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# south african Jewish Report

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## Cape mom swept off rocks in tragic accident

TALI FEINBERG

**T**wo young brothers, aged nine and 11, shovel earth onto their mother's grave, then stoically say kaddish. The rabbi leads the congregation in a rendition of *Eshet Chayil*. Elderly parents bid their daughter goodbye. These were just some of the devastating moments at the funeral of Laureen Rubin Leps (49) after she died in a freak drowning accident off the rocks in Sea Point in Cape Town on 4 July.

The Cape Town Jewish community is reeling at her senseless loss, but has rallied in support of her boys, their father, and her family.

The accident was a “bolt from the blue”, as Laureen went to be by the sea on one of the first sunny days in weeks, and was knocked off Rocklands Beach rocks by a massive wave during the unpredictable spring tide. When she was in the icy Atlantic, the area became misty, and rescuers at first battled to find her. Though two other drownings in the same area took place on the days either side of her death, they are unrelated.

“Laureen was going through a rough time, but she didn't jump [into the water], and she wasn't pushed,” says Laureen's husband, Simon Leps. “That

is what the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) report confirms. There was no foul play.”

Speaking at the time of the accident, Paula Leech, NSRI Table Bay duty controller said, “It appears that she was walking on the rocks when she may have been swept into the ocean. The eyewitnesses that raised the alarm

and the swift emergency response by all involved is commended.”

The rescue efforts were extensive. At 14:18, NSRI Table Bay and NSRI Bakoven were alerted by City of Cape Town Law Enforcement officers to a drowning in progress at Rocklands Beach, according to Leech. “NSRI Bakoven and NSRI Table Bay rescue swimmers, Cape Town Fire and Rescue Services, the South African Police Service, and Netcare 911 ambulance services responded directly to the scene and joined law enforcement officers on the scene. Western Cape Government Health EMS rescue squad, an EMS ambulance, and the EMS rescue drone team responded.”

NSRI Bakoven duty crew launched the NSRI rescue craft Gemini Legend. When they got to the scene, they spotted a woman “drifting about 200m offshore”, but with the misty conditions, they quickly lost sight of her “with a heavy sea swell running”, according to Leech.

A helicopter, returning to the V&A Waterfront, was

diverted to provide an “aerial situation report”, said Leech. While the Police Dive Unit was placed on alert, they were unable to catch a glimpse of her after that first sighting 200m or so from the shore. They launched a sweeping line search and then about 500m offshore in rough seas, they spotted and recovered her apparently lifeless body and carried her onto the rescue craft. They attempted CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) immediately, and were met by paramedics at the Granger Bay Water Club jetty. Paramedics at the club continued CPR.

“Laureen was tiny,” says her sister, Bianca Shifrin, who lives in Israel but flew to Cape Town as soon as she could when she was told of the accident in a heartbreaking phone call from her brother. “It wouldn't have taken much to knock her. She always loved the sun and the beach, and many people go on the rocks. When they finally found her, she had been in the freezing water for about 15 minutes.”

Hypothermic and hanging onto life by a thread, Laureen was taken to a government hospital – Somerset Hospital – as there was no way of identifying her, and it was close to the scene of the accident. Her only identifying item was a necklace she was wearing, which was her name. “She was being cared for by emergency physician Dr Kirsten Cohen, who was excellent,” says her husband, Simon. “I think it was Dr Cohen who had the idea to put Laureen's name into Facebook after seeing it on her necklace.”

“They looked at the Laureens listed,” says Bianca. They identified her by her picture, and then saw her siblings were listed. Only my brother, Harley [Rubin], was listed as being in

Cape Town, and his number was on Facebook. That's how they found our family.”

Harley and Simon went to the hospital, where they were told that Laureen had little chance of survival. “They gave her the best care, but they couldn't

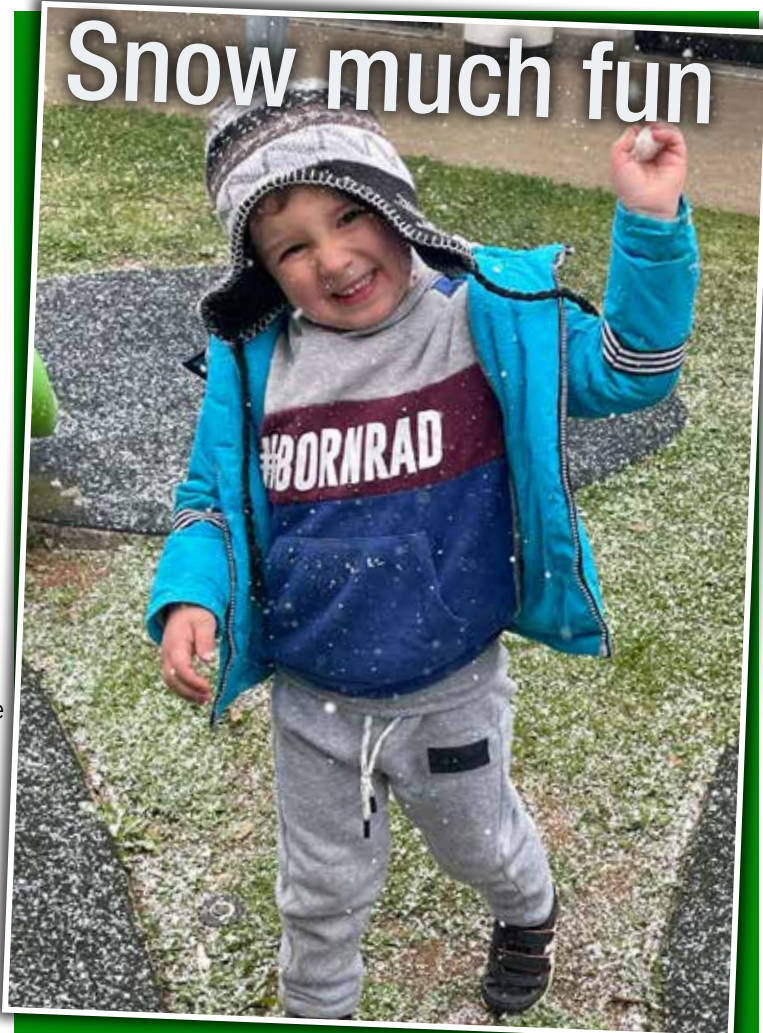
save her,” says Simon. The family's rabbi, Dovid Wineberg, and Laureen's loved ones, including her children, gathered at her bedside. They were able to say goodbye, and she passed away soon after midnight, in the early hours of Wednesday, 5 July. Her official cause of death was drowning.

Laureen's passing was part of a trio of tragedies that struck the same part of the Cape coastline in the space of three days. On Monday, 3 July, two tandem paragliders collided in the air above the Sea Point Promenade. One of the passengers, 58-year-old former Scotland International and Munster Rugby Elite Performance Officer, Greig Oliver, died when he landed in the sea.

Then, the day after Laureen's death, an unidentified man drowned off Rocklands Beach, the same stretch of sand where Laureen had been. The tragedies come just weeks before World Drowning Prevention Day on 25 July, which raises awareness of drowning as a global public health concern and that “anyone can drown, no-one should”.

The brief sunshine that had led Laureen to the seaside was over by the time of the funeral, with the Cape of Storms living up to

**Continued on page 11 >>**



Micah Lyons, 5, playing in the snow in Joburg on Monday morning. See more snowy pics on page 11.

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# King Charles III knights UK chief rabbi

STAFF REPORTER

The South African-born chief rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, was officially knighted by King Charles III on Tuesday, 11 July, at Windsor Castle in England this week.

Mirvis was awarded the Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire, which is one of the United Kingdom's highest honours, as part of King Charles' New Year's Honours List.

The chief rabbi was awarded for his service to the Jewish community, and interfaith relations and education.

"I feel exceptionally honoured and humbled to receive this honour," Mirvis told the *SA Jewish Report* in January shortly after he found out about it. "I'm privileged to be given numerous opportunities to strive to achieve much, and I pray that the Almighty will bless my efforts. I would like to thank the South African Jewish community for giving me the upbringing that has been an ongoing inspiration for me to get to where I am today."

King Charles III's list noted Mirvis' work in the field of interfaith dialogue and his advocacy for Uyghur Muslims suffering under oppressive policies in China. The list also noted Mirvis' efforts to make the Orthodox world more inclusive of women and LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) Jews.

"He has been an advocate for greater inclusivity in Orthodox Jewish life, appointing Britain's first female halachic adviser and establishing greater opportunities for female leadership and scholarship," the list noted. "In the field of education, the chief rabbi has championed the

cause of faith schools and Jewish education, and issued a guide on the well-being of LGBTQ+ pupils in Orthodox Jewish schools – the first of its kind anywhere in the world."

This honour most recently follows his recent hosting of an imam in his community and his official visit to an Arab state at the invitation of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace.



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis is knighted by King Charles III

The chief rabbi has launched various programmes to build bridges across faiths, including an effort to bring together Jewish and Anglican clergy, as well as the Jewish and Muslim communities in the UK.

Mirvis told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Jewish communities around the world are confronted by 'the three As': antisemitism, assimilation, and apathy. It's our responsibility to show the relevance and beauty of authentic Torah Judaism within an increasingly secular world, to achieve and maintain Jewish unity, to excel in our social responsibility, and recognise the value of every human being."

# Life's journey

Torah Thought



Rabbi Pini Hecht - Marais Road Shul

I have recently returned from a memorable family trip to the United States.

Spending time in a different country and city allowed me to reflect and gain valuable perspective. We were based in Brooklyn for much of our stay, and spent a few days exploring New York City with our kids. Here are some of my observations:

New York City had a mix of contrasts. On the one hand, it appeared filthy, with cracking roads and a noticeable presence of vagrants. Moreover, there was a pervasive stench of marijuana on almost every block. However, alongside these less appealing aspects, there was an undeniable vibrancy and confidence in the way people went about their lives. The city is also brimming with construction projects, embodying a sense of hope, purpose, and endless possibility.

This experience prompted me to contemplate the way we approach challenges in South Africa. Often, we tend to view every pothole or power outage as a message of doom. However, we have so much to be grateful for and proud of in our beautiful country. There's also a great deal of hope and opportunity to contribute towards building a better society. Remembering this can have a significant influence on our life perspective and our commitment to our communities and society as a whole.

So, how can we maintain a positive attitude and perspective in the face of daily challenges? This Shabbat, we'll read a double Torah portion called Matot-Masei, marking the conclusion

of the fourth book of the Torah, Bamidbar. Within parshat Masei, we reflect on the 40-year journey of our ancestors through the desert, consisting of 42 individual journeys from Egypt to the land of Israel.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that these journeys are reflected in our own lives. Each of us undergoes 42 stages in life, akin to a personal exodus, growth, and a quest to find our promised land. Interestingly, the parsha's name, Masei, which means journeys, encompasses not only the actual journeys but also the detours and encampments along the way. This implies an

important life lesson: all the ups and downs, achievements, and shattered expectations, progress, and setbacks are part of the journey, part of a greater plan. These experiences represent progress towards fulfilling our G-d-given purpose. Recognising this allows us to perceive challenges as opportunities, and directs our focus towards the positive aspects around us. It inspires us to seek ways to contribute to and transform the world so that it reflects its divine essence and inherent goodness in a revealed way.

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The 42 journeys and encampments of Israel are listed from the exodus to their encampment on the plains of Moab across the river from the land of Canaan. The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and places of exile for inadvertent murderers.



# Israeli water experts find fertile ground in Tshwane

NICOLA MILTZ

On one of the coldest days in Tshwane’s recent history, a group of local matriculants from Mamelodi were captivated by two visiting Israeli water experts at the Jewish National Fund (JNF) Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre in Tshwane.

“You are the next leaders of South Africa,” said Yechezkel Lifshitz, the director-general and chairperson of the board of the Governmental Authority for Water and Sewage in Israel. “Your country is 600 times bigger than Israel, but we face similar water scarcity.”

Lifshitz and Dr Yehonatan Bar-Yosef, project manager: water quality management and ecology at the Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael (KKL-JNF), addressed pupils from the Phateng Comprehensive School about the importance of saving water now and for generations to come.

“In Israel, we educate children from a young age about how to save water because we don’t have enough,” said Lifshitz, who is responsible for the management of Israel’s water resources. The country is a world leader in water technology and management.

“This education is passed down and continued so that every generation knows about the vital importance of saving water,” he said.

“It starts with you, the future leaders,” he said, encouraging the students to use the educational resources offered at the JNF centre to pass on their knowledge to their families and wider communities.

Bar-Yosef, an expert of ecosystem rehabilitation and water-pollution detection, spoke about necessity being the mother of invention and innovation.

In Israel’s case, where there’s little rain and much water scarcity, he said, “It’s not about miracles or anything rare, it’s about the will of the people

(SAZF), JNF-SA, the Israeli Embassy in South Africa, and it was supported by KKL-JNF.

It couldn’t have been better timed. Rand Water this week cut supply to several feeder reservoirs, affecting scores of suburbs across Johannesburg, and a mere 50-odd kilometres away, the residents of Hammanskraal continue to grapple with water contaminated with cholera bacteria.

The high-level experts met Tshwane Executive Mayor Cilliers Brink on 10 July, who welcomed their input on water governance during a seminar on water security and sustainability hosted by the City of Tshwane attended by the Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky.

“Water security and stable water supply are very important to us, especially with the ongoing water supply challenges of Rand Water affecting many parts of Tshwane,” said Brink.

He said central to the city’s climate action plan, it had committed itself to providing clean, potable water to all residents and had “intentionally partnered” with various stakeholders to learn about best practice to reach this goal.

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Head of the South Africa department KKL-JNF, Orna Toeg, Yechezkel Lifshitz, and Dr Yehonatan Bar-Yosef at the JNF Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre

Photos: SAZF and JNFSA

world leader in water management, and we’re committed to help share this knowledge and expertise with the people of Tshwane.

“The Israeli water delegation’s visit to South Africa reaffirms the need for South Africa to strengthen its ties to Israel, which remains a dedicated partner for development in our country and across the continent. To date, Israeli technology and innovation has given more than half a million South Africans access to water. We hope to expand this in the future through

entities, and this focus only on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict prevents life-changing and often low-cost Israeli water solutions from reaching poor and deprived areas around South Africa. The United Arab Emirates, India, China, and others have adopted a more pragmatic, de-hyphenated approach between Israel and the Palestinians, which allows them to have separate relations with both and benefit from Israeli solutions in technology, agriculture, health, and water.”

In addition to the Tshwane seminar, the delegation spent the week meeting officials and municipalities in other regions of South Africa, including KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, to share knowledge on water infrastructure, agriculture, and wastewater treatment, and advise on various aspects of water technology, innovation, and management.



Executive Mayor of Tshwane Cilliers Brink meets Dr Yehonatan Bar-Yosef with Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky and Yechezkel Lifshitz

“Israel has excelled in water management and security, and is a world leader in using recycling municipal water. While largely arid, the country has found ways to become completely water sovereign, and this has been the backbone of its extraordinary growth,” Brink said.

“Today’s seminar reflected on Israel’s systems to manage water leaks and treat sewage for agricultural use.”

He said the seminar came at a critical time due to severe problems faced by Rand Water, which supplies Tshwane with more than 70% of its water.

“The City of Tshwane welcomes this collaboration with the embassy of Israel and other stakeholders to explore new technologies and water governance and conservation systems,” said Brink.

JNF South Africa Chairperson Michael Kransdorff told the *SA Jewish Report*, “The JNF, through our environmental centre in Mamelodi, has had a long partnership with the City of Tshwane. We have identified water as one of the key challenges facing the city, as seen by the cholera outbreak and failing water infrastructure, which is extremely serious, even life threatening. Fortunately, Israel is the



Yechezkel Lifshitz presenting at Wits University

partnerships like these.”

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the SAZF, said, “South Africans suffer when the government refuses to treat Israel and the Palestinian Authority as separate and distinct

Tshwane.

The Israelis planted an olive tree on the grounds of the Mamelodi centre symbolising growth, peace, and hope for future collaboration between South African and Israeli expertise.

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# Community blamed for Jenin raid at Cape vigil

TALI FEINBERG

Less than 50 people gathered for a “vigil for Jenin” in Cape Town on Sunday, 9 July, and though the crowd was tiny, the message was concerning. Participants held signs saying, “Today’s Jenin refugee camp massacre funded or enabled by South African Zionists.”

Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) spokesperson, Professor Usuf Chikte, said, “This crime against humanity is enabled by South African Zionists, an extreme, anti-Palestinian racist network, supporting Israeli state terror and settler pogroms against defenceless Palestinians in refugee camps trapped under illegal occupation, under the jackboot of Israeli fascism.”

The event was organised by the PSC. According to Mogamad Nazier Paulsen, a Western Cape member of the National Assembly for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), “EFF members from Cape Metro participated [in the vigil]... the Western Cape government refuses to deregister [Herzlia School]. We share a province with children

who grow up to murder Palestinians with the blessing of a DA [Democratic Alliance]-led government.”

The posters, the speeches, and Paulsen’s comment all emphasised that the Jenin raid and the larger conflict was the “fault” of South African Jewry, which is largely Zionist. According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism, “holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel” is antisemitic, as is “making stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective”.

Günther Jikeli, the Erna B. Rosenfeld Associate Professor at the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University, told the *SA Jewish Report*, “The PSC campaign on Jenin is an example of a smear campaign with grossly exaggerated accusations not only against Israel but also, thinly veiled, against the South African Jewish community, with strong antisemitic overtones.”

Local antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, Milton Shain, said, “The determination of Jew-haters to drag the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the South African political arena is disturbing. Supporters of Israel are crudely accused of enabling Israeli actions and defining its policies. This is puerile. Worryingly, these efforts could well gather pace as we move towards the 2024 general election.”

Jevon Greenblatt, operations director of the Community Security Organisation,

said, “Increased tension in the Middle East often leads to dangerous rhetoric locally, which can affect the safety and security of our community. It’s well documented that words often turn into actions, so this is something we monitor closely.”

Chikte also made a number of “demands” at the vigil. He



Photo: Facebook

demanded that the Israeli ambassador be declared *persona non grata* and that South Africa sever all diplomatic relations with Israel; that South Africa isolate Israel through boycott, divestment, and sanctions; that the National Prosecuting Authority expedite cases of South Africans serving in the Israel Defense Forces; and for the department of sports, arts, and culture to implement a sporting and cultural boycott.

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation said, “Professor Chikte is deliberately misleading South Africans by ignoring the context and rationale behind Israel’s military action in Jenin last week. The town of Jenin in the West Bank is a hotbed of terrorist activity, with hideouts storing illegal ammunition, bomb-making factories, and illicit stashes of cash for operations that target and kill innocent Jews in Israel.

“The terror cells targeted by Israeli forces in the surgical operation in Jenin tracked down ammunition and 300 explosive devices which were hidden beneath mosques, schools, and hospitals. These actions by Palestinian extremists, who target civilians as well as hide behind them, are international war crimes that put Palestinian civilians in harm’s way.

“The majority of terrorist attacks in Israel in the past year emanated from Palestinians living in Jenin, or from those given free rein to hide there and plan attacks,” said Polovin. “The Palestinian Authority’s own security has been unable to clamp down on these activities, leaving it to the Israeli security forces to take measures to protect civilian lives and thwart further acts of terror which have killed innocent Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Israel.

“Last week’s counter-terror operation came about at the exact same time as a terror stabbing attack in Tel Aviv, which left a number of innocent people in hospital, and tragically, resulted in the murder of an Israeli baby before it was even born,” he said. “The baby’s mother, who was pregnant, is still recovering in hospital. To draw a comparison – the 12 Palestinians killed in Jenin were all combatants and violent political extremists, and Israel’s security forces should be commended for preventing the loss of innocent Palestinian lives.

“Zionism is the quest of Jews to live in freedom and self-determination

in their ancient homeland of Israel following millennia of persecution, and for the Jewish state to live side by side in peace with her neighbours,” said Polovin. “It follows that for anyone to refer to Zionists as racists is itself an obscene statement of racism and antisemitism, and should be condemned in the strongest terms.”

“Once again, we see a sustained attack upon the Zionist idea – the legitimate right of Jews to a nation-state,” said Shain. “This was agreed to by the United Nations in 1947. Today, the Zionist idea has been mangled and a complex geo-political problem simplified. Criticism of Israel no longer needs to be argued. It has become axiomatic. In other words, Manichean simplicities have replaced rational thinking.”



# Durban Jews – strong two years after riots

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been two calamitous years for the small and ageing KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Jewish community, which has been battered by a series of natural and man-made events, but it has come through resilient and united, residents say. Aside from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the province was beset with apocalyptic and deadly riots in July exactly two years ago this week, followed by an onslaught of catastrophic flash floods, crippling loadshedding, and contaminated beaches. It has been one thing after another.



Widespread looting and riots in July 2021 shook South Africa to its core

The tight-knit community has felt the loss of about six families to emigration, the majority having made aliya for various reasons, and one or two have semigrated to places like Cape Town. But, for the most part, Jewish life in Durban is “alive and thriving”, they say. In spite of the challenges, the 1 600-odd Jewish souls have pulled together not only for their own well-being but for the betterment and upliftment of the wider community, remaining steadfast and positive.

“The province isn’t called ‘KwaZilience’ for nothing,” said resident and active community member, Alana Baranov, the political and social justice liaison for the national office of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). “The spirit, generosity, and determination of the people has really shown through” in spite of the challenges, Baranov said. “Our small but vibrant community has gone above and beyond not only to assist each other but to be a part of the wider disaster relief and humanitarian efforts for those most affected by the riots and floods. No matter how difficult things have been, we know that we have many privileges not afforded to others, and our community has a responsibility to put the Jewish principles of *tikkun olam* and *tzedakah* into action.” This week, on the anniversary of the 2021 July riots, one of the darkest periods in recent history, which shook South Africa to its core following the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma, fears of further unrest have played on people’s minds. The Road Traffic Inspectorate described the torching of numerous trucks on the N3 and N4 highways as “barbaric”, co-ordinated attacks on the logistics sector – all hauntingly reminiscent of the events that transpired from 9 to 18 July 2021 in KwaZulu-Natal and parts of Gauteng. President Cyril Ramaphosa and other senior government officials referred to the attacks as “economic sabotage”. Susan Abro, the president of the SAJBD KZN Council, said there hadn’t been extensive numbers of community

members leaving the province for greener pastures. “We haven’t had a mass exodus from here. There are community members who have made aliya, but not for the reasons such as floods or riots. We’re a small and ageing community, but we’re very active. As the late John Moshal said, “We always punch above our weight”. “During the riots, the greater community came together regardless of race or religion, and since then, the same camaraderie exists. One might say the floods cleared a path for *ubuntu*. We’re an extremely resilient and positive community which takes care not only of our own, but the greater KZN community. Especially now, with the recent flooding, we’re incredibly grateful for the assistance received by local community members as well as the SAJBD national board,” she said.

Recent events have taken a financial toll on many in the community reliant on Durban Jewish Social Services for assistance. Director Janine Saperson said 10% of the community required some form of help. “We’re assisting new clients every month. People we didn’t even know about are coming to us for help. Many have lost their businesses, their jobs, and are really struggling, so they have reached out to us. We’ve never seen as many as this,” she said. There’s also an increase in the number of people experiencing hardship in the wider community. Said Tanya Altshuler, who heads up The Angel Network in KwaZulu-Natal, “The province has faced an onslaught of challenges which has resulted in an increase of people needing just the basics to survive. Homes have been destroyed; shops have been destroyed and need to be re-stocked; and the poor have been devastated by ongoing trauma. It’s all very sad.”

Baranov, who is also the chairperson of the newly established Chaverim Community Hub in Durban, said that although the community had shrunk to emigration, “Jewish life in Durban is thriving.” “I’m thrilled to be a part of the new Chaverim Community Hub, which was formed in November last year. We’re a community, religious, and cultural hub for Jewish life in KwaZulu-Natal, and are focused on building an active and engaged Jewish community. We’re a place where every individual can connect to their Jewish identity in whichever way they choose and at all stages of life. We have hosted an array of events in recent months, including the Durban Jewish Fun Run/Walk; Family Sports Day; children’s Shabbat services and brocha; a guest-speaker programme; Shabbat dinners; Shabbatons; and women’s shiurim. We have lots of plans for the future.” Resident Hayley Lieberthal who edits Jewish monthly magazine *Hashalom*, said, “It has been said over and over again that we’re a resilient community because it’s

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true. We remain committed and we like to look on the bright side. We’ve been through a lot but we’ve been through it together. We’re small but we make it work when it counts.” Rabbi Gilad Friedman, the director of the Umhlanga Jewish Centre and head of Jewish Studies at Akiva College in Izinga, said Jewish communal life was “stronger than ever”. “Since the end of the pandemic, shul attendance is larger than before, with people looking for a sense of community and a social environment and making an effort,” he said. “No-one is running away because of the state of affairs. If anything, Jewish life is better than ever. We have lost a few, but just this past week, someone moved to town and joined the shul. Being a smaller community, people feel they can make a difference. Durbanites are kind, warm people – it’s not just our weather. We focus on the magic not the tragic.” Sadly, those affected by the July 2021 riots have yet to see justice for loved ones lost or properties destroyed, and those who masterminded the violence still walk free.

WHAT IF NOBODY COMES

The play that was performed to a full house on the “Theatre On The Square” is on its way to Elphin Lodge.

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## When life snows you

There was something quite magical in watching snowflakes fall in Johannesburg. It wasn't a blizzard, so we could see each individual snowflake falling. It felt like a truly magical gift to all of us. Something so beautiful to behold in my own backyard – and yours (if you are Johannesburg-based, that is).

There was something unique in watching my neighbour's thatched-roof lapa turning white, not for long mind you, but it was indicative of how snow in Africa is a fascinating anomaly. It went away as quickly as it came, but left behind a sense of magic and endless possibility.

Did it have that effect on you, or was it just a nuisance, getting in the way of the things you needed to get done? It's always a case of how we choose to see it.

To be honest, that was a tiny part of a week in which, as with the snow, I had no control of the outcome. I got a virus, and it took me out of action in every way. From late Thursday afternoon, I was woman down battling a temperature, terrible headache, and weakness.

I was witness to how a Friday and then a wonderful weekend I had planned and was looking forward to disintegrated in front of me. I guess some might say it was magic. Every time I had to send a message to cancel or postpone something, the wind left my sails even further. I was flattened, and there was little I could do about it.

Had I been about to get on a plane to the best holiday in the world, I wouldn't have been able to. I couldn't do much except think a lot in between sleeping.

I did wonder where I might have picked this up, how and when I was going to get over it. The problem was, I had no clue. I knew that come Monday, I had to get back to working on the *SA Jewish Report* because that was a non-negotiable. I do have a wonderful team, which I knew would do all it could to make it easier for me, but I had to be involved. We all have our commitments. But as we so often say, "Man – or woman in my case – makes plans, and G-d laughs!" and He was laughing. Me? Not so much.

And as we saw with the snow, when things are taken out of our hands, we have numerous ways of dealing with it. Two of the main ones are to accept it and enjoy it, or at least do your best not to let it drag you down. You also have the option of letting it make you furious so that the world doesn't look magical, it looks horrible.

I believe it's a choice. The snow, for me, was an easy one, as are the many occasions in which we get stuck in traffic on our way to something. We can either enjoy some good music, listen to an audiobook or a podcast or two that might teach us something or is just fun, or even catch up on the calls we needed to make. Lots of things. The alternative is to seethe, get anxious, and waste all our time finding reasons why we have the worst luck, life hates us, and everything always goes wrong. We could even add that we don't believe that we deserve this, and life is just cruel.

Either way, it's a choice. For the most part, I accepted my situation and tried my best not to let it get me down. Did I get grumpy at times when we were putting this newspaper together this week because I was feeling horrid? I sure did. Apologies to my colleagues!

Life is as it is. However, when you see the horror wrought on a family who lost their beloved mother when she fell into the sea in Sea Point and ultimately drowned, leaving two pre-teen sons behind, it seems impossible to find the ability to accept it (page 1). It's difficult not to ask, "Why? How do you move on from there?"

Suffice to say, the number of people who did everything they possibly could to save Lauren Rubin Leps was quite astonishing, as was the support from family, friends, and community.

This weekend, an adorable King David Grade 8 boy died, devastating the community. This isn't the nature of things. Parents shouldn't have to bury their children. The hearts of every one of us as parents reaches out to the family in support. The *SA Jewish Report* spent time working on this story of the community support of this family, but then pulled back this week when we got the sense we needed to wait. The last thing we want to do is to add to the family's pain. We're part of the community, and we wish them and the Leps family strength and to be surrounded by love.

Once again, not being on a spiritual higher plane, I simply cannot see why this needed to happen. I cannot find those answers.

All I can say or do is be there for these people and do all I can to make tomorrow a better day, however trite that may sound. We cannot bring anyone back, but we can live our own lives to the best of our ability. We can also do whatever we can for the many others in need (See page 17).

We can choose to see magic in the snow and a short time-out in the middle of traffic. We can even choose to find acceptance in having a virus.

So many people have been struck down with far worse that isn't simple to cure. Their paths aren't easy, but as bad as their situations are, they have a choice in how they see them. And the rest of us can give a hand to help them wherever they need it, showing them the goodness in this world.

Shabbat shalom!  
Peta Krost  
Editor



## Israelis call for reasonableness as reform ignites protest



OPINION

ROLENE MARKS

Tens of thousands of Israelis took to the streets on Tuesday, 11 July, for a "day of resilience", but some called it a "day of disruption".

In cities across the country, bearing the blue and white flag of the state of Israel, many of the country's citizens started early in the morning along major highways and intersections. In spite of requests not to block the roads, major highways, and arteries between Modiin and Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Herzlia, Netanya, and Haifa were congested.

The catalyst for the "day of resilience" protests was the proposal to overhaul the "Reasonableness Law". Essentially, this law is an amendment to the Basic Law, which applies a "reasonableness standard" to decisions made by government officials.

demonstrations, in a side road that was closed. The bus drivers were having coffee and weren't in the buses, he said, and a few people that meant to go to demonstrate just stood there and talked. No cars or people were on the road. The child's parents put the child there as a joke, the photographer thinking it could be nice to start a day with a smile. It didn't have the desired effect.

Protests against the overhaul spread to the military echelon as well, albeit not in the streets.

Reserve pilots meeting with the commander of the Israeli Air Force reportedly told him, "We swore to serve the kingdom, not the king," according to an unsourced Channel 12 news report. Three hundred cybersecurity reservists threatened not to show up for duty, and issued a public letter saying, "Passing the law to cancel the reasonableness clause is the first step in

the transformation of the state of Israel into a corrupt, backward, and weak state. Cyber capabilities that are sensitive and have the potential to be misused must not be entrusted to a criminal government that undermines the foundations of democracy."

Ben Gurion Airport was the site of more than 10 000 protesters. Organisers said the airport was the symbol of a thriving democracy. Protesters thronged Terminal 3, and there were reports of clashes

with police, who eventually stopped those gathering to protest from getting off the trains.

Protests continued into the night, and many gathered outside the United States consulate, calling for international pressure. The White House responded that the right to protest must be protected by the government, and called for broad-based consensus.



Many Israelis are concerned that removing judicial scrutiny from government officials, which essentially is what the overhaul proposes, means that there's no protection from potential corruption and no assurances of protection of individuals from harmful and, some would say, capricious government decisions. Supporters say overhauling the Reasonableness Law prevents the Supreme Court from subverting policy with its own views.

Israel has no official Constitution, and the Basic Law enshrines individual and civil rights. The first reading of the reform of the Reasonableness Law passed on Monday 10 July in a vote of 64-56.

Israel's National Union (Histadrut) decided to stay out of the protests, preferring to advocate for negotiations for broad-based consensus. By 11:00, protesters had gathered outside its Tel Aviv quarters. Addressing the crowd, Histadrut Chairperson Arnon Bar-David addressed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: "Stop the crazy chaos in Israeli society as soon as possible. The ball is in your court. When the situation reaches an extreme and all other paths have been taken, we will intervene and use our power. Shutting down the economy isn't a game."

Protests gathered momentum throughout the day, and there were reports of numerous clashes with police. One report included a protester allegedly being trampled by a horse, while others alleged that police had used force, grabbing some by the neck. Water cannons were used to disperse crowds in spite of an appeal from doctors earlier in the week to stop using them because the pressure and force of the water can cause serious injuries. Before the protests started, a photographer captured an image of a toddler placed on a blanket in the middle of a road in front of two buses. It created an uproar on social media.

Speaking to Israeli television, the photographer confirmed that the image was taken somewhere in Ramat Aviv before the



A street seller making the most of the opportunity that the protests bring in Tel Aviv

The protest movement shows no signs of abating. If anything, it's gaining momentum. This Saturday night, Kaplan Street in Tel Aviv will be full, and similar protests will take place across other cities. Most Israelis hope broad-based consensus will be reached in the near future. This is a seminal moment in Israel's history. Perhaps the time is right for a Constitution.

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



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# Samovar seals family history in Shadova

TALI FEINBERG

An elaborate samovar, otherwise known as a Russian tea urn, is being escorted from Cape Town to Lithuania by the outgoing Lithuanian ambassador to South Africa to the region it's believed to have come from.

The samovar is going to Šeduva/Shadova in Lithuania, which once had a bustling Jewish community, and will be displayed in a new museum recording the lost world of the Jewish shtetls. For Capetonian Sue Benatar, it's a bittersweet moment, as she inherited the samovar from her grandmother.

She decided to send the heirloom to be part of the Lost Shtetl Museum in Šeduva/Shadova – the village where her *bobba* came from – so that it could symbolise the heartache, loss, hope, and renewal of Jewish life in the 20th century.

Ambassador Dainius Junevičius, who has done much to mend the relationship between Lithuania and South African Jewry, is to take the samovar back with him to Lithuania to be part of the museum chronicling our history. This is his last act as ambassador before he retires.

"My *bobba*, Shasa Tzippa Shapiro [nee Zall], had to leave her own beautiful samovar in Lithuania when she came to South Africa in May 1939, just

escaping the Holocaust," says Benatar. Shapiro, her husband, and their children settled in Bulawayo and managed to build a new life. "She was heartbroken to have left her samovar behind. Years later, while on holiday in Muizenberg, she saw almost the exact same samovar for sale, and my grandfather bought it for her."

The samovar was Shapiro's pride and joy and symbolised what was lost. Her brother was killed in the Holocaust, shot in the forest with his wife and children. For the survivors and the friends Shapiro made in her new home, it symbolised tradition and connection to the past. "Every second-day Rosh Hashanah, my *bobba* made lemon tea with the samovar, and the women would drink it with grape jam stirred in or holding a sugar cube between their teeth and sucking the tea through the sugar cube."

Benatar and her grandmother were close, and she loved hearing stories from "the old country". So it meant a lot to Benatar when she inherited the samovar, which she kept polished and in pride of place. "My husband and I are now scaling down and our children don't have the space to keep the samovar. It was too precious to sell," she says. Benatar was unsure what to do with it, but then the answer fell into her lap.

"I went on a whirlwind trip to Lithuania in 2015,



Lithuanian Ambassador Dainius Junevičius and Sue Benatar

and met a Lithuanian man who was tasked with restoring the Jewish cemetery and overseeing the memorials in the forests where the Jews of Šeduva/Shadova were killed. He later met Lost Shtetl Museum Chief Curator Milda Jakulytė-Vasil. He mentioned that he had met some South African Jews, and she asked to get in contact."

The result was that Benatar's grandmother's story will now be featured in the museum. "I've always been the family archivist, so I was able to provide a lot of photos and documentation," says Benatar. The museum team even filmed her telling her grandmother's story. And then, when Benatar was thinking of what to do with the samovar, she realised that the perfect solution was to allow it to be part of the museum in the very town where the family's original samovar was left behind as it fled the Holocaust.

"Sue and I became friends a number of years ago when I started working at the Lost Shtetl Museum, looking for information about the people who lived in the town," says Jakulytė-Vasil. "In 2017, our team visited South Africa, where we met descendants of the Jews of Šeduva, including Sue's family."

"During these meetings, the descendants shared their family stories and showed photos and relics of their grandparents. They even gave us a few of them. So I was delighted to receive a call from Sue when she said that she had decided to donate her grandmother's samovar to us. We're happy to have the help of Lithuanian Ambassador Dainius Junevičius in bringing this exhibit to Lithuania."

The Lost Shtetl Museum will open its doors in 2024. The name was chosen to reflect the disappearance of Jewish communities that were destroyed during the Holocaust in Lithuania and throughout Eastern Europe during World War II.

The museum will present the history, culture, religion, folklore, and daily life of the Jews of Lithuania's shtetls and their relations with their neighbours – an entire way of life that ended with the Holocaust. The museum's exploration of daily shtetl life is based on the many stories of the Jews of Šeduva/Shadova. This is why the museum is

being built there. The museum is privately funded, supported by a group of Jewish businesspeople in Switzerland whose ancestors lived in Šeduva/Shadova.

During the period between the two world wars, about 7 000 Litvaks left Šeduva for South Africa, and the museum includes many of their stories. For example, Mendel Berkow came to South Africa in 1902. Until the end of his life in 1976, he drove a horse-drawn cart, as he was accustomed to do in the village. Berkow brought religious books to South Africa, and passed them on to his children. These will now return to Šeduva and be on display in the museum.

The Jews who were left behind were decimated. Five hundred years of Jewish life in the village ended in just two days of slaughter. German forces entered Šeduva on 25 June 1941, and exactly

She decided to send the heirloom to be part of the Lost Shtetl Museum in Šeduva/Shadova - the village where her *bobba* came from - so that it could symbolise the heartache, loss, hope, and renewal of Jewish life in the 20th century.

two months later, the Jews were loaded onto trucks and taken to Liaudiškiai, 10km south-west of the town. The entire Jewish community was shot and buried in two pre-prepared mass graves. Two hundred and thirty Jewish men, 275 Jewish women, and 159 Jewish children were killed – a total of 664 people.

The museum meticulously attempts to capture what was lost, and many stories are recorded on its website. Benatar hopes to visit the museum when it opens this time next year. Not only that, she's writing and illustrating a children's book about the samovar and its journey back to Lithuania.

Everything fell into place to get the samovar to Lithuania when Junevičius offered to take it back with him. A few weeks ago, he came to Benatar for tea, where she handed over the magnificent heirloom. "I was filled with extreme emotion," says Benatar. "I was so close to my *bobba*, and having her samovar felt like she was there with me. But at the same time, this feels like the perfect solution. It will be displayed in the section on my grandmother's family. It's going home."

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# Pirates resist pressure to pull out of friendly with Maccabi Tel Aviv

NICOLA MILTZ

It's kick off time for one of South Africa's favourite soccer teams, Orlando Pirates, to take on Israel's popular Maccabi Tel Aviv in a friendly pre-season camp in Spain, defying persistent pressure from anti-Israel lobbyists to pull out.

It has been a week of high drama in the Pirates locker room following a bullying call by the South African Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition (BDS SA) last Friday, 7 July, to withdraw in solidarity with Palestinians.

The organisation penned an open letter calling on Pirates not to play against Maccabi Tel Aviv, saying, "There's nothing 'friendly' about playing a team representing apartheid Israel."

The letter accused Israel of occupation, "institutionalised racism", and war crimes, and compared its treatment of its Palestinian population to apartheid South Africa. The group also called on the South African department of sports, arts, and culture to enforce a cultural and sporting boycott of Israel.

It's understood that BDS also reached out to the South African Football Association and the Confederation of African Football to garner more pressure to have the match cancelled.

In response, Orlando Pirates explained in a lengthy statement on Monday, 10 July, that the match with Israel was organised by a FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) match agent, and since there's no official "boycott of any form" against Israel implemented by FIFA or the government, they must play Thursday's game against Maccabi Tel Aviv, which includes Arab-Israel soccer players. Pirates further explained that though it's "naturally conscious of the plight of the Palestinian people", it must follow FIFA and government rules.

"Orlando Pirates' core functioning is governed by rules," the team said. "It's to the rules that Orlando Pirates went when confronted with calls to withdraw from playing Maccabi Tel Aviv. There's no cultural boycott or boycott of any form by either the South African government, FIFA, or the host country that Orlando Pirates can base its refusal to play against Maccabi Tel Aviv on. Heeding a call from any other body would create a conflict within Orlando Pirates that would undermine the club's values and history irreparably."

Anti-Israel groups aligned with the BDS including amongst others the African National Congress (ANC) Veterans League, the South African Communist Party, and the South African Federation of Trade Unions, added their voice to the calls to back out, urging Bucs Chairperson Irvin Khoza to call off the match. ANC veteran Ronnie Kasrils called it an "immense disappointment" that the "noble" Buccaneers were set to "sully their human rights record".

Speaking on the sidelines of an ANC elections workshop on Monday, ANC Deputy Secretary General, Nomvula Mokonyane said the party was "concerned" about Pirates playing the Israeli club, but it couldn't place pressure on the club at this late stage. She said the match was a reminder that a "stronger stance" against Israel, including discourse around a cultural boycott, should be considered by the party.

Pirates and Maccabi Tel Aviv are both on a pre-season camp and are scheduled to play a few matches in a mini tournament in Spain, involving numerous clubs from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

The South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) on Monday called on Orlando Pirates to "stand firm" in its decision and ignore the "hate and bullying" they face.

SAFI spokesperson Bafana Modise said, "Orlando Pirates must play against Israel and tackle BDS hate, because boycotting sport and alienating players won't produce the goal of peace in the Middle East."

In a statement, SAFI said, "Instead of allowing South African sports teams to abide by international rules and participate freely in international matches, BDS is trying to harm a sports team like Orlando Pirates by pressuring them to cancel this positive sporting engagement. "This own goal would be a grave injustice to South African sport as well as the positive role that sport plays in bringing people of diverse backgrounds together, and we call on Orlando Pirates to stand firm."

Modise said stakeholders of the BDS movement were "fearful" that South Africans would see the diversity of the Israeli soccer team, which is made up of Arabs and Jews – "human beings, just like us".

"As Israel is the world's only Jewish state, BDS wishes to discriminate solely against her amongst the community of nations whilst remaining silent when serious human rights abuses occur daily on our doorstep in Africa and other parts of the globe.

"If South Africa was scheduled to play Russia or Iran, or any major human rights abuser, BDS would be cheering our beloved players on as opposed to bullying them.

"Soccer can play a unifying and meaningful role in bridging the disconnect created by the inflammatory tactics of BDS, which only seeks to sow hate and division. This dishonest attempt to dehumanise Israelis and bully South Africans must be rejected and condemned."

In March, Israeli rugby team Tel Aviv Heat was disinvited from participating in a competition in South Africa after supporters of the BDS movement pressured the South African Rugby Union.

Meanwhile, the recently appointed Maccabi Tel Aviv coach, well-known Irish soccer player Robbie Keane, also faced heavy criticism from anti-Israel lobbyists when he took up the coaching position for the Israeli side. Two days after his appointment as coach, BDS called on him to join "the international athletes who fight for the rights of the Palestinians and oppose co-operating with apartheid".

Keane, a former Ireland and Tottenham Hotspur striker, joined the club as head coach on a two-year deal. "I'm delighted to take on this challenge at Maccabi. My team and I look forward to beginning work, and we have confidence in our ability to do what's necessary to prepare the team for the coming season."

Pirates left South Africa for Spain last weekend. The team is expected to have a pre-season camp in Marbella, southern Spain, until 21 July, during which they will face Maccabi before taking on Independiente del Valle on 15 July. They are also scheduled to face the Spanish La Liga side UD Las Palmas on 19 July.



Photo: Screenshot

Orlando Pirates will play against Maccabi Tel Aviv in a friendly pre-season match in Spain

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# Income disparities need not be dealbreaker for kids

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When their friends have the latest PlayStation Console, sports car, or designer jeans, it can be difficult for kids from families with fewer resources to accept that they can't access the same luxuries. In a community where income disparities can be dramatic, how do we help our kids to navigate financial differences?

"We really struggle financially, and it's a constant source of pressure to have to deal with the disparities between my kids and their friends," says an anonymous mother of three. She has two boys at a Jewish high school, and one girl at the primary school.

"There are so many different ways it affects them," she says, "from not being able to buy from the tuckshop to not being able to go on school or sports tours. We often have to deal with the 'Why can't I have these shoes or that jacket or a new phone case?' stories."

She and her husband also find themselves having to limit their children's social arrangements because they cannot afford to pay for every movie, dinner, and outing. "Over the years, our kids have become more understanding, accepting, and supportive when we say no, but there are occasions where they still feel unhappy about the situation," she says.

The family has learned to navigate challenges as they arise and ensure that they maintain open communication about finances, where the children are also empowered to voice their concerns. "I really don't believe my kids lack anything, but it's still hard to have to explain regularly why they can't have everything they want or feel they need," says the mom.

She teaches her kids to be grateful for what they do have, and stresses the importance of giving back, an important way of helping them to develop a broader perspective. "As parents, we also lead by example and put people ahead of things."

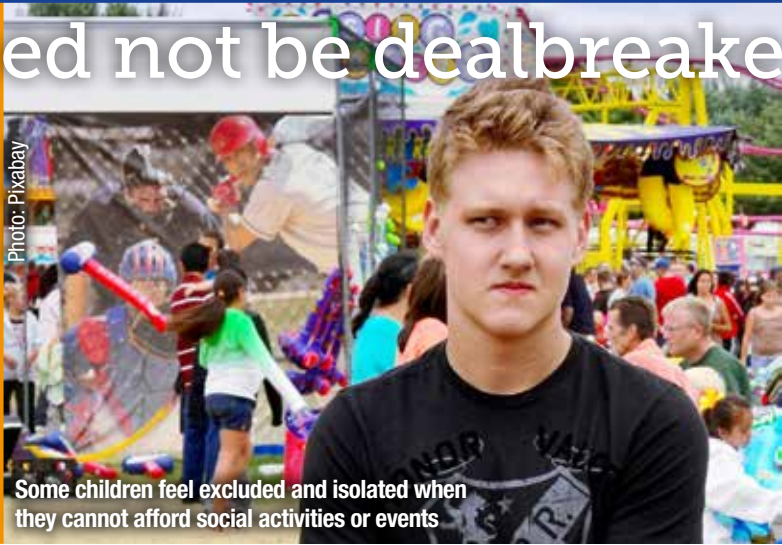
Though there have been challenges along the way, the mom says her children have benefited from learning the value of hard work. "My children are grounded and show respect to everyone. They have a heightened sense of empathy and compassion." For families on both ends of the financial spectrum, it ultimately comes down to instilling such values.

A Johannesburg-based single mom, who also wishes to remain anonymous, says that even though she considers her family to be in the upper-middle-class bracket, there are still financial discrepancies between her kids and some of their friends.

"We have always instilled values in our children, so when my matric daughter's friends were gifted with BMWs and Audis for their 18th birthdays, she didn't feel any envy," she says. "She was also fortunate in that she received a car, albeit second-hand and handed down from a family member."

She credits her daughter's mature attitude to the way she's been raised, especially when it comes to finances. "My children and I have a deal: they receive monthly pocket money, and they can earn extra by doing chores. If they want to save towards a branded or expensive item, I will match whatever they have saved. For this reason, my daughter isn't envious of her friends, as she feels a sense of achievement in being able to buy these luxury items partly on her own."

That's not to say that issues don't



Some children feel excluded and isolated when they cannot afford social activities or events

sometimes arise, especially when it comes to not being able to afford group holidays with her friends. "Our budget is simply different. My daughter has learned that it's perfectly acceptable to want nice things and lovely holidays, but these are never taken for granted as she has learned how to save and work towards affording such things."

With many of our children attending private Jewish schools that offer financial assistance to those who qualify, they inevitably confront such monetary differences. "As an inclusive community school, we have always recognised the importance of being mindful of these differences and strive to create an inclusive environment that supports all pupils and their families," says Sydney Samakosky, Herzlia High School's deputy principal: student affairs and wellness, and systemic head of counselling at the SEED Department, which supports emotional and educational development.

Parental attitudes, children's personalities, and environmental influences all affect the emotions that kids may experience in the face

of a continuum of wealth disparities, he says. In some kids, such challenges may foster resilience and determination to overcome obstacles, while others may feel excluded and isolated when they cannot afford social activities or events. These feelings may also damage their self-esteem. Yet for others, it helps to generate a greater understanding of the struggles faced by others.

Parents can help their kids to build a positive mindset by encouraging them to focus on what they do have and what makes them unique, which matters far more than material possessions. The school and community also play a role, Samakosky says. "Teaching social and emotional competencies such as empathy and kindness as part of the curriculum and role modelling such behaviours encourages our kids to engage in these behaviours through programmes that promote *gemilut chasidim* [acts of loving kindness]."

Lisa Klotz, a senior social worker at King David High School Linksfield, says that helping kids cope with financial discrepancies comes with instilling a sense of

contentment, self-confidence, and gratitude to ensure their emotional well-being and equip them with better coping mechanisms for all of life's challenges. "There are always people who will be brighter, more talented, or in this case, richer, so it's important to develop a strong sense of self in all spheres of life," she says.

Klotz stresses the importance of open and honest communication with your kids. "Acknowledge that everyone's financial circumstances are different, and that it doesn't devalue them or their family in any way." She also advocates teaching children, regardless of their financial background, that the true value of friendship and a person's worth lies in genuine connections rather than material possessions. "Encourage compassionate behaviour and foster a sense of community by engaging in activities that give back to society."

Greenside Shul's Rabbi Mendel Rabinowitz says it's up to parents to instill limits in their children's quest to keep up with peers. When it comes to Batmitzvahs and Barmitzvahs, where families have even been known to dip into their bonds to fund lavish functions, the meaning of the day is often lost.

"As far as the functions are concerned, there's always been a disparity between rich and poor," he says. "That manifests itself in nearly every facet of life. It's important that families don't major in the minor. Today, unfortunately, kids don't invite all of their friends to shul, but rather to the function that night. There's no problem with having a function, but the focus should be on the shul service, a family's community involvement, and making the day something more

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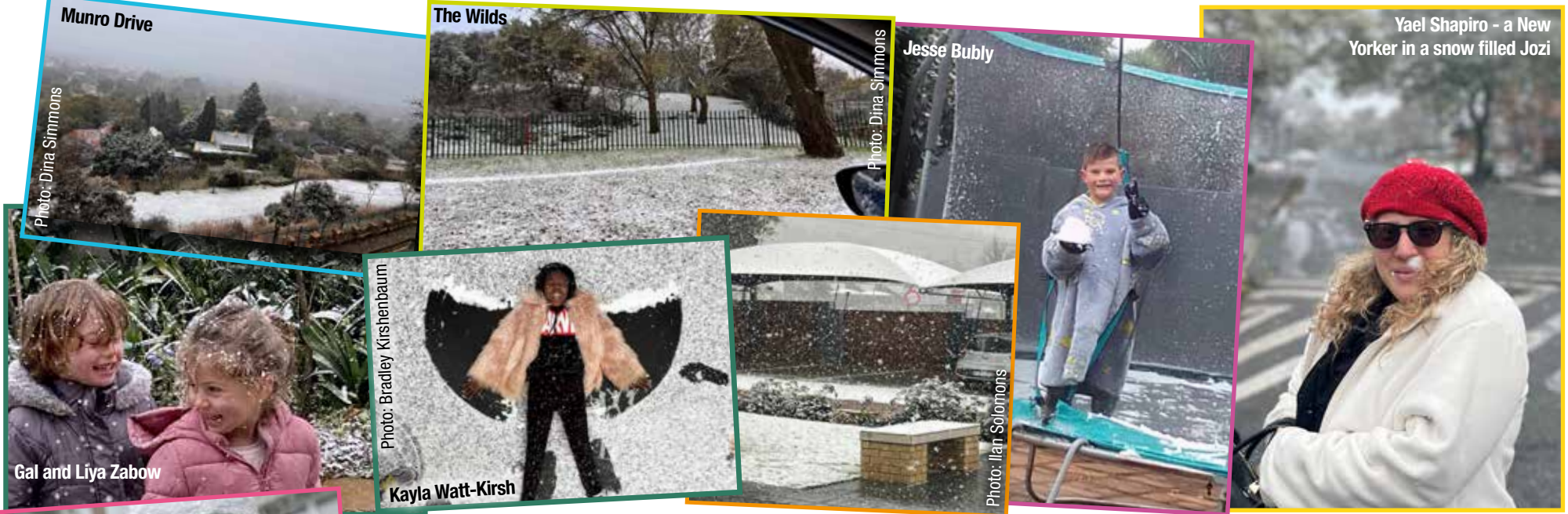






# Snowprise and delight in Jozi

Monday’s snowfall took Jozi by surprise, being the first time we have had the delightful white cover since 2012. Some may recall a smattering in 2007, others back in 1981. These are memory-making days, so the *SA Jewish Report* called on the community to send in pics. Here’s a selection.



**Cape mom swept off rocks in tragic accident**  
**>>Continued from page 1**

its name amidst wind, rain, and hail. Yet hundreds turned out for the funeral, with many more joining online from around the world. “And just for the funeral, it stopped raining,” says Bianca.

“I can’t accept that I don’t have a sister anymore,” she says through tears. Although they were 10 years apart and didn’t share a mother, they were extremely close. “The loss of a sibling isn’t the natural order of things. I don’t know life without Lauren. When her first child was born, I stayed up at night with her while she fed him, then I helped settle him. That’s how close we were. We came to Cape Town for Pesach, and thank G-d we did. Lauren hadn’t even met my youngest child. Now I have the most beautiful photo of them together.”

“My sons are mourners, but I’m not sure they fully understand,” says Simon. “Even for me, it feels surreal – like this is happening to someone else.”

But one thing that feels very real is the outpouring of support the family has received from the Jewish community. “We’re so grateful,” says Bianca. “It has been almost overwhelming – the love that has poured in. We don’t take it for granted. When you need it, the community rallies.” And even though Bianca will have to return to Israel, she knows her nephews and the family will have all the support they could need in such a tragic situation.

“It’s hard to describe the extent of comfort we have received,” says Simon. “To live amongst people like this – all I can say is thank you.”

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# Scarred generation – the price paid by activists’ children

STEVEN GRUZD

“For many years, I couldn’t understand why a struggle 6 000 miles (9 656km) away was far more important to my father than I seemed to be”, said Nicholas (“Nic”) Wolpe. He’s the son of anti-apartheid stalwart Harold Wolpe, who daringly escaped from the government’s clutches and went into exile in the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1960s.

At the same time, in the American South, Adolph Ira (known as “Al”) Botnick was fighting against the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the Civil Rights Movement, but kept most of his activities from his son, Michael.

These children were both forged and scarred by the legacies of their fathers. Nic Wolpe and Michael Botnick were in conversation in a webinar on 9 July convened by the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the United States (US).

Nic revealed that Harold discovered communism in his teens, and remained a lifelong devotee. His anti-apartheid activism was shaped by leading the student representative council at the University of the Witwatersrand and his legal studies. Harold was the head of military intelligence at the clandestine headquarters of the banned African National Congress (ANC) at Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia in northern Johannesburg. He was arrested in 1963, but escaped from custody in Marshall Square with three others, including Arthur Goldreich. He

became a leading intellectual in the ANC in the UK where his family joined him. He returned to South Africa in 1991 and died in 1996.

Michael Botnick’s father was the son of Ukrainian immigrants seeking a better life in the US. Having witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust, Al got involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1950s. “He had heart, guts, he was brave. And he wanted to see things change,” Michael said. Strongly influenced by his socially conscious rabbi, Al joined the Anti-Defamation League and became its director in the South. He had to face down the intimidating, secretive KKK, which was vigorously resisting racial integration. The climate was violent. Three Jewish activists were killed, civil rights leader Medgar Evers was assassinated, and the shul and rabbi’s house in Jackson, Mississippi, were bombed. Al made bringing the perpetrators to justice his life’s work. He died aged 72 in 1995. “He saw many changes for the better, and left his footprints in the sand,” Michael said.

Nic said that in South Africa, “The stories of my generation are marginalised. It’s hard to articulate the suffering we experienced as children of political activists. Those who stayed in South Africa faced very harsh restrictions compared to the life in exile of me and my two sisters. These experiences shaped and defined us. We grew up recognising the importance of the struggle to our parents. It was only much later in life that I came to understand it. I recognised apartheid as abhorrent, evil, and inhumane. But my childhood was traumatic and hard.”



Michael Botnick



Nic Wolpe

He had nightmares about being kidnapped and buried alive. His father remained a wanted man. In the 1980s, their house was bugged and British police told Harold he was on an assassin’s hit list. “The sense of fear and anxiety was perpetuated due to the high-profile nature of my parents’ work,” Nic said. “It was emotional, traumatic, and left its scars.”

In contrast, Al Botnick’s work was behind the scenes, and he shielded his family as much as possible. But he was also targeted by the KKK for elimination.

His would-be killer, Byron De La Beckwith, who also murdered Medgar Evers, was eventually jailed, where he died in 2001. “We want to carry on our father’s legacy. Hate is not going to disappear – it’s a full-time job fighting bigotry.” Michael was inspired to become a lawyer and continue to fight for human rights causes.

Noting how “struggle Jews” were isolated and disowned by the mainstream Jewish community in South Africa, Nic recalled how his mother, AnnMarie, felt completely shunned and abandoned when Harold was arrested. Being an avowed communist and atheist, Harold passed down nothing of his Jewish identity, culture, and history to his family. Nic felt this “void existed in our household”.

He also remarked how women in many respects suffered more than their husbands, and were often separated from their children, but their roles are largely forgotten.

Wolpe is disappointed that there isn’t fuller acknowledgement of how leftist Jewish activists were disowned by a fearful Jewish community after the National Party’s (NP’s) electoral victory in 1948 that ushered in apartheid. “I can see why,” he said, “the NP were Nazi sympathisers, and the community felt scared and vulnerable that the same fate of Nazi Germany would play out in South Africa. Today, we need a re-evaluation of the roles of the community in the period 1948 to 1990.”

For Michael, his upbringing was very Jewish, with his parents teaching Jewish Sunday School and all the festivals

celebrated, “but it was more cultural than religious. Jews in the South sought assimilation and acceptance.” The Civil Rights Movement began to rock the boat, which upset the Southern Jews, and the Botnicks were ostracised.

Nic was asked what his father would say about South Africa today. “He would say it has failed to live up its aspirations and ideals for a free and just South Africa. He would be devastated by the drift from noble principles to the corruption, theft, and greed that define our country today. We’re still divided by poverty and inequality, and we have seen the resurrection of racism.”

Michael said the rise of antisemitism in some parts of the African American community was “disconcerting”, but we shouldn’t generalise. Many black communities give great credit to the Jews involved in the Civil Rights Movement. “It’s the Louis Farrakhans that give them a bad name, and through social media they get more attention,” he said.

Nic was the driving force in making Liliesleaf into a world-class heritage site, but says it was more to preserve this period of history rather than anything his father had done. “It wasn’t a personal crusade,” he said. He lamented the lack of government support for vital heritage sites like Liliesleaf “which is today a shadow of what it was before the COVID-19 pandemic. The site has disintegrated. It’s symptomatic of how government has treated historical sites across the board. No due respect is given to preserve them and ensure that history isn’t forgotten.”

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# Basserabie goes mainstream with new hit single

TALI FEINBERG

When Johannesburg student Yishai Basserabie's single *My Own Skin* hit streaming platforms Apple Music, YouTube Music, and Spotify recently, it was a milestone for this talented young singer-songwriter as well as the family, friends, and community that have supported him along the way.

"I've been sitting on this song for about a year watching it morph into what it is today," says Basserabie (21). "Now that it's done, I'm just happy that people beside my mom get to hear it! It's such a weird feeling seeing my name on these platforms after so much work went into the song. It feels like finally letting it out."

Music has always played an important role in his life. "Music is my tool for defining periods of my life and guiding my emotions," he says. "One of my most prized possessions is my music library. If I scroll through it, I'm immediately taken back to the moment I was listening to those songs. I feel what I was feeling, see what I was seeing, even smell what I was smelling. Sometimes a song can be played only in a particular context, which means that if I ever need to feel that emotion, all I need to do is play the song."

Basserabie grew up in Johannesburg and went to Yeshiva College. "I'm starting to write and make music, which I love, while doing electrical engineering at Wits [the University of the Witwatersrand] as a side hustle!" he says. "I've been singing my whole life, but what really accelerated my love for it and my abilities is Tamzyn Lombard, my vocal coach of 11 years. She's seen me go through stage-fright-stricken student shows to school choir concerts to now giving me the confidence to share my music.

"Sometimes songs take forever to write, but this one was quick," he says. "It was really late one night, and I couldn't fall asleep – my mind was buzzing. I sat up, saw my guitar, and thought that I might as well play if I couldn't sleep. So I sat on my bedroom floor and wrote *My Own Skin*. I fell asleep straight after that, and in the morning, the process of tweaking and rewriting began."

He says the song's meaning is unique to each person who listens to it. "The song will be about what it will be about to each person. It's funny because I feel like there's a disconnect between the lyrics and the music of the song. What you hear now isn't how it was originally written. It started off as a typical slow, sad, open-chorded guitar song, but it's morphed into sounding like what I think it would feel like if someone was going through the difficult process of feeling



comfortable inside their own skin. It's quite uplifting in the end."

He didn't aim to launch it as a single. "When I wrote *My Own Skin* and all the songs I had written up until that point, it was just for fun. That is, until I got the push I needed from Tamzyn to start thinking about producing them and putting them out there. It's quite scary to do that. I almost didn't do it because of the thought of the reactions of some people. But I did in the end, thanks to the support of Tamzyn, my friends, and my family.

"There are two stages to making a song," he says, "the writing and the production. The writing of *My Own Skin* somehow happened quickly – that's not usually the case – and over about a week, I was happy with the structure, lyrics, and melody.

"Once you have the outline and feel of the song, production begins," he says. "Tamzyn and RJ Benjamin were kind enough to reach out to a producer they know in the industry, Ewald van Rensburg, who is a legend.

"This led to a week-long trip to Potchefstroom to spend all day in Ewald's studio, with my little guesthouse trying hard to make me a kosher breakfast! Production was intense: hours of recording, re-recording, and tweaking; and layer upon layer of instrumentation that takes weeks to finalise. Once that's done, the song goes off to be mastered, where it's prepared for streaming and radio."

Getting it onto streaming platforms was "much more complicated than I thought. There's registration with the South African Music Rights Organisation, distribution services, and the like. There's bar codes, copyrights, and metadata to process. I know absolutely nothing about any of this, and so I was lucky that RJ Benjamin agreed to guide me through the process. I'm incredibly grateful."

He hopes the song is well received. "To be perfectly honest, it's still really surprising seeing my name on all these platforms. I've loved getting random videos of people listening to it – often people I haven't seen in ages, so that's been special. It's been a great way to reconnect to people I otherwise wouldn't have."

His primary goal was simple: "To have the song played at the Bnei Akiva campsite." That has already happened. *Chaverim* visited the site recently, and sent videos to Basserabie of them listening to the song. Now, he hopes it will blast out of the speakers at machaneh at the end of the year.

He says that the toughest aspect of this journey is "how difficult it is to put yourself out there". His advice to others wanting to do the same is that "if you like what you've made, then you just need to trust that it will find the right people".

He's not sure whether he'll make music full-time. "At the moment, it's a passion project – just a lot of fun. Who knows though, let's see how many people listen to the song after reading this and I'll get back to you!" he quips. "I'll definitely release more songs. There's another one already produced, and then hopefully more on the way."

To the community, he says, "Thank you all for all the support you guys have given me, online and off. I appreciate it more than you know."

# Nutty knitters go woolly for Teddy Bear Clinic

HANNA RESNICK

"You don't need to donate thousands to make a difference," says Dr Efrat Barnes, a medical doctor at the Teddy Bear Clinic, "you just need a pair of knitting needles and some wool."

When Barnes, who works with minimising the effect of abuse on children, met women from Knitting Knuts, she loved the idea that they would knit teddies for the children she worked with.

"Children often go for the knitted teddy bears over other fancy toys," said Barnes.

"There's just something warm and snuggly about them."

Teddy bears play the role of a transitional object for children at the clinic, Barnes said. "It's essentially used to provide psychological support and comfort to the child during that difficult period when they first come into the clinic. Developmentally, all children will seek out some sort of transitional object or comfort object as they separate from their caregivers." Additionally, hugging the teddy bears releases oxytocin, which stimulates feelings of love and happiness. "Interestingly, when a woman gives birth, oxytocin is released. That's what allows the bonding to occur between mother and child."

But Barnes had no idea how seriously the women of Knitting Knuts would take their commitment to creating these essential

tools.

Hilary Sassen, one of the two founders of Knitting Knuts, created more than 35 years ago, and part of a group called Knit & Knatter, immediately got to work with her groups, as well as posting about the project on a Jewish women's Facebook page. Sassen said about 70 women volunteered to knit teddy bears, while others donated wool to the cause.

"We have had such an unbelievable response to this project, and are so grateful to all the wonderful knitters involved," Sassen said. "Knitting Knuts channelled its love of knitting into making a real impact on people's lives.

"Knitting is what keeps me sane," she said. "We also crochet, but would rather not call ourselves the Crazy Crocheters."

When the group was started by Sassen and Doris Pollack, they began knitting squares for blankets. Helen Handel joined the group a little while later, and the trio, along with a few other group members, began knitting blankets as well as beanies,

jerseys, and other items for those in need. "We've knitted for organisations like DL Link and the Union of Jewish Women," said Sassen. "We also make a lot of beanies and things for premature babies. We're always happy to knit for whoever is in need".

Knitting Knuts has also recently knitted blankets for the Abraham Kriel Children's Home.

• Those who need knitted items or wish to donate wool and supplies, can send an email to [ehmudpuddles@gmail.com](mailto:ehmudpuddles@gmail.com)

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# No Cluedle? Try this online game

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

In a world in which we face more problems than solutions, the rush of decoding cryptic crosswords is that much more satisfying. Now, through Cluedle, a website he co-created, sub editor and journalist Jonathan Ancer is spreading the magic of solving cryptic clues.

Though Ancer's children may not believe him when he tells them that wordplay is just as much fun as PlayStation, a rapidly growing number of Cluedle users are fast coming round to his way of thinking. Developed with his friend, computer fundi Alastair Otter, who programmed the website, Cluedle allows Ancer to teach those interested how to unravel the mystery of cryptic crosswords "one clue at a time".

Unlike regular "coffee-time" crosswords, which generally seek a synonym or piece of trivia, a cryptic crossword offers players two opportunities to solve clues. "They give you a definition and the word play, and you use the word play, for example an anagram or hidden word, to unlock the solution," Ancer says. It's much easier than people initially think, he claims.

When, growing up, he watched his mother do cryptic crosswords, Ancer himself felt nothing but confusion. Yet he later developed a love affair with the practice. Working night shifts as a sub editor at *The Star* newspaper in 2001, he began spending his "lunch break" at 21:00 solving *Business Day* cryptic crosswords.

"The time they printed the following

day's *Business Day* coincided with our lunch break, so I started to look at the paper's crossword," Ancer recalls. "I became obsessed with trying to be the first person in the country to solve the *Business Day* crossword because I knew that I would be able to solve it before anybody else could even see it."

Guided by his colleague, Charles Machanik, a crossword aficionado, Ancer's skills and passion grew. "I loved the logic of it," he says. "I loved how you could look at a puzzle, a grid, and when you first read it, it makes absolutely no sense. At first you can't see a single answer and then you see a solution, and suddenly the grid starts solving itself and you eventually work it all out."

Ancer still remembers the first clue that he solved in which he had to find "a colour that starts your car". After thinking and thinking, he had it – a car key that sounds like the colour khaki. "It's an 'aha' moment when you realise this is how it all works," he says. "Everything comes into focus and it's like a rush of adrenaline."

Ancer's desire to spread his passion came to the fore when he was asked to run a cryptic crosswords workshop at the University of Cape Town (UCT) Summer School, which mainly attracts

retirees. Shortly afterwards, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown began, and he was asked to run an online course instead. UCT thought it would be an enjoyable activity people could do during lockdown.

"Teaching the basics of how to solve cryptic crosswords is like teaching a language," says Ancer. "Once you learn a bit of the vocabulary and the lingo, you can solve it. That's why it initially seems so difficult – you don't have the language."

"There's a lot of research that has shown that doing cryptic crosswords improves your memory and teaches your brain to be agile," he says. "It's a bit like taking your brain to the gym. It helps you to think laterally."

The successful online course led to

more requests for tutorials from friends and friends of friends, and Ancer decided to start a WhatsApp group in which he shared a cryptic clue each day and explained how to solve it. As the group grew, the idea of a website that emailed daily cryptic clues to users hit Ancer. He chatted to some friends including Otter, who ultimately built the website, and so Cluedle was born.

Though it's been around for only about six weeks so far, Cluedle, a free service, already has more than 350 subscribers. It's mainly grown through word of mouth and social media. Though users are generally older people, some have said that they're using it to teach their children how to do cryptic crosswords. "It's for anybody who enjoys playing with words and seeing their power," says Ancer.

Ancer says that other word games, most notably Wordle, have also contributed to the rising popularity of linguistic hobbies. "With Wordle, you're trying to guess a word, but with Cluedle, you're actually solving a word, so you're solving a puzzle," he says. "There's less guesswork and more decoding. It's what spies do – get a secret code and try to unlock it. That's why it's captured people's imaginations – it's fun to actually decode something."

In fact, encrypted crosswords were instrumental in the recruitment of code breakers who decoded enemy messages

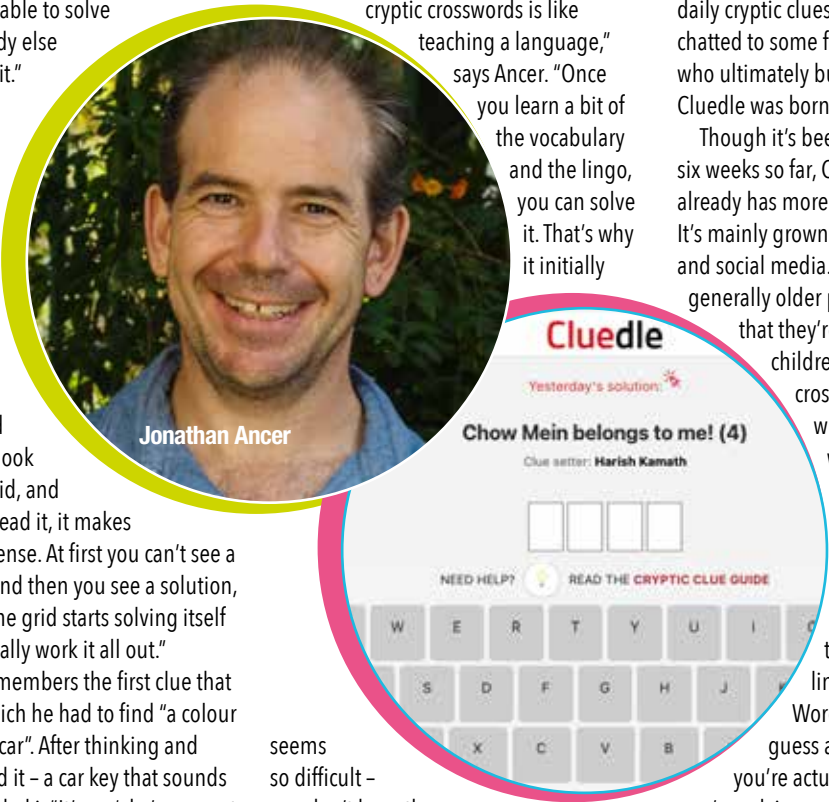
during World War II. "The decoders who were recruited for Bletchley Park [the home of code breakers in England during the war] were crossword solvers," says Ancer. In 1942, *The Telegraph* held a timed cryptic crossword challenge. The war office was watching, and the five fastest crossword solvers received a letter inviting them to work at Bletchley.

Though it may not be used to crack wartime codes, Cluedle provides users with Ancer's guide to cryptic clues, explaining exactly how they work. "You sign up, and get an email sent to you at 07:00 each morning," he says. "We start with an easy clue on Monday, and it gets progressively more difficult as the week progresses."

Various hints are provided, and users have the entire day to solve it. If they don't manage to do so, the solution as well as a detailed explanation on how to reach it is shared the following day. "The idea is to teach people how to solve clues, how the clue breaks down," says Ancer.

"The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. People are saying that they've always wondered how these things work and it's suddenly starting to make sense. I've been really surprised and thrilled at how much people love it. There isn't a money incentive for me, it's just a lot of fun."

Ancer hopes the website will eventually lead to monthly webinars featuring compilers and chances to collaboratively solve cryptic crosswords.



• Sign up to Cluedle on <https://cluedle.theoutlier.co.za/>

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# Finkel sisters cross world for CrossFit Games

SAUL KAMIONSKY

You may think CrossFit is restricted to your local gym, but Capetonian sisters Reegan and Brady Finkel are heading to the United States this August to compete at the annual international CrossFit Games. Reegan, 20, and Brady, 22, took up the sport about five years ago, and the Games, in Madison, Wisconsin, will be their first international competition. They will represent Africa as a team of four against the best teams from around the world.

The Finkels say competing at the Games will be the realisation of their “ultimate goal”, and they think they can place in the top 20 out of the 40 teams. “As we get older and do it more, I would love to fight for the top spots at the Games,” Reegan says.

To qualify for the Games, athletes must compete in three specific phases, the open, the quarter-finals, and the semi-finals.

The Finkels progressed to the semis, which took place in Johannesburg in May. They won two workouts out of six, placing them about 20 points behind the winning team.

Unexpected news followed when the winners failed a drug test. As a result, the Finkels bagged an invitation to participate in the CrossFit Games about three weeks after the semis.

The CrossFit Open is a three-week competition in which participants across the globe do one workout a week and enter their scores online. “You’re ranked on a leaderboard based on your best scores,” Reegan says. The Finkel sisters were part of the top 10% in Africa, who qualified for the individual quarter-finals, which consist of three days of workouts.

Reegan and Brady ranked amongst the top 30 girls in the quarter-finals, qualifying for the individual semi-finals, placing seventh and 12th respectively.

“The following week, we competed in the team quarter-finals in a team of four, two males and two females,” Reegan says. “We placed second, and were one of the top 20 teams to go to the semi-finals in Johannesburg.”

They arrived two weeks in advance to become accustomed to the difference in breathing and altitude. They competed in the semis across three days, having to do two workouts each day, whether it be gymnastics, weightlifting,

or cardio exercises.

“As an example, the first workout we did was the cardio – there was running, bike riding, and skipping,” Reegan says. “We have this thing called a worm, which is a big bag shaped like a log, and we have to pick it up. There’s a lot of gymnastics. We have a weightlifting component with cleans, which are an Olympic lift. The winners should be the most well-rounded athletes in their team.

“Everyone around the world has the same workouts in the CrossFit Open.



Brady and Reegan Finkel

They’re competing against their own continent. Each continent has a certain amount of people who go through to the CrossFit Games.” Africa gets only one place for an individual female, an individual male, and a team.

The workouts at the Games will be more intense, Brady says. “The weights are a lot heavier, the cardio is a lot harder. You have to swim in lakes. And you compete against a much higher level of athletes.”

The Games’ official website says that it aims to find the fittest people on

earth. Each year, the Games are a more comprehensive test of fitness, and athletes raise the competition level to unprecedented heights. The average semi-finals athlete this year will be more capable than the world’s best a decade ago.

During their school career at Camps Bay High, the Finkels took part in a lot of sport. They took a liking to CrossFit when their dad forced them to watch a CrossFit Games documentary about five years ago. “We didn’t want to watch it, but as soon as we finished watching, I said, ‘We have to start,’” Reegan recalls.

Reegan and Brady have participated in a few local competitions. “We’ve competed in the open semi-final individually,” Reegan says. “In 2021, Brady came seventh and I came 10th. Then in 2022, Brady couldn’t compete because she hurt her ankle. We were going to participate as a team as well. I still competed, and came seventh. Now we are competing as one team.”

Their training regimen is “honestly insane,” Reegan says, especially with the Games on the horizon. “On some days, we’re at the gym from 07:00 until 19:30 at night. We train for three hours in the morning, then rest, eat, and recover before going back into another session, which is three or four hours long.”

They train five days a week, with Thursdays focused on active recovery such as a swim or run, and Mondays being a full rest day. Aside from doing CrossFit, the Finkel sisters also coach the sport at their gym.

They usually do CrossFit with their youngest sister, 19-year-old Ashton, who also reached the semi-finals at the open, but with a different team.

Asked if there’s rivalry between the sisters, Reegan says, “When we compete as individuals, we’re competing against each other. But if we want anyone to beat us, it will be one of our sisters rather than anyone else.”

Reegan says CrossFit is like a combination of every sport, from bike riding and running to swimming and gymnastics.

“The CrossFit community is special. You would have to try it to understand. Everyone is so supportive. It’s such an amazing and wholesome community. The training is insane. I love it.”

“It’s an addictive sport because you’re constantly improving,” Brady says. “You always want to do better and more. With the weightlifting, you get to increase your numbers. There are so many different movements you can learn and become experienced at.”

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Raising concerns at highest level

Events in Cape Town over the past six months were the main subject of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) meeting in Pretoria on 5 July with National Police Commissioner General Sehlahle Fannie Masemola and other senior officials from the South African Police Service. The inflammatory nature of much of the rhetoric and activities against our community during this period has become a genuine cause for concern, and as the representative voice of the Jewish community, we felt the time had come to raise this at the highest level. During the meeting, National Director Wendy Kahn gave a sobering PowerPoint presentation on how historically, incitement has led to antisemitic violence, including in South Africa. We greatly appreciated the warm welcome we received, and left feeling assured that any threats to the Jewish community are being taken very seriously.

## Lessons from the Srebrenica massacre

Meanwhile, on the international stage, SAJBD National Vice-President Mary Kluk continues to do us proud. Last week, she wrote about her attendance at the annual Claims Conference meeting in New York, and on Monday, 10 July, she was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she participated in a Srebrenica Collective Memory Conference. Srebrenica was the site of one of the worst atrocities to take place in Europe after World War II, with the mass killing of more than 8 000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in and around the town. The conference was a joint initiative of the World Jewish Conference (WJC) and the Srebrenica Memorial Center.

Mary has long served on the WJC executive, initially in her capacity as SAJBD national chairperson and thereafter as an elected member in her own right. She continues to chair the important WJC security committee. On the local front,

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

Mary has over the years increasingly devoted herself to Holocaust education, most notably in her capacity of founder and director of the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre. At the Srebrenica conference, she was a speaker on a panel titled "Preserving memory, memorials, museums, and education".

## Snow in Joburg

The usual Monday morning blues were somewhat dispelled this week with Johannesburg and other parts of the country experiencing their first real snow falls for many a year. It was a real moment of joy for Joburgers across the spectrum, particularly in the wake of so many difficult months of loadshedding, post-COVID-19 pandemic rebuilding, and other pressing challenges facing our city. For a few brief hours, everyone was able to share and simply enjoy the rarity value and appreciate the freshness and beauty of it all. At the same time, however, we need also to remember those who lack warm clothes and shelter, and who urgently need whatever assistance those more fortunate than them can provide. As I wrote in my last column, there are many Jewish-led social upliftment programmes underway that help relieve the hardship so many are experiencing, including through clothing and blanket drives. The Board, through its Jubuntu project, is documenting and in due course will be publicising these initiatives. I again urge those involved in this area to get in touch on [sajbd@sajbd.org](mailto:sajbd@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

# Batmitzvah book just a coincidence – or something more?

PERSONAL STORY

DAVID ZIDEL



Has something ever happened to you that made you sit up, take note, and think – how can that possibly be? Well it happened recently to me, and some people that I have shared this story with said it gave them the *ghrills* (a good thing, I think).



Romi Zidel and Gabi Zidel

My daughter, Gabi, celebrated her Batmitzvah recently at Schafflers Nursery in Lyndhurst. Attached to the nursery is a little coffee shop with a second-hand book store. My brother and his daughter, Romi, went to the coffee shop about three months before the Batmitzvah party because it was a favourite spot for my dad in the last couple of years before his passing. As Romi wandered into the book store section, she saw a book lying on the table, on its own, in such a way that she couldn't miss it, as if it had been placed there for her to not miss it.

The book was *Anne Frank, Beyond the Diary*. What made this book relevant to our family is that my mother's story is similar to that of Anne Frank. She, too, was born in Amsterdam, and was hidden in an attic as a child. So, obviously, her grandchildren have always been interested in the Anne Frank story because she passed away before they were born and they all wanted to know more about that time. They "know" her only through a

film my brother made of her for the Holocaust Foundation in the last year of her life.

Romi, picked up the book to page through it, and since it was a second-hand book, it already had a dedication written in it. She started to read the dedication, and was overcome with disbelief. The dedication went, "Dear Gab, on your Batmitzvah day, I wish you everything of the best for a happy and successful future. Thank for being such a great friend, love always Romi."

There she was, a different Romi, holding a book related to her Granny Rosa's story, dedicated to wishing *mazal tov* to a different Gabi on her Batmitzvah, at the exact venue that her cousin, Gabi, was going to celebrate her Batmitzvah. So many coincidences all wrapped up in one.

Romi bought the book that the other Romi had bought who knows how many years before, and kept it a secret for three months. She then gave it to Gabi on her Batmitzvah with her own, now second dedication in the book, "Dear Gab, I love you to the bone, congrats on your Bati, love you always Romi."

The book now has two similar dedications from two different Romis to two different Gabis, and at the same time, my cousin in the Netherlands has just released a book on the story of my mom's family, titled *The Landau Brothers: A Jewish family of chocolate makers in Amsterdam before and after the Holocaust*.

Is this a message or blessing from those that have passed on – or just an unbelievable coincidence?

I would love to find out who the original Gabi and Romi are.

• David Zidel is the father of the second Bati, Gabi.

Dear Gab  
I love you to the bone  
congrats on your bati  
love you always  
Romi

Dear Gab,  
On your Batmitzvah day  
I wish you everything of  
the best for a happy  
and successful future.  
Thank for being such a  
great friend.  
Love always  
Romi

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The Jewish Report



# Many ways to honour Madiba on Mandela Day

On Mandela Day, in honour of the life of the late great President Nelson Mandela, we traditionally find a way of doing at least 67 minutes of community work, whether it's in our own community or other more needy ones. This day is a call to action to take time to reflect on Mandela's principles and make a personal positive impact, but it's often hard to decide what to do. The SA Jewish Report has collated a list of incredible ways you can honour Madiba.

- Johannesburg**  
**Tuesday 18 July**
  - Yad Aharon & Michael invites community members to pack food hampers for members of the community in need. Venue: 21 Main Street, Rouxville. Time: 09:30 to 10:37. Contact: 011 485 2076 or jodye@yadaharon.co.za
  - The Angel Network, in partnership with Fingertips of Africa, invites corporates and individuals to take part in its Hearts Build Homes initiative. Come help build the framework for homes that will be given to people who have lost their homes in informal settlements around Gauteng. Sponsors are welcome to donate towards stocking these homes with essential household items. Time: 09:00 to 14:00. Venue: Wanderers Stadium. Contact: Glynne 083 777 1621 or Yehuda 060 625 0828.
  - The Union of Jewish Women is collecting babygrow's, socks, vests, bottles of water, biscuits, and wet wipes to go into Bags for New Beginnings. Drop off these items at 77 Sandler Road, Percelia. Contact: info@ujw.co.za or 011 648 1053
  - The Harvest Project, in partnership with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and the World Jewish Congress, invites you to join it at

the opening of the multi-purpose Eco Communal Centre and classroom at the Harvest Centre of Education & Equality in Brakpan. This centre sits on the grounds of the old Brakpan Synagogue, and will support and feed young children from the Brakpan area. Attendees are encouraged to bring a bag of maize meal to the opening. Time: 10:00. Venue: 89 Kingsway Avenue, Brakpan. Contact: theharvestp@gmail.com or charisse@sajbd.org



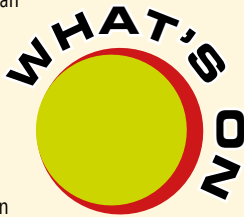
Photo: Talva Chalef

- Sunday 23 July**
  - Hatzolah will be providing a free CPR training course in honour of Mandela Day. Everyone is welcome to attend because knowing CPR can save lives. Time: 10:00. Venue: Huddle Park, Linksfield. Contact: training@hatzolah.co.za
- Cape Town**  
**Sunday 16 July**
  - Temple Israel Green Point invites you to join it at its sandwich-making marathon. The sandwiches made will then be delivered to shelters on the same day. Time: 14:00. Contact: wynberg@templeisrael.co.za
- Tuesday 18 July**
  - The Jacob Gitlin Library is collecting children's books to donate to libraries, schools, and crèches in need. These books can be dropped off at 88 Hatfield Street, Gardens, Cape Town. Contact: 021 462 5088 or admin@gitlinlibrary.co.za
  - Highlands House welcomes you to join it in packing hand-knit clothing items, handcrafted beadwork, and toiletry care packs that will be distributed to various organisations. There will also be activities with the residents such as painting and playing cards. Time: 14:15. Venue: Highlands House Lifestyle Centre. Contact: 021 461 1100 or lifestyle@highlandshouse.co.za

- Wednesday 19 July**
  - ORT SA Cape will be hosting a free training workshop in honour of Mandela Day for people who work in early childhood development. Time: 10:00. Venue: 370B Main Road, Observatory, Cape Town. Contact: 021 448 8516 or bev@ortscape.org.za
- Sunday 23 July**
  - The Mensch Network, supported by partners Cape SAJBD, the Joint Jewish Distribution Committee, United Jewish Campaign, The Angel Network, and the South African Urban Food and Farming Trust invites you to join in a cook-a-thon to cook meals for
- Sunday 16 July**
  - New Beginnings hosts a talk by Rabbi Joseph Matzner on From a Monastery to a Yeshiva. Time: 10:00. Donation: R50. Venue: UJW House, 77 Sandler Road, Percelia. Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za
- Thursday 20 July**
  - ORT SA hosts an Excel Crash Course with Dan Stillerman and Avi Levy. Time: 10:00. Venue: Online. Contact: admin@ortjet.org.za or https://bit.ly/ExcelORT202307
- Sunday 23 July**
  - The Jewish Women's Benevolent Society hosts its R30 book sale. Time: 09:00 to 14:00. Venue: Genesis Shopping Centre. Contact: 011 485 5232 or gloria@jwbs.co.za
  - New Beginnings hosts a talk by Professor Philip Frankel on human trafficking. Time: 10:00. Donation: R50. Venue: Holocaust Museum, 1 Duncombe

- 4 000 people. These nutritious meals will be distributed by The Angel Network via its feeding programme to 13 kitchens across the Cape Peninsula. Time: 10:00. Venue: Gardens Community Centre. Book your spot by contacting jodi@mensch.org.za or visit www.mensch.org.za/mandeladay2023/
- Pretoria**  
**Tuesday 18 July**
  - Join the residents of Jaffa Retirement Home who will be making toys and classroom necessities for Sunnyside Primary School. Time: 09:00. Contact: 082 468 5103.
- Road, Forest Town.  
Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za

  - Second Innings hosts Johannesburg Awakening Minds (J.A.M) who will be doing a Shakespearian play and poetry recital. Time: 10:00. Venue: Golden Acres. Cost: R40 (R20 members). Contact: 082 561 3228
- Thursday 24 August 2023**
  - MSCSPORTS hosts its annual sports quiz night. Time: 18:00. Venue: The Galleria, Kramerville, Sandton. Cost: R18 000 (incl. VAT) for a table of 10 guests. Contact: 083 276 6751 or katherine@mscsports.co.za



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If that's confusing, that was the same age group that called their girlfriends "*stukkie*", which to me is more associated with a



*Howard Feldman*

The blend of languages isn't unique to South Africa. Anglos living in Israel are known to slip between languages when a more appropriate word works better. What's relevant to South Africa is that in spite of what a few opportunistic politicians want us to believe, our blended, colourful, and expressive language indicates a shared outlook, a respect for heritage, and a unity that is a delight. And I really "*smak*" that.

**- Albert Glass, Cape Town**

As for your last sentence – an antisemitic trope – “Typical of rich Jews to force criminals into less wealthy areas”, I’d like to point out some obvious things like the fact that not every Jew is wealthy, nor do only Jews live in the Savoy/Waverley enclosure. Nor do Jews necessarily dominate or even live in the vast majority of enclosed suburbs that are scattered throughout the whole of Johannesburg. Instead of whining, be thankful that you do indeed have a car that you can drive compared to the multitude of people who don’t have their own transport. Be resilient, allow a few extra minutes for your travels, and re-evaluate how you communicate your complaints so that it doesn’t scream of antisemitism, narrow mindedness, and ignorance. – **Michele Engelberg, Johannesburg**

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