasm shown by those in attendance.

Whether in celebration or solemn commemoration, from the elderly to the very young, the Jewish community continues to be as active, identifying, and involved as ever in all major events on the Jewish communal calendar. Amidst all the doom and gloom that inevitably confronts us, it’s just as important to recognise where our strengths are and take encouragement from it. That, too, is being a realist.

Jewish Affairs journal

A tangible sign of the vitality of communal life in any Jewish community is the presence of an active, well

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



supported Jewish media. Many different publications have appeared over the decades, with new ones regularly coming out to replace those that have come to the end of their natural life. Perhaps the oldest Jewish publication still in existence is *Jewish Affairs*. The journal has been produced under the auspices of the SAJBD continuously since 1941, and has become the go-to resource for anyone interested in Jewish history and heritage, in particular relating to our own community. *Jewish Affairs* is now published online, and is freely accessible at www.jewishaffairs.co.za. The latest issue features a broad range of articles on themes ranging from late Biblical times, the Medieval-era, and the birth of modern-day Israel, to the story of our own community, including the impressive growth of Orthodox Judaism in Johannesburg and interesting new insight into the Jewish role, both as medical personnel and patients, in the first successful heart-transplant operations in late 1960s Cape Town.

In addition to the latest articles, the site provides easy access to all material published since 2009, grouped under categories such as Jewish History – South Africa, Israel, and Zionism; Antisemitism and the Holocaust; and Fiction and Poetry. I encourage everyone to visit the site and browse through the more than 600 articles that have appeared over the past 15 years. You can also sign on to the mailing list to receive regular updates by writing to the editor, David Saks (david@sajbd.org).

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

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

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Honoured by IUA/UCF for outstanding service



Alon Futterman (CEO of UIA Keren Hayesod) with Hilary and Hirsch Jocum

Hilary Jocum, the chairperson of the IUA/UCF in Pretoria, received the Yakir Award from Keren Hayesod-UIA World Chairperson Sam Grundweg at a gala dinner during the annual Keren Hayesod World Conference in Tel Aviv on 26 April.

The award is bestowed upon individuals who have made an outstanding, long-term contribution to Israel, the Jewish people, and Keren Hayesod. The Hebrew word “yakir” means beloved, notable, worthy, and the Yakir Award reflects the ultimate devotion and clarity of vision a community leader can show.

WIZO gets into the spirit of Israel’s 75th

WIZO (the Women’s International Zionist Organisation) Johannesburg celebrated Yom Ha’atzmaut in style on 26 April in the beautiful courtyard of Arbour Cafe in Birdhaven. Adam Davis and Jonathan Birin entertained the audience, creating a celebratory spirit for Israel’s 75th birthday. Delicious food was provided by kosher delis, caterers, and bakeries. WIZO is grateful to the volunteers and donors for their hard work and generosity, enabling it to continue improving the lives of women, children, and the elderly in Israel.



WIZO women enjoying the Yom Ha’atzmaut festivities

KDVP High pays tribute to Israel’s fallen

King David High School Victory Park’s Yom Hazikaron assembly on 25 April was a sombre reminder of the ongoing

struggle for peace in Israel and the sacrifices made by those who fight for it. Two guest speakers addressed the commemoration, Cheryl Mandel, who lost her son, Daniel, in a military operation in Shechem, and Dana Ofir, who was injured in a terror attack. It was a fitting tribute to the fallen soldiers and victims of terror who have made the ultimate sacrifice for Israel’s existence.



Yom Hazikaron commemoration at King David Victory Park

Sunday 7 May

- New Beginnings hosts a talk by Dr Kiki Marx on *Endurance, Perseverance, and into the Guinness Book of Records*. Time: 10:00. Venue: 77 Sandler Road, Percelia Estate. Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za
- Second Innings hosts a talk by Irene Jansen van Rensburg on *Embracing the Changes as we Grow Older*. Time: 10:00. Venue: Golden Acres Building, Sandringham Gardens. Cost: R40 (R20 for members). Contact: 082 561 3228 or greciagabriel1@gmail.com

Monday 8 May

- The Union of Jewish Women hosts its knitting circle. Time: 10:00. Venue: 77 Sandler Road, Percelia Estate. Contact: 011 648 1053 or info@ujw.co.za
- Sydenham Shul hosts a Lag B’Omer braai and bonfire bash. Time: 18:00. Cost: R188 (adults), R100 (children aged five to 11). Contact: sydshul@sydshul.co.za or 011 640 5021

Tuesday 9 May

- United Herzlia Schools hosts its *Lag B’Omer haircutting extravaganza* in aid of non-profit organisation Zichron Menachem. Time: 15:30. Contact: yfish@herzlia.com

Tuesday 16 May

- The Academy of Jewish Thought & Learning hosts a course on *Torah in a Nutshell*. The course spans more than six Tuesday-night sessions. Contact: courses@theacademy.org.za

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