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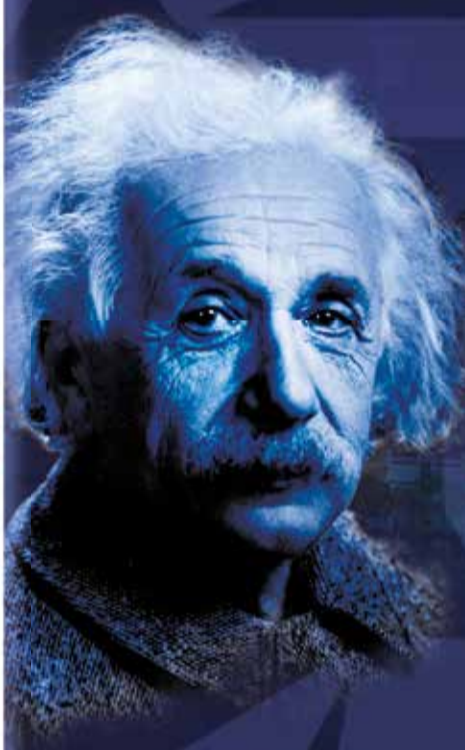
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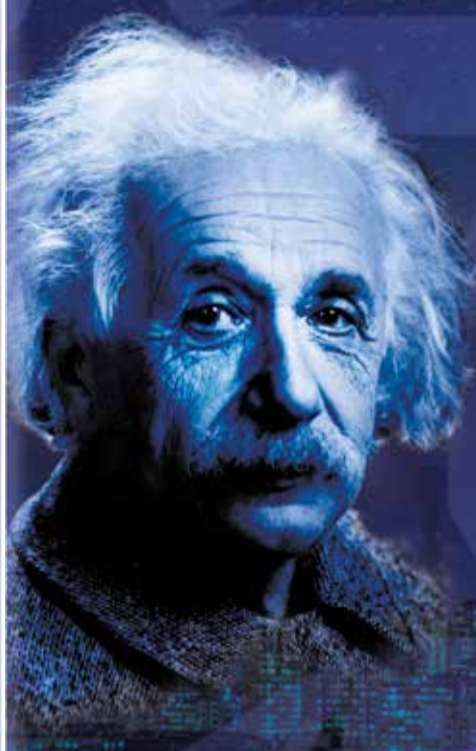
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## Craig's English Channel swim a triumph over tragedy

TALI FEINBERG

**W**hen Maxine Nerwich watched from Cape Town as her son, Craig Nerwich (44), swam into French waters during his English Channel crossing on 23 August, she was overcome with emotion. "There's such a contradiction, with my one son always being a water baby and wanting to do this, and my other son drowning 10 years ago. I'm anxious, excited, and tearful."

Having lost his younger brother to the water a decade ago, Craig was determined to do this swim "to turn tragedy into hope". He did it in his brother's honour and to make sure that his swim could prevent others from drowning. Braving the cold water and currents, Craig swam relentlessly for 13 hours and 16 minutes, arriving in France on Wednesday at 17:08.

For each stroke he took between England and France, Craig hoped that money would be raised to teach adults and children to survive and thrive in the water.

The money was raised through Craig's newly established Brett Nerwich Swimming Fund to enable less fortunate youngsters to have life-saving swimming lessons and to help the National Sea Rescue Institute's drowning prevention campaign. Craig wrote on his crowdfunding page, "The glaring irony of the situation is that the very thing that took my brother's life is the very thing that makes me feel so alive."

In an interview with Howard Feldman on ChaiFM last week, Craig said: "I always knew that I wanted to do this swim for something other than my own personal gain. We're raising money to be able to help people whether it's children, whether it's adults, to learn how to survive in the water, not to learn how to swim necessarily."

He also said: "I think that it's important for my kids growing up to be able to see what it is to identify and train for a goal."

With his drive, determination, humility, and humour, Craig also managed to unite the South African Jewish community and people all over the world, who watched transfixed from the early hours of 23 August as he powered across the Channel.

Following the path of his support boat, which displayed a South African flag, the red dots showing his journey seemed to grow by the second. As a proud South African, Craig wore nothing but a Speedo and swimming cap decorated with the South African flag. He remained in good spirits, cracking jokes and drinking protein shakes in the water.

He swam in darkness, through sunrise and into daylight, with his devoted wife, Daniella, on the boat beside him. Losing her voice and enduring sea sickness, she told her husband that many people were following his journey with bated breath. Hundreds sent messages of support, from classrooms of children to working professionals, all drawn into the magic and inspiration of the ocean crossing. Work and lessons ground to a halt as they followed the swim.

Not only an inspiring swimmer, many messages reflected that Craig is an inspiring leader and support to others. Fellow athlete Lauren Friedman says she's part of a group who trained for a Robben Island crossing 10 years ago. "Most of the people had never swum that much before. Craig was instrumental in getting us all to swim. After the swim, he mailed me and said I should do Ironman Durban with him. Without Craig pushing me, I wouldn't be the triathlete I am today. Many of the group, including Kiki Marx [who later swam the Channel], can say that."

The resilience that Craig brought to the swim

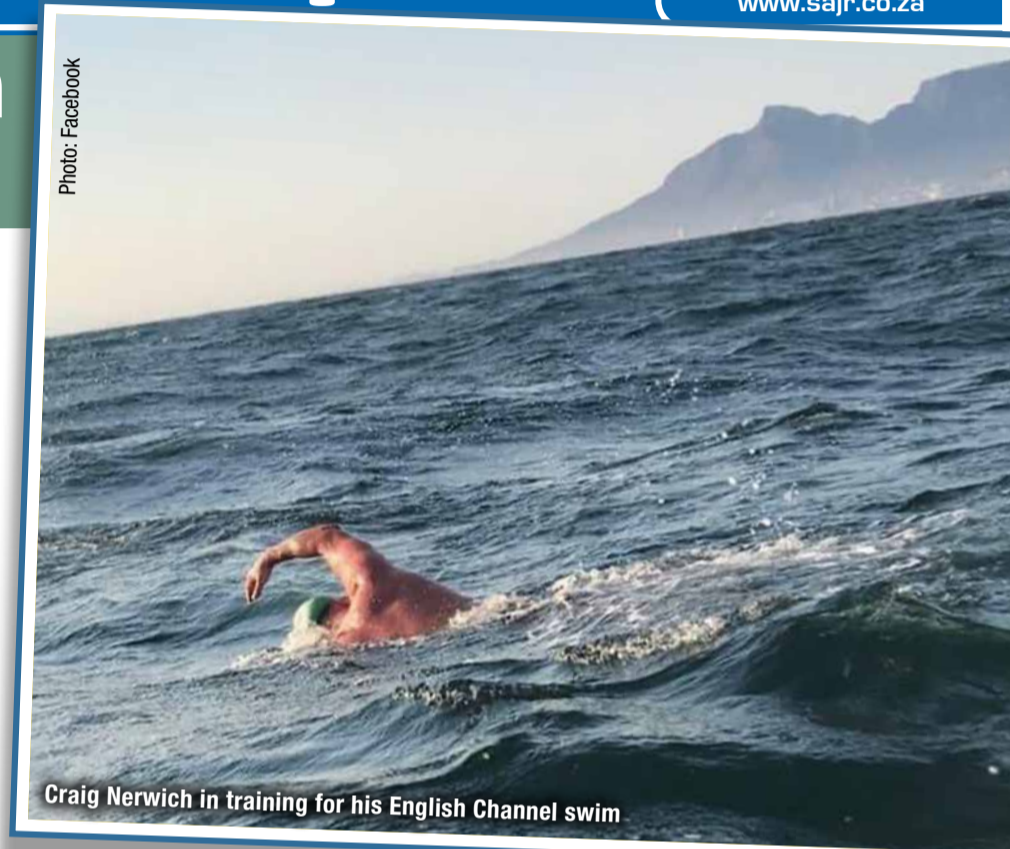


Photo: Facebook

Craig Nerwich in training for his English Channel swim

began building long ago, when his family faced tragedy after his younger brother, Brett, was knocked down by a drunk driver on holiday in Durban, at the age of six. Brett was in hospital for three months, far from home, and then had a tracheotomy in his neck for 13 years. After the accident, Brett had special needs, but managed to live a full life, loved by friends and family, including Craig.

"Those were his formative years when his friends were learning to swim, and it was just too dangerous for Brett," recalls Maxine. Brett eventually learned very basic swimming skills.

But 10 years ago, tragedy struck again, and Brett, who had fought so hard to live, died in a freak drowning accident at a dam in Cape Town on a day out with his other brother, Rus, and friends.

"On 24 November 2013, Craig did his first Robben Island swim, and we all met him on the

beach," says Maxine. "It was the last time Craig would see Brett. Exactly a month later, Brett was on a rubber duck [boat], which the wind flipped over in the middle of the dam, and he wasn't a strong swimmer. He drowned, and it took divers a long time to find his body. It would have been his 40th birthday this year. Today, I know Brett is behind Craig for every stroke."

Maxine says Craig always loved the water, and Brett's accident didn't undermine this.

In recent years, Craig has delved even further into his love of extreme sport, grabbing life with both hands. From being a smoker five years ago, he quit, and is now an extreme athlete. He has swum Robben Island crossings, including swimming the distance three times in one go; has swum around Madagascar; completed an Iron Man triathlon; and run Comrades Marathons. In

**Continued on page 13 >>**



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**Maestro's prosthetic nose not antisemitic, says ADL**

The Anti-Defamation League has agreed with Leonard Bernstein's family: Bradley Cooper's prosthetic nose in the upcoming *Maestro* biopic isn't an antisemitic portrayal of the celebrated Jewish conductor.

"Throughout history, Jews were often portrayed in antisemitic films and

propaganda as evil caricatures with large, hooked noses. This film, which is a biopic on legendary conductor Leonard Bernstein, isn't that," the group, which monitors and responds to antisemitism, wrote in a statement first published by *TMZ* on 21 August.

The American Jewish Committee also sent the celebrity news site a statement defending Cooper, writing, "We don't believe that this depiction harms or denigrates the Jewish community."

After the film's trailer dropped last week, criticism erupted over Cooper's apparent prosthesis. Some said Cooper's appearance was redolent of antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish noses, while

others went further and said it was a literal embodiment of "Jewface", a critical phrase that has come to refer to portrayals of Jews by non-Jewish actors.

"It happens



Bradley Cooper as Leonard Bernstein

Photo: Jose Perez Bauer-Griffin GC Images

to be true that Leonard Bernstein had a nice, big nose," a statement by Bernstein's three children read. "Bradley chose to use makeup to amplify his resemblance, and we're perfectly fine with that. We're also certain that our dad would have been fine with it as well."

**Jewish groups back gun restrictions for domestic abusers**

Following the United States Supreme Court's announcement that it would consider a major case on Second Amendment rights (the right of people to keep and bear arms), Jewish groups are joining an effort to back gun-rights restrictions for people convicted of domestic violence.

Jewish Women International, an organisation which supports women who have suffered domestic abuse, is leading an amicus brief that includes the organisations representing Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox rabbis, along with several interfaith organisations, in the case *United States versus Rahimi* that will examine whether a law prohibiting people under domestic violence restraining orders from owning firearms is a violation of the Second Amendment, which says the right to gun ownership "shall not be infringed". Gun-control advocates worry that the court's rightward tilt, combined with its willingness to hear the case at all, could point to a ruling that overturns the law.

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## Battle hardened



Rabbi Rodney Richard, Emmarentia Shul

Every year, at the beginning of the month of Elul, we read the Torah portion of Ki Teitzei, which starts with the words, "When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hands..."

Many of the commentaries highlight that, more than merely referring to a physical war, this verse alludes to a spiritual battle – our internal battle against the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), which presents us with the harmful desires and distractions we face on the journey of life. This would, indeed, explain the use of the singular, "deliver him into your hands".

Each of us has our inner battle to wage. For some of us, it may have been the same battle, striving to overcome the same weaknesses for many years. For others, it may be different challenges in different stages of life. But one thing is certain – we all fight, we all struggle, and we all wage an inner battle.

To accomplish and achieve in life, we must be willing to fight. Our dreams and aspirations won't materialise without strife and difficulty. As Ethics of the Fathers records Ben Hei Hei as saying, "According to the effort is the reward" or, as we would say, "No pain, no gain."

In this month of Elul, we reflect on our achievements and the shortcomings of the past year. Too often, we fail to reach our goals simply because we stopped fighting when life got tough. When we got knocked down, we failed to rise again. Show me the verse in Torah which promises us an easy life!

We must remind ourselves that our nemesis, the *yetzer hara*, appears in many guises. This would

explain the plural form, "enemies", in the above-quoted verse. Perhaps as feelings of apathy and complacency that creep in and multiply? Perhaps as self-doubt, taunting us that we can't?

We must realise that just as Hashem as resourced the *yetzer hara*, he has adequately provided for the *yetzer tov* (good inclination) as well. We have the divine tools at our disposal to accomplish and succeed. More than that, we have the greatest ally, as we read in last week's portion, "For it's Hashem, your G-d, who marches with you to do battle for you against your enemy, to bring you victory."

Notwithstanding the enemies lurking on all fronts and in all forms, and, notwithstanding the obstacles we must overcome at every turn, if we persevere down the path of personal accomplishment and self-growth, Hashem will deliver our enemies into our hands. It's Hashem's promise to us!

This Elul and beyond, as we gird ourselves with our battle gear of Torah and *mitzvos*, let us, most importantly, not forget our shield of faith. Let us put our trust in Hashem as we march side by side onto the battleground.

May you all be inscribed and sealed for a good and sweet new year!

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The Torah specifies that one must pay one's worker on the day that he completes his work. One should complete mitzvot on the day the opportunity to fulfil them arises. The Torah recognises that a worker is often in urgent need of his wages. To postpone paying him may cause him distress. By keeping this mitzvah, we train ourselves to be compassionate and kind.

# Israeli holidaying in SA coordinates Ethiopian rescue mission

NICOLA MILTZ

Shay Felber was holidaying in Cape Town when violent clashes intensified between the Ethiopian army and Fano militia in Ethiopia’s Amhara province two weeks ago, leaving many Israelis stranded and desperate for help.

As the director of the Aliya and Absorption Unit of the Jewish Agency, it put an abrupt halt to Felber’s family holiday.

Israeli citizens, Ethiopian *olim*, and Israeli volunteers being evacuated from Gondar in Ethiopia’s Amhara province



He soon found himself involved in dramatic and courageous rescue efforts to evacuate about 200 Israelis, including those eligible for aliya whose lives were in peril.

“I was at the V&A Waterfront when I received a call from my staff in Jerusalem saying that the situation was intensifying in the region and we needed to make an urgent plan,” Felber told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

Amhara, Ethiopia’s second most populous region has been gripped by instability since April, when federal authorities moved to disarm Amhara’s security forces following the end of the devastating two-year war in the neighbouring Tigray region. Authorities last year also tried to dismantle the informal Amhara militia known as Fano.

According to reports, the fighting that broke out became Ethiopia’s most serious security crisis since the devastating civil war in Tigray, which ended in November, a deal brokered by the African Union in Pretoria.

The increasing volatility of the situation led to Ethiopia’s

government declaring a six-month state of emergency in Amhara, the country’s second-largest region, on 4 August, following days of clashes between the military and local Fano militia. It gave the government the power to impose curfews, restrict movement, and ban gatherings.

Felber, who was the Jewish Agency *shaliach* (emissary) in South Africa back in 2003, immediately set to work with his staff in Israel and on the ground in the northern Ethiopian

city of Gondar.

“There were three groups of people needing urgent assistance: Israeli citizens of Ethiopian origin who were visiting; *olim* who were in the process of making aliya; and Israeli volunteers from our Project Ten centre who do community work there,” he said.

“Although the situation appears to be calmer now, at the time we had no idea how things would play out and how long the clashes would continue, so it was an emergency and we had to rush to evacuate those in potential danger,” he said.

A situation room was set up in Jerusalem and in Gondar, and the Israeli foreign ministry put out a travel advisory urging all Israelis in the region to take shelter.

“There had been fighting across the region, flights to Gondar were suspended, the internet was down, there was little to no water, no electricity, and very little food. Following the state of emergency, I was told the streets were empty,” said Felber.

He said the complex rescue effort involved a massive team effort

including the Jewish Agency along with the Israeli prime minister’s office, the foreign affairs ministry, the Israeli embassy in Ethiopia, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Aliya and Integration, and the Ethiopian government.

“We approached the Ethiopian government to allow us to have an humanitarian corridor to transport our people to the airport to get them to Addis Ababa as fast as possible.

“The roads were dangerous, and it would have been about a 15-hour journey to get from Gondar to Addis Ababa, so the only way was by air. The government agreed to assist with security, but it was a difficult situation. We really didn’t know how long the fighting would last, so we did everything in our power to save the people.”

After a few days of clashes, there was the sense that things were calming down which allowed the government to secure the airport in Gondar for a few hours during a ceasefire to allow planes to land and take off.

“We had to act fast in the middle of the night to gather everyone together to be ready to fly as soon as we got the go-ahead. The evacuees gathered at the local synagogue at the Jewish Community Centre in Gondar and a nearby hotel. There was a small window of opportunity. From there, they were transported to the airport by a couple of buses protected along the way by security forces. Four planes landed one after the other to rescue the Israelis and get them out of Gondar to the capital.”

In the space of a few days, he said, Israel arranged to extract about 200 citizens.

According to a joint statement by the prime minister’s office and the foreign ministry, Israel rescued 174 Israelis and Ethiopians eligible to immigrate from Gondar in Amhara, home to thousands of Ethiopians waiting for permission to move to Israel.

Another 30 Israelis were rescued from Amhara’s capital city, Bahir Dar.

“It was a tense few days,” said Felber. “This rescue mission is what the Jewish Agency is all about. It’s

our obligation to save Jewish lives. Eighty years ago there was no-one to save Jews, now there’s the state of Israel. The Jewish Agency is responsible for Jewish life around the world, especially in cases of emergency where we need to be on the forefront of helping them. So we put all our weight behind taking these people out of a danger zone.” Felber points out that 15 000 Ukrainians have also been rescued and are being absorbed in Israel.

Jewish Agency Chairperson Major General Doron Almog said Jewish Agency staff were on the ground from the beginning, working with teams in Israel to ensure the safety of the Jews in Gondar, including volunteers from the Project Ten centre.

“We initiated this rescue operation

as part of our shared commitment and strong dedication to our people. We won’t break our promise; we won’t abandon any Jew who needs our help on the ground,” said Almog.

Meanwhile hundreds of protesters rallied in Jerusalem a few days after the successful evacuation to demand that the Israeli government bring in more immigrants from Ethiopia, where thousands of people with Jewish roots remain at risk from the armed conflict.

The protesters are demanding further flights amid what they described as life-threatening conditions for thousands of people with Jewish roots in northern Ethiopia.

It’s a complicated and controversial situation, according to stakeholders.



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# ‘Too quiet,’ say Zim Jews on eve of elections

TALI FEINBERG

“I don’t know why, but I have a sinking feeling that there’s going to be some sort of uproar if the results don’t go as planned,” says a young mother and member of the Harare Jewish community in Zimbabwe. “Maybe because it’s so quiet that I have that feeling ... like the lull before the storm.” She was speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on the eve of the Zimbabwean elections on 23 August.

The *SA Jewish Report* agreed to withhold her name and that of others in light of Zimbabwe’s new law banning criticism of the government, which President Emmerson Mnangagwa signed into law in mid-July. Violators run the risk of up to 20 years in prison.

“Security is a concern now. We all hope that once it’s all over, we’ll carry on as normal,” says a Jewish community leader. “Will the losing side accept the results? How will it react, and when will it settle down? However, nothing specifically concerns the Jewish community.” He planned to vote on election day.

Zimbabweans voted to elect councillors, members of parliament, and a president. If there was no outright winner in the presidential contest, a run-off would be held six weeks later. The contest is likely to be between presidential incumbent Emmerson Mnangagwa from the governing Zanu-PF party, and opposition leader Nelson Chamisa from the Citizen’s Coalition for Change. Analysts expect a tense election amid entrenched poverty, high cost of living, inflation, power cuts, and other shortages.

“In all honesty, it doesn’t even feel like there is an election tomorrow,” the young mother said. “I’m sure those in the low density and rural areas are feeling it a lot more than we are, but it’s all quiet here, and we don’t get the feeling that many are even interested this time round. I feel like everyone is so bored with the same dialogue yet again. The millions of posters for all parties that litter the walls and lampposts look and feel as deflated as most of us. The old question, ‘Why bother?’ is on so many people’s lips.

“People are hungry, and empty promises don’t feed families,” she says. “The opposition should win – it has the support, but Zanu-PF has the intimidation. According to everyone you ask, it’s all rigged already. They’ve made stupid rules like you have to wear a mask



Incumbent Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa

Photo: Facebook

to vote, so you turn up to vote and you’ll be turned away.”

A Jewish woman who lives near Victoria Falls says, “I’m still here. I reckon I’ll be the last to turn the lights out! Elections in Zimbabwe seem to have been met mostly with resignation about the inevitable likelihood of the same old, same old. Where we are is incredibly peaceful, but that’s also normal. I’ve heard of some instances of intimidation and brutality in other rural areas, but to be honest, in our environment, we’re unlikely to hear or see anything unless we read about it in the media. We probably don’t understand or appreciate the fear that many others may have to

contend with.

“There has also been quite a bit in our media about alleged vote rigging. Our ruling party usually wins the rural vote – the largest element of our population – as they tend to vote only for peace and continuation of life as they know it. The opposition put more effort into the rural vote in these elections, so it will be interesting to see if it will make any difference this time.

“The majority of Zimbabweans are under the age of 40, and there was low registration turnout among the youth – apathetic after years of being brow beaten,” she

Continued on page 11>>

## Much bluster about BRICS, as countries vie to join

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



Traffic in Sandton will be more snarled up than usual this week because there are a lot of big *machers* in town. The Sandton Convention Centre is the venue for the 15th summit

of BRICS, the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Many leaders from the Global South – once disparagingly dubbed the “Third World” – have been invited. There will be presidents and ministers, businesspeople and advisors, and advisors to the advisors.

More than 40 countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS, with half of them having made formal applications to do so. Among those are Venezuela, Iran, and the “state” of Palestine. The bloc will wrestle with the question of who to admit and when.

One of the strands holding the extremely diverse members of the BRICS together is shared antipathy towards the United States (US) and its receding but still dominant global position. They want to reform the international system to

be more representative of developing countries. Or so they say. But their national interests are much more important than any altruistic desire to rebalance the globe’s power distribution more equitably.

Observers will be looking for something more than hot air, political theatre, and photo opportunities from the BRICS summit. The international calendar since COVID-19 has once again become clogged with leaders flitting across the planet. Russia, even sans Vladimir Putin, who is staying home, will no doubt use the meeting to demonstrate that it isn’t isolated in the international system, in spite of heavy Western sanctions. China, too, is flexing its diplomatic muscles as it gears up to challenge the hegemony of the US. Premier Xi Jinping is combining the summit with a state visit to South Africa, seeking to deepen ties between the two countries on every level. India will be careful not to be overshadowed by its two giant neighbours. With the re-election of “Lula” da Silva in Brazil, BRICS has found an avid supporter. For South Africa, BRICS membership validates its aspirations to be a country that matters in the world and it will want to put on a good show at the summit.

The BRICS members are reportedly divided on the question of expansion, however. China and Russia are enthusiastic supporters, seeing this as a way to project their power and influence. South Africa is also pro-expansion, with President Cyril Ramaphosa having said so in his live TV address on 20 August. India is less keen to dilute the exclusivity that BRICS offers in its current form, and Brazil is also cautious and reticent. It’s anyone’s bet which countries are the front-runners for admission.

The posture of BRICS is striking a chord among the many countries clamoring to get into this club. It isn’t entirely clear whether all or indeed any will be admitted to BRICS at this summit, as the five countries were still developing and debating admission criteria.


If states like Iran join, expect the tone and tenor of BRICS to become ever more radical from a country that makes no bones about its hatred for Israel and the West. If “Palestine” is somehow admitted, this will add to its quest for recognition as a sovereign state, bypassing direct negotiations with Israel (admittedly stalled for years now).

With South Africa in the chair, expect the bloated post-summit declaration to devote more attention to the plight of the Palestinians, in greater detail and with more inflammatory language than the last two (virtual) summits hosted by India and China in 2021 and 2022. The other BRICS countries – apart from South Africa – have managed to support the Palestinians but simultaneously maintain warm ties with the high-tech and dynamic economy that Israel has become over the past 20 years. They won’t let ideology stand in the way of lucrative business ties.

This is the third time South Africa is hosting the annual pow wow of the bloc, having done so in 2013 in Durban and 2018 in Sandton as well. It will surely be relieved that the prospect of having to arrest Putin has been averted by his non-attendance.

How will BRICS interface with the new African Continental Free Trade Agreement, a framework for increased trade and investment? Will there be significant progress in moving away from the US dollar for international trade? And what might expansion of BRICS mean to older clubs in the developing world like the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77, both of which will be chaired by Uganda in 2024? Hopefully we will have clearer indications as the sun sets on this summit.

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



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# Selfless doctor recovering from taxi strike attack

TALI FEINBERG

Dr Irwin Krombein (72) had worked in underprivileged Cape Town communities for decades, but that meant nothing to the mob of angry young men who stoned his car amidst the Cape Town taxi strike, leaving him with a hole in his skull that will need to be repaired using 3D printing technology.

The taxi strike lasted from 3 to 10 August, bringing the Mother City to a standstill and leading to widespread suffering across the metropole. Five lives were lost in opportunistic violence, and it’s a miracle that Krombein’s life was not added to that list.

“The people throwing stones, their intention wasn’t to damage my car but to hit me and kill me. This is obvious because the back of the car wasn’t touched, but the front windows were smashed by rocks and a brick. They also tried to break the windscreen but failed. They were vicious.” A bus was set alight on the same day and the same road as the one where Krombein was attacked.

Krombein, a Herzlia and University of Cape Town alumnus, says he went to work on Monday, 7 August, in the middle of the strike, believing there was no reason not to go, even though patients later told him that their own doctors hadn’t come into work which was why they were visiting him. He has been doing locum work as a general practitioner and family physician for 15 years at a medical facility in Mitchell’s Plain. For 30 years, he had his own practice in Bonteheuwel. On this particular day, he had a three-hour shift in the morning and another three-hour shift in the afternoon.

Between the two shifts, he set off for his

regular kidney dialysis. “I came to a police roadblock and they directed me to go back to Mitchell’s Plain. I did so, and my GPS then directed me on an alternative route towards town, onto Govan Mbeki Drive. I soon saw rocks, burning tyres, and possibly a burned-out car. I saw one guy come towards me with a rock, and yelled “Stop!”, which he did. But after that, I was like a fish to a shark. Others came and pelted my car with brick-sized rocks and a brick.”

Krombein was unaware that he had been struck on the head, and managed to keep driving to a police roadblock, where his car was towed. His memories are hazy, but at some point, his car key was stolen in the chaos. He was taken home, and convinced his wife to take him to his dialysis. But when he got there, the doctor advised him to go to hospital, which he did.

“I had x-rays which showed I had a depressed comminuted skull fracture. This means the bone has broken into pieces and displaces inwards. These injuries usually result from blunt-force trauma. I was admitted, and saw a neurosurgeon. I was taken to theatre the next morning, where they did their best to clean the wound, but it was contaminated with dirt and so on.”

He was in hospital for a few days and has since been at home. He has had his stitches out and the next step is more x-rays, after which doctors will use 3D printing technology to fill the gap in his skull. He says he hasn’t felt much pain as the medication he has been given has been sufficient.

He plans to return to work soon. “I don’t scare easily. Everything is quiet on the Western front, so I will return.” He will go in an Uber as he now doesn’t have a car, and

hopes to resume his normal routine. However, he admits to being more disillusioned with the country than before the incident, as is his wife. He believes the attack was a “very bad signal” of simmering anger under the surface of South African society that erupts in moments of disquiet.

Born and raised in Cape Town, Krombein first went into pharmacy, but then switched to medicine, getting his medical degree in 1975



Dr Irwin Krombein

and doing his internship at Groote Schuur Hospital. For the next nine years, he worked at various hospitals. He also spent a year as a radiology registrar at the University of the Witwatersrand.

In 1985, he opened his practice in Bonteheuwel, which he had for three decades.

In 2005, he obtained a Masters’ Degree in Family Medicine from the University of Stellenbosch, which was awarded with honours. He was a part-time member of staff of the department of family medicine at the University of Stellenbosch from 2003 until 2006, and served as a tutor and examiner of third and final-year students.

He has also worked part-time for the outpatient and emergency departments of various Cape Town hospitals, and in England as a resident medical officer. He spent six years practicing in Ireland from 2007 until 2012, gaining experience in emergency after-hours medicine as well as general practice and family medicine.

“I’ve known Irwin since nursery school,” says fellow Capetonian Gilad Stern. “He’s been my oldest friend since the age of four. At university, he had a broad range of friends from all backgrounds, and he’s had a practice for many years in an underprivileged area. He’s dedicated to his patients and their health. I’ve seen him get people admitted to hospital when circumstances were difficult. He’s very thorough, always taking the time and the trouble, even if they don’t have the money to do basic tests.”

Stern was shocked by the news of Krombein’s attack. He says his friend went through a lot during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has had a tough time with his health, but has bounced back after every hurdle.

“He continues to practice in his 70s. He’s done it with dedication and commitment for all these years. It’s admirable.”

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## Unsung heroes

When people take risks to save lives, they are heroes. They may escape public exposure or even the notice of their friends and family, but that doesn’t diminish their incredible selflessness.

A hero is defined as a person of “distinguished courage or ability, admired for his or her brave deeds and noble qualities”. I believe someone who isn’t known for those deeds is just as much – if not more – of a hero.

On Tuesday, my former colleague, Derek Watts, who I worked with for seven and a half years at *Carte Blanche*, passed away from cancer.

There are many who would call Derek a hero because week in and week out, he would publicly challenge the bad guys on M-Net’s weekly current affairs and investigative programme. When people were duped, betrayed, conned, or harmed, he would go in and fight the good fight for justice. And he always did it with a friendly smile on his face and a ready throaty laugh, but nevertheless holding the baddy to account.

People may have feared Ruda Landman, Derek’s erstwhile co-presenter on *Carte Blanche*, arriving at their doorstep, knowing if they had done wrong, it wouldn’t end well. However, they didn’t fear Derek, believing him to be their buddy. Derek would appear to be just that, remaining charming throughout the interview, but he still always got the baddies tied up in knots on camera, and justice was always seen to be done.

Derek had a clear sense of right and wrong, and took on the challenge of outing those who had crossed the line. He did it because he believed that doing the right thing and justice should prevail in this country for all South Africans.

To many, he was a people’s hero. And wherever Derek went, people would stop him, even in the middle of a difficult conversation or meeting. Derek would never embarrass people, especially those who just wanted to rub shoulders with him. He would stop and give them time before getting back to his sometimes not-so-patient colleagues, friends, etcetera. Yes, I was often one of those, and I have to admit that I marvelled at the way Derek always made time for strangers.

Derek was a guest on one of our most popular *SA Jewish Report* webinars, about his aunt, Sylvia Raphael, who was a South African-born Mossad superspy.

She was known to have operated in Cairo; Mogadishu; Asmara; Djibouti; Beirut; Amman; and Damascus. In fact, she is said to have replaced Eli Cohen in Damascus, an agent who infiltrated the top echelon of the Syrian government and was publicly hanged in 1965.

Sylvia was a heroine, many of whose courageous deeds will never be revealed, but they were all done to help the Jewish state and its people.

In this week’s story, which goes behind the scenes of Israel’s most recent Ethiopian rescue operation (page 5), there were numerous heroes. They did what they did to save the lives of about 200 Israelis and Ethiopians eligible for aliya. Will we ever truly know what each hero did to save lives? It’s unlikely, but if one of them made the wrong move, it might have been detrimental to the whole operation. For them, it may well have been another day at work.

Dr Irwin Krombein is a hero (page 7). A medical doctor who has focused on helping underprivileged Cape Town communities, the doctor didn’t think twice about heading out to help people in Mitchell’s Plain in the middle of the taxi strike earlier this month. It was in between shifts that he was attacked on the road by protesters. They didn’t care that he had effectively risked his life to give medical care to people during the strike when so many doctors and medical staff stayed home. They didn’t ask.

Craig Nerwich is also a hero (page 1). Craig, who loves extreme swimming, lost his brother in a drowning accident. While this was devastating for him and his family, Craig decided to get something positive out of it by swimming the English Channel in his brother’s name.

Not only did he do it to honour his brother, but to raise money to enable underprivileged children to get essential swimming lessons. Funds raised will also go towards the National Sea Rescue Institute’s drowning prevention campaign. The most recent statistics show that more than 1 500 people drown in South Africa every year, which works out to about four people a day.

If the money that Craig raises can prevent even just 10 drownings a year – and hopefully it will be more – that’s 10 lives saved. How many of us can say we have saved 10 lives? What a hero! No wonder so many within our community have bought into his passionate swim for life.

It was a privilege to be included in a WhatsApp group set up to follow Craig’s swim. It was so evident how this man has inspired so many with his swim. It was beautiful!

Heroes have a way of inspiring us, but so many go unsung.

For example, I look at our own journalists, who take risks to ensure that we bring you the story. You’re never told about the volatile events they brave, you simply hear what happened there because the reporter isn’t the story, we simply tell it.

I know we all know of the incredible work that Hatzolah does, but we never hear about the one volunteer who risked life and limb to save a person’s life.

Heroes truly don’t do the right thing or take risks for the *kavod*, they do it because they want to and because for them, it’s the right thing to do.

The truth is, we have many heroes in our community. And they are inspired by others to go the extra mile.

This weekend, when many of us will gather at Limmud, we’ll hear inspirational stories about heroes. I look forward to seeing you there.

Shabbat shalom!  
Peta Krost  
Editor



## Opposition partnership worth the gamble

OPINION

TONY LEON



Some years back, I was invited to Emperors Palace in Kempton Park to address a business conference. It took prodigious feats of imagination to remember that this glitzy casino had, in its previous life, as the jerry-built and misnamed “World Trade Centre” been the venue for the constitutional negotiations which birthed democratic South Africa.

Outside the gaming areas, a few heroic sepia-tinged photographs of Nelson Mandela and other delegates to the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) were dotted. Of course, CODESA collapsed shortly after commencing business in May 1992. After massacres and violence, mass action, and much off-site bargaining and arm-twisting or worse, proceedings recommenced in April 1993. The less grandiose titled “multi-party negotiation forum” had succeeded by November 1993 in fashioning an interim Constitution and the transitional arrangements which bridged the old and new orders.

I was reflecting on the clashing dramas and often endless haggling and multiple visits to the free bar and buffets – generously funded by the unsuspecting taxpayer – interspersed with bouts of goodwill and enmity in which as a delegate to those proceedings more than three decades ago I had been an engaged participant.

Last week, the same venue was chosen as a site for the birth of the multi-party charter and the new opposition collaboration to provide South Africans with the prospect of a more unified opposition and the prospect of a governing alternative to the African National Congress (ANC).

This isn’t the first attempt to rationalise the disunified opposition corner of the country, but certainly the urgency of building a bloc which can compete for power in 2024 has never been more apparent.

A recent report on state collapse here commenced with this bleak description: “The country continues to be hit by socio-economic crises including persistent loadshedding; slow economic growth; high joblessness and a rising cost of living; systemic corruption; violent crime; stubborn inequality; and deepening poverty.”



To this bill of indictment – and core to the cause of state failure – could be added, erratic, inefficient, and biased rule-of-law application; persistence in ruinous policies, from cadre deployment to black economic empowerment; and deep government hostility at home to minorities and the private sector and abroad to the West and its allies.

The grim prospects facing South Africa and imperilling its future should make the opposition’s ability to win next year’s poll about as easy as Lionel Messi scoring a goal. But for reasons of history, race, and legacy, and the chronic dependence of more than twenty million South Africans for monthly government grants, it’s less so.

Still, the best outcome of last week is that, at least for disillusioned voters and crucially the commentating class here, the opposition gets some crucial momentum, it places the ANC on the backfoot, and, provided the next steps of getting

more parties to sign up happens, offers new hope.

Beyond the allure of history, the choice of a casino for opposition talks next month is also rich in a range of possibilities: “a massive gamble”; “the house always wins”; “staking it all on black”; “hit the jackpot”; and “go for broke” are just some of the options.

Four of the participating parties have some significant political real estate – the Democratic Alliance, Inkatha Freedom Party, Action SA, and Freedom Front Plus – and three are very obscure. Still, the unified imaging which emerged last week is intended to serve as a spur to others beyond the embrace of the ANC and Economic Freedom Fighters to climb aboard.

An old political hand once told me, early on in my career, that “the first law of politics is to be present”. That makes the decision, to date anyway, of start-up party Rise Mzansi not to attend the talks a curious one. Songezo Zibi’s new movement has apparently attracted significant funding and some smart advisors. But to the wider public, it remains an unknown entity with a largely unknown bench of leaders. And though it might tick some imaginative boxes, to suggest, as its leader does, that the movement is neither anti-ANC nor pro-opposition but in favour of a new politics for the country can be simultaneously over sophisticated and quite naïve. South Africa isn’t France awaiting its Emmanuel Macron moment, not that he is much of a role model these days.

The outcomes of the August summit might indeed be modest or inconclusive. A set of common values and principles, a joint plan of action, and some agreed priorities for a new coalition government or even a joint presidential candidate – that should be quite a bunfight given some of the egos around the table – are some of the early steps.

However, it will be about the appearance of co-operation and offering the disillusioned opposition voter, especially those who have opted out of the political process entirely, the glimpse of an imagined post-ANC future. And its possible attainment. That in itself can create a following wind or political momentum to drive the opposition turnout in 2024 to new heights. And the first steps can pave the road to a consolidated opposition which can genuinely challenge for power. But it requires careful management and deft execution.

Thirty or so years back, when Emperors Palace was still the World Trade Centre and the original CODESA talks had collapsed, I was on a visit to Washington D.C., filled with grave doubt about whether there would be in South Africa a peaceful and successful resumption of the stalled constitutional negotiations. I was introduced to Dr Chester Crocker. His painstaking efforts as US assistant secretary for African affairs between 1981 and 1989 led the diplomacy that produced the

treaties signed between Angola, South Africa, and Cuba in 1998 which led to Namibian independence in March 1990, then seen as one of the most difficult strategic challenges in the world.

After I expressed my pessimism to Crocker on the same achievement being likely in South Africa, he counselled, “Get the process right, and process can overcome the most difficult problems.”

He was entirely correct, as the resumed and more realistic talks which commenced months later at Kempton Park proved. Let’s hope that the same care and spirit on both process and outcome accompanies the new talks next month in Kempton Park. For the democratic health and continuity of the country, it’s a gamble worth taking.

• Tony Leon is the founding leader of the Democratic Alliance, the longest serving leader of the official opposition in Parliament since the advent of democracy, and a former ambassador. He is chairperson of a communications company.



**ANDREW LEVY**

The right to peaceful protest is one of the foundations of democracy, and for the past eight months in Israel, there have been daily protests against the judicial reforms sought by the governing coalition. These have at times rallied up to 250 000 people. There have been counter protests, but by and large, though protesters have sought to disrupt normal daily life by blocking highways and the like, as far as I'm aware, there have been minimal acts of violence, damage to property, and heaven forbid, loss of life.

democratic society.

Many will sympathise with citizens who see this as an attack on democracy. It's easy to point out many historical examples of what can happen in a society where this separation has been done away with. Many will give the subsequent acts of protest moral approval, but it's doubtful if this could survive should violence and destruction of property follow in its wake.

- With more than 45 years of experience, Andrew Levy is recognised as an expert commentator and advisor on employment and labour legislation.



HARRY JOFFE

A Saudi-Israel normalisation agreement would anchor Saudi Arabia securely back in the Western camp and bring it closer to the US. US-Saudi relations have long been strained, particularly after Biden called the Saudis a pariah state in his 2020 election campaign. The US bringing a major deal between Israel and the Saudis to conclusion would also show that it's still invested in the Middle East, and it has become important for the US, as the world's superpower, to be able to complete an even bigger deal than China in the region.

Photo: Chinese Foreign Ministry/  
Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

**Saudi Arabian national security adviser  
Musaid Al Aiban, Chinese Foreign Minister  
Wang Yi, and Iranian security official  
Ali Shamkhani in June 2023**

More importantly, and back to the diplomatic front, normalisation would be a “geopolitical game changer” for Israel, to quote many writers on the topic. Due to the Saudis’ special status in the Arab world, it would

All three parties have realised that time is running out. From 2024, the US presidential campaign will be in full swing, with little time and effort left for the Biden administration to commit to concluding a deal.

**Continued on page 10>>**

The image is a 2x2 grid of photographs showing modern high-rise apartment buildings in Israel. The top-left photo shows a tall, cylindrical building in Jerusalem at dusk. The top-right photo shows a cluster of modern buildings in Ir Yamim, Netanya. The bottom-left photo shows a modern building with a large glass facade and a rooftop garden in Tel Aviv. The bottom-right photo shows a modern building with a curved facade and balconies in Ra'anana.



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## SECURING YOUR FUTURE IN ISRAEL

# Women’s dialogue gives voice to silent stories

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Reflecting how words are either muted, used to empower, or destroy, a panel of women from diverse backgrounds participated in a women’s dialogue hosted at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC) last week.

Held in collaboration with the Nelson Mandela Museum, the Women’s Month event titled “Silent Voices” revealed the importance of communicating effectively. It allowed participants to speak openly about their experiences, ideas and learnings, and looked at the trials, traumas, and triumphs of women throughout history. Words matter, whether it’s about women’s experience of leadership, in the Holocaust or Rwandan genocide, or in confronting the challenges we face as a country in dealing with poverty, inequality, and how that relates to girls and women. Discussing this idea, Tracey Henry who serves on the board of trustees of the JHGC and is chief executive of Tshikululu Social Investments, stressed the importance of interrogating the words we use and hear.

“Words can have long-term consequences in terms of how we view our world and ourselves,” she said. “While the phrase ‘actions speak louder than words’ has relevance when we want to move beyond words and focus on outcomes, we need to spend more time reflecting, listening, and being cognisant of what’s being said, the words we use, and the consequences thereof.”

When it comes to women’s liberation, she said, we need to provide spaces for meaningful, constructive, and healing dialogue to support women to talk through issues of inequality, discrimination, prejudice, racism, abuse, and violence. “We need to ensure that vulnerable voices aren’t silenced, and that we recognise these experiences to heal individually and as a nation.”

Baleka Mbete, the chairperson of the board of the National Liberation Heritage Institute of South Africa and former speaker of parliament, highlighted the leading female role players in history including the likes of political activist Charlotte Maxeke, who fought for freedom from exploitation and improved social conditions for African women.

“Women have never been silent,” she said. “History is loud about the role that women have played over the decades.” We need to learn from their example and celebrate their courage.

Mbete also highlighted the inherent anti-war and anti-violent stance of women because they give birth to children, therefore focusing on bringing life into the world. “There’s no solution in a war because a solution that takes life isn’t a solution. Women contribute life in order to build life and take us forward constructively.”

Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa, a council member of the Nelson Mandela Museum and a professional coach, author, and strategic and operations leader, spoke of the challenges and experiences of women in leadership. “Sometimes we glamorize female leaders but we don’t engage with them in a reflective way,” she said.

Women in positions of power in fact navigate many challenges including environments in which they feel unsafe or where they are voluntarily or involuntarily silenced, especially in the boardroom, Songelwa said. “Because they want to fit into this square that has been created before

they came in, many women leaders end up facing imposter syndrome [feelings of inauthenticity] because of their desire to fit

women in the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide, Tali Nates, the founder and executive director of the JHGC, whose father was a Holocaust survivor saved by Oskar Schindler, said the JHGC was born of the need to look at the past and connect it to ourselves

Rwandan genocide. Among these is that of Johannesburg-based Holocaust survivor Wanda Helena Albińska, born Rotstein, whose mother, Halina Rotstein, was a young doctor when the Holocaust began.

Halina continued working as a doctor in the Warsaw Ghetto and smuggled out her four children to an orphanage to save their lives. She later died with her patients. Nates spoke of “the resilience of Wanda, who started to speak of this experience only 10 years ago because she said, ‘No-one knows of my mother’s bravery.’”

The cathartic power of sharing one’s story was exemplified by JHGC volunteer and mother of two, Christine Niwemfura, who initially didn’t have the words to describe what happened to her. The only member of her family to survive the Rwandan genocide, which began when she was eight years old, Niwemfura gave a harrowing first-hand account of witnessing her family’s brutal murders at the hands of machete-wielding militia. Niwemfura herself was left for dead.

In the lead-up to the genocide, being a

member of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, many of whom were ultimately murdered by the Hutu militia, was traumatising, she said. “I felt I wasn’t a human being.” After her family was killed, Niwemfura went into hiding, at one point in the bush, where she was found and attacked. She was ultimately taken to an orphanage, completed her schooling, moved to South Africa, and started a family.

“Telling my personal story to others helped me heal,” she said. “It’s also a way of honouring those who lost their lives in the genocide. We don’t want to forget them.”

Clinical psychologist and psychometrist Karyn Kadish, a volunteer at the JHGC, said that studying dark histories like the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide had deep psychological value. Learning of such atrocities, hearing personal stories, and connecting to the humanity of survivors and victims, while emotional, helps students to develop resilience and empathy, which encourages critical thinking.

“It’s believed that by learning about these events, we can help prevent future atrocities by raising awareness of hatred and intolerance,” said Kadish. “It’s a call to action to stand up to hatred and discrimination and foster tolerance in which every individual is respected and valued.”



Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa, Karyn Kadish, and Sizakele Shongwe



Christine Niwemfura

today. “By doing so, we learn lessons about resilience and how to be inspired by stories that we hear.”

Nates shared significant stories of survival from the Holocaust and the

## Interwar pogroms in Ukraine foreshadowed the Holocaust

STEVEN GRUZZD

Most historians consider the Holocaust to have started with Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 and to have ended after World War II in 1945. Research has revealed, however, that thousands of Jews died in violent pogroms (ethnic riots) in what is today Ukraine between 1918 and 1921, foreshadowing the tragedies to come.

This research was shared by History and Judaic Studies professor Jeffrey Veidlinger from the University of Michigan in a hybrid event on 17 August, co-hosted by the Jewish Democratic Initiative, Limmud, and the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town.

Veidlinger’s latest prize-winning book is *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918-1921 and the Onset of the Holocaust*. He explained how Russian territory was engulfed in a complex civil war between the communist Red Army, the White Army, nationalist groups such as the Ukrainian Nationalist Army, and with local gangs and militia also active in this period. His research has unearthed about 2 000 separate violent incidents in which approximately 100 000 Jews died in these four years.

The conventional view is that the Final Solution “came out of the blue”, said Veidlinger, and that the situation for Jews suddenly changed with the election of Hitler as führer in Germany in 1933. Veidlinger and his research team travelled regularly to the shtetls and towns of Ukraine between 2001 and 2010 to interview elderly Yiddish speakers. “They remembered the violence and mass murder that took place before the Holocaust, 20 years before Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union,” he said. “This shows that the Holocaust wasn’t the first time that systematic, genocidal violence was unleashed on the Jews.”

About 90% of Jews were urbanised, while just 10% of

the general Ukrainian population lived in cities and towns. Jews were shopkeepers, barbers, tailors, and other artisans, while the non-Jewish Ukrainians were overwhelmingly rail-workers, peasants and farmers. These socio-economic divides made Jews targets as it was believed they had money, gold, and jewels in the desperate wartime conditions. It built upon centuries of antisemitism and a long history of pogroms.

Veidlinger showed video interviews with survivors of this period, who spoke about their families being murdered and how as children they miraculously escaped death themselves. One pogrom lasted eight days in the Tulchyn district; others were over in a few hours. In Tulchyn, local thugs from surrounding farms murdered the shtetl’s Jews until a Polish priest convinced them to desist.

In Khmelnytskyi, the violence was concentrated into four hours, and was carried out by military units of the Ukraine National Army. Between 1 000 and 3 000 Jews were systematically killed. Historians have hundreds of documents filled out by local rabbis naming the murdered members of their congregations. Geographically, the pogroms occurred in wide areas across Ukraine.

“What came of these pogroms?” asked Veidlinger. “They have been almost forgotten today, but were much talked about in the 1920s and 1930s.” An article in the 1920s in

*The New York Times*, for instance, said these pogroms were the first step to eliminating the six million Jews in Poland and Ukraine. Jewish leaders went to Versailles in 1919 and succeeded in getting minority rights enshrined in the constitutions of Poland and Romania. “Of course, this didn’t work in protecting Jews. They did a lot, but it wasn’t enough” he said. This period also marked the emergence of the mass Zionist movement, and the emigration of millions of Jews from greater Russia, mainly to the United States. The latter resulted in a legislative clampdown on Eastern European emigrants by successive US governments. Veidlinger also showed how Jews were demonised in cartoons in this period. The charismatic Jewish Bolshevik, Leon Trotsky, was the face of the Red Army, and was depicted as evil, dirty, and bloodthirsty. Another cartoon showed the Red Army soldiers and sailors following Jesus Christ bearing his cross, reviving the false trope that Jews – equated with Bolsheviks – killed Christ. Jews and Bolsheviks were seen as one and the same. This helped rally support for the White Army.

The country was in turmoil. Jews moved to large cities like Moscow and St Petersburg, and about 500 000 Jews fled to Germany as they feared the spread of Bolshevism. “The Nazi Party was also an anti-immigrant party – this can be seen in their newspapers from the time,” Veidlinger said.

Tragically, he said, Ukraine today is again gripped in violence that begets more violence as political authority breaks down. Do we ever learn from history?



Jeffrey Veidlinger

## Israel-Saudi normalisation – a mirage or a new dawn?

>>>Continued from page 9

More importantly, if the US is to provide the Saudis with a formal security treaty, this needs to be ratified by the US Senate. Many commentators agree that if Biden brings such a treaty to the Senate now, the Democrats would probably support it, whatever their misgivings, so as to give their president a foreign policy boost going into the election campaign. A majority of the Republicans should probably as well, given what such a treaty would do for Israel, which the majority support. However, if such a treaty were ever to be brought in future by a Republican president, even though this would be less likely given their desire to be less committed to the Middle East, there’s a good chance the majority of Democratic senators wouldn’t support it due to their views on the Saudi human rights record – and some aren’t supporters of Israel either.

### What could go wrong?

This is by no means a done deal. With a complex three-party agreement such as this one, a lot can go wrong from all three sides.

The US might balk at the prospect of giving the Saudis a security guarantee as well as advanced weaponry, and Biden might well not get any deal through the Senate. A combination of Democrats opposed to the Saudis’ human rights record and Republicans wanting the US to pivot away from the Middle East and focus more on Asia might scupper

the deal. On the Israeli side, the purported concessions they will have to make in the territories might prove too much for Bibi, and even if he is happy to accept them, there’s a fair chance the more right-wing elements in his cabinet might not be. If the Israeli government falls over this, it would only delay and impede any progress. Then, of course, there’s fear in Israel about any Saudi nuclear programme, even if only civilian, as well as the advanced weaponry the Saudis will want. The Saudis, for their part, might decide that what they stand to gain from any deal isn’t enough to make them commit, given that they already enjoy some military ties with Israel, although these are “in the shadows”. Particularly if the US refuses/is unable to grant them a full security treaty, they might think that they are giving up too much and getting too little in return.

Deals of this nature are complex at the best of times. Add in the fact that this one involves three parties, each with their own interests; a looming US presidential election; a coalition government in Israel which might not survive the required concessions; a Saudi government with high demands and expectations; and the agreement just got a whole lot more complex. The prospects of a deal are still good given the benefits to all three sides, but don’t bring out the (kosher) champagne just yet!

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.

# Miss SA chief to build army of empowered women

NICOLA MILTZ

The chief executive of Miss SA, Stephanie Weil, despises the “rehashed question” of whether beauty pageants hold relevance in today’s world.

“It’s the first question I get asked in every interview,” she said as if pre-empting the obvious.

Weil is the brains behind the SABC 3 reality television series, *Crown Chasers*, the first reality TV show in pageant history to showcase the real life and times of beauty contestants, offering a rare glimpse into their world.

“The show answers exactly why pageants are more relevant today than ever,” Weil told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“Beauty is being proud of who you are, it’s not about being this perfect Cindy Crawford anymore. The landscape has changed. To enter, you can be a mother, a wife. It’s inclusive and embracing. It’s about bigger women, women with cellulite and imperfections, and it’s ok. It’s about their story and what makes them tick,” said Weil, 33.

Having been at the helm of Miss SA for five years, Weil believes her role is among other things about making Miss SA more commercially viable than a one-night spectacle and extravaganza, and making the iconic brand more sustainable.

Last year, *Crown Chasers* gave a behind-the-scenes look at the build-up to the 2022 finale. This year, it was developed into a five-part reality series that grew in viewership each week as another contestant got kicked off at the end of each episode.

“I’m proud of what we achieved. We broke even for the pilot show, and there are talks of expanding it,” Weil said.

It’s been less than two weeks since Natasha Joubert was crowned the new Miss SA 2023 at the SunBet Arena at Time Square Casino in Pretoria, taking the reins from Ndavi Nokeri.

The 26-year-old BCom Marketing Management graduate, fashion designer, and owner of a fashion design company said she was humbled and grateful to win the title.

“Natasha is incredible. She’s like a prize after a long, hard year,” said Weil. “A lot goes into reshaping the brand, and it’s challenging,” said Weil.

When Weil met the *SA Jewish Report* this week, she was exhausted after contracting a cold in an action-packed few weeks of defying time and financial constraints.

“We filmed for 28 days nonstop, going straight into the finale, pulling it off in literally less than five days. It’s been insane,” said Weil, who has learnt many lessons along the way. One of these was to hire a production company next time, and not “take on the role of executive producer of a television show,” she said, conceding that she may have bitten off more than she could chew.



Stephanie Weil

However, she has been on a mission to develop Miss SA ever since she took over the brand in 2019, having learnt the ropes alongside her late mother, public relations and communications specialist Suzanne Weil, who bought into the brand in 2013.

“She had me working at registration desks from 13 years old and being there with her I don’t think I could’ve got better training,” she said.

Weil believes beauty is but one facet of a multidimensional Miss SA. “Miss SA doesn’t pretend to be someone she’s not, nor does she conform to societal pressures or expectations that go against her core values. Instead, I want her to embrace her unique qualities, quirks, and imperfections, understanding that these are what make her distinctive and real,” Weil says.

“It’s not just about reshaping beauty standards, it’s about unveiling the brilliance within each woman and lighting the way for a new generation of unstoppable leaders and ambassadors,” Weil says. Ultimately it’s

about empowerment and authenticity, she insists.

Weil knew she was onto something when shortly after she become chief executive of Miss SA, Zozibini Tunzi went on to win the title and became the first black woman from South Africa to be crowned Miss Universe.

“That was a definite career highlight,” said Weil. “Zozibini’s decision not to wear a weave during the pageant instantly inspired other women to embrace their natural hair and beauty. I could just see how she could make a huge difference in the world. It was the perfect time to witness a shift in the beauty narrative, and I could feel we were on the right track of what this empowerment movement could be.”

One of her career lows was having to face the possibility that *Crown Chasers* wasn’t going to materialise due to funding issues.

“I had been dreaming of this show for so long, and the very real possibility that it would all fall apart at the last minute was distressing,” she said.



Miss South Africa 2023  
Natasha Joubert and  
Stephanie Weil

Another career low was the bullying from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) lobby group during the controversial reign of Miss SA 2021, Lalela Mswane, who chose to participate in the Miss Universe pageant in Israel.



Miss South Africa 2020  
Shudufhadzo Musida  
and Stephanie Weil

“I think I’ve erased it from my memory because it was so traumatic,” Weil said. “The constant death threats and intimidation by members of BDS, who menacingly pitched up outside my offices – it was a lot. It required trauma counselling, and I was incredibly lucky to have the South African Jewish Board of Deputies on my side,” she said.

“I was determined to go ahead, not because Lalela wanted to, but because these people were encroaching on something that was personal – my religion and my strong Jewish roots, of which I’m proud, my Israel.

“I was never going to give up, I didn’t care how much pressure there was. Lalela was so strong, stronger than me at times. There were moments when I was like, ‘Let’s give up,’ and she was, ‘No, we’re in this, we’re doing this.’ She was so determined, she had worked so hard, she was strong from the word go. At the end of the day, it wasn’t only about me, it was about our community, it was about what it would say to them if I didn’t do it. It was about what I stand for.” But she admits she was terrified.

All that is behind her, as Weil soldiers on to champion authenticity as the essence of beauty. “My dream is to create an army of empowered women who are ready to go into battle and take the world by storm,” she says.

## ‘Too quiet,’ say Zim Jews on eve of elections

>>Continued from page 6

says. “My feeling is that the ruling party will win, but not with a vast majority and possibly with run-off elections. At the very best, we could hope for a government of national unity and undoubtedly, there will be disputes and some skirmishes post-election results, but I don’t envision major violence. I certainly don’t fear for my own safety where I live.” She cannot vote because she is out of the country at the moment.

A young Jewish entrepreneur who recently moved to Zimbabwe says, “I’m not overly concerned about violence, but there is a chance. I don’t think there’s any chance of change in these elections. The general feeling is that it’s just a formality.” He’s also unable to vote because he is travelling.

“They are saying the results will start filtering out on Friday [25 August], predicting the presidential votes will be out Monday [28 August],” says the young mother. She says violence might erupt at that point, or earlier if the opposition sees blatant vote rigging. She’s unable to vote as she is no longer living in her hometown and cannot travel there as she has a newborn baby.

However, she thinks the aging Jewish community of about 100 people across Zimbabwe will be safe. “I can’t see why there would be any issues unless they are politically involved. The small community left is here to stay, no matter what. I don’t believe there are any security risks [for the Jewish community] relating to these elections.”

Meanwhile, community members continue to go about their daily lives, keeping Yiddishkeit alive in spite of the small numbers. “In Harare, we hold Saturday morning shul services and lately, we have had fairly regular *minyanim*,” says the community leader. “There are a section of people who attend shul more regularly – mostly people above 60 years of age – and another section who don’t. The kiddush *brachot* following the Shabbat services are a regular social gathering for people attending services.

“I would estimate that at any one time we have in total between 40 to 50 Jewish people in Harare. I cannot speak for Bulawayo. People have been going about their normal daily lives, notwithstanding the very significant increase in prices in the past three months. Overall, there has been no significant change in the community.”

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# Will ‘new’ Bibi take Israel to the brink?

TALI FEINBERG

Seasoned Israeli journalist Allison Kaplan Sommer says the November 2022 election campaigns of Likud and other right-wing Israeli political parties didn’t allude to judicial reform, and the determination and speed of the coalition to entrench judicial reform has caught many observers by surprise. It has also led many of these parties’ voters to have second thoughts about who they put into power. “Israelis aren’t stupid, and they’re less than thrilled at the coalition’s attempt at judicial reform. If an election was held today, the current coalition would get 53 seats, not its current 64 seats in the Knesset,” she told a large audience at Limmud in Cape Town. “And the opposition would get 62 or 63 seats.” “How did we get here?” she asked rhetorically about the political turmoil in Israel. Ultimately, she said the longest-serving Israeli prime minister, Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu, brought himself back to the political stage to form the most extreme right-wing government in Israeli history. This was only possible because Bibi “put a kosher stamp” on parties that were previously seen as anathema to the Israeli electorate because of their extreme views. Coalition parties have aligned because they all want judicial reform, but for different reasons,

Kaplan Sommer said. For Netanyahu, it’s to stay out of jail; for the settlement parties it’s to annex the West Bank; and for the religious



parties, it’s to avoid conscription and for Israel to become more theocratic. The fallout of the proposed judicial reform has been swift: thousands protesting; economic instability; possible withdrawal of foreign investment;

and reservists threatening not to serve, with an impact on the security of the Jewish state. “How could Netanyahu, the father of the start-up nation and the king of security, allow this?” asked Kaplan Sommer. Many commentators feel that this “new” Bibi is now making decisions based only on his own political and personal survival, she said. “He no longer cares about America’s sentiments or the future of the nation. It’s harsh, but it looks like that’s what happening,” she said. However, she pointed out that Bibi now may be “in over his head”, and instead of getting the coalition parties to dance to his tune, he now must dance to theirs. By bringing these parties in from the political wilderness, he also gave them access to power that they don’t want to give up in a hurry. This is another reason for them to push for judicial reform. According to the *The New York Times*, “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel is the face of his government’s effort to reduce judicial power. His justice minister, Yariv Levin, is the main architect.” Kaplan Sommer explains that Levin is determined to make the Knesset into more of a “high school

student council” system – just like at high school, when the student council gets voted in and has all the power and there are no “pesky checks and balances”. Levin calls this “pure democracy”. However, all of this could blow up in the face of the coalition. If the judicial overhaul measures are passed, they will give the Israeli government unforeseen power. And if the left comes roaring back with success in the next elections, the right could find itself more powerless than ever before. What could stop the current trajectory in its tracks? “Normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia,” said Kaplan Sommer. Such a success would force the judicial overhaul to take a backseat and boost Israel’s image and economy. She believes United States President Joe Biden may “dangle this in front of Bibi”, offering it to him in return for a halt on judicial reform. In return, he may ask Netanyahu to abandon the current path and his coalition, form a new coalition with centrist parties, and pull Israel back from the brink. Could this happen? From her experience as a longtime journalist, Kaplan Sommer said, “In Israeli politics, just like in South Africa, you never know what’s around the next corner.”

## Hurts to laugh – comedienne blazes trail in Israel

TALI FEINBERG

As one of the few female comedy writers in Israel today, Michal Zoran has succeeded to the point where she now writes for satirical Israeli TV show *The Jews are Coming*. As the only woman in the writing room, she brings a unique perspective to what she describes as her dream job. Speaking at Limmud in Cape Town, she shared a photo of herself as a young child, complete with thick glasses. “I was small, I was weak, I had glasses, I was bullied in high school. So I really needed humour growing up as a tool to survive.” And she has made a career of it, as a writer and cultural entrepreneur. Her work on *The Jews are Coming* will soon be aired. She’s also the founder of “Write Club”, an evening of literary duels between pairs of sparring writers. She writes standup comedy for a number of female comedians in Israel, and co-hosts the weekly podcast, *That’s My Opinion Anyway*. Her debut novel will be published this year. “Humour is the weapon of unarmed people,” she said, quoting late Nazi hunter and Holocaust survivor Simon Wiesenthal. Some of the funniest comedians in history have been Jewish, she said, and this comes from our history. “Humour is a coping mechanism: it helps to lighten the hard stuff, which is healthy. It’s also a tool for criticism – if you soften things with a joke, people hear you better. It can be a disarming strategy to break the ice, and it helps you get what you want in life, especially with landlords! Finally it’s a communication skill. For example, I started this lecture with a joke, which helped us connect.” Therefore, humour has always been used by Jews in difficult situations, “in the weaker position”, said Zoran, as Jews have been through most of history. “The distance between sad and funny aren’t that far apart, especially in Jewish and Israeli humour.” She demonstrated this point with a number of clips from *The Jews are Coming* and other sources. The first showed two Jewish parents begging their daughter to blend in and assimilate in America after the Holocaust, even buying her a Barbie and a doll’s house to emphasise the point. “You look as Jewish as a kneidel,” her hysterical mother cries, while

Michal Zoran



her father says that the Barbie house is great because no Barbie would “hide in the attic”, like Anne Frank. Another clip showed two Israelis approaching a German official at an athletics meet, asking him to let the Jewish runner have a head start. “Haven’t the Jewish people suffered enough?” wails the one official when the German officer is reluctant. Both scenes use Holocaust trauma for humour in a way that allows Israelis to laugh at themselves. The sketches are clearly written for Jewish audiences. “Context is everything in comedy,” said Zoran. “Haven’t the Jews suffered enough?” is a line that’s often used in Israeli comedy. She said Israeli humour in particular has changed now that Jews have their own country and are no longer in a weak position. But this also brings trauma, also often used in comedy. For example, another clip from *The Jews are Coming* ties into the story of Purim. A celebrated soldier who helped take down Haman tries to describe his symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, but is ignored by the audience, which only wants to hear about victory. The scene is a brutal reflection of the realities that Israeli soldiers face, and puts a mirror up to Israeli society. “It shows the price we pay for being in a stronger position,” said Zoran. Another scene shows Israeli officials speaking about waves of immigration to the newly-established Jewish state. “Don’t be silly, the Americans will never come here,” says one official, who then says that they will bring African Jews to Israel. The ensuing racist discussion is shocking, but again holds a mirror up to the changing nature of Israeli society and the divisions that have long existed. Zoran said being a comedy writer is intense and frustrating at times, and one has to have a strong voice and a thick skin to pursue such a career – especially in Israel, where the industry is so small. However, Israeli society provides constant material for humour as it’s in such a state of flux, its politics are dynamic and complex, and “Jews can never agree on anything.” Looking back, she realises that just like the Jewish people, she’s no longer in a weak position and is no longer the little girl with the thick glasses. “I’m in a position where I can write something that makes an impact,” she said. And though many of her Israeli friends are talking about emigration because of the political climate, she’ll never leave Israel. It’s the only place she knows how to write comedy, so she’ll continue to blaze a trail for female comedians in the Jewish state.

## Fake Nazi death camp – a Wikipedia site of struggle

TALI FEINBERG

Wikipedia is such a part of our lives that we rarely take time to think about how it works and what role it plays in shaping society. Yet these questions are being asked by Israeli journalist and researcher Omer Benjakob on a daily basis. He calls Wikipedia the “de facto core of knowledge” in today’s world, and says we’re experiencing “the wikipedication of knowledge” and “a post-truth battleground”. Benjakob believes that every serious media source needs a “Wikipedia journalist” to trawl the online encyclopaedia and report back on the “knowledge wars” that play out on those pages. Wikipedia tries to get to the core of truth by allowing anyone to contribute to its pages, Benjakob says, but at the same time, this allows false information to creep in, even with Wikipedia’s strict requirements. At the same time, he believes Wikipedia is one of the best sources of information on the internet because it’s so strict about information being backed up by sources. An investigative journalist working at the intersection of politics, technology, disinformation, cyber, and surveillance, Benjakob told a rapt Limmud Cape Town audience how he and others discovered one of the biggest Wikipedia hoaxes of all time – the creation of a fake Holocaust death camp. In looking at its past, Poland is in a complicated space, Benjakob says, because Poles were both victims of Nazism and perpetrators of the Holocaust. At the moment, there’s a strong movement in the country to obliterate knowledge of the latter. Some political parties are even calling for “rewriting the pedagogy of shame”, giving themselves and others a mandate to re-write or alter World War II history to hide Polish participation in the Shoah and highlight its victimhood. In 2018, the Polish government introduced a controversial law that forbid blaming the Polish nation for Nazi crimes. The legislation was softened following Israeli pressure to remove punitive measures, but Benjakob says one historian is on trial for this very “transgression”. So why would Polish nationalists want to create a fake death camp in Poland? “To raise the numbers of ethnic Poles who were killed at the hands of the Nazis,” said Benjakob. He notes that there was a kind of concentration camp in Warsaw near the end of the war,

named KL Warschau. However, those interned there had essentially to “tear down” the Warsaw ghetto after it was liquidated, and at no point was it a death camp with gas chambers. Benjakob says interestingly, when the ghetto was torn down, its bricks weren’t destroyed. Essentially, Warsaw and the ghetto were “rebuilt” from their own bricks after the war. Yet for 15 years, the Wikipedia article portrayed KL Warschau as a Nazi death camp in which 200 000 ethnic Poles were systematically killed in gas chambers. “I don’t think there’s a city that’s as well documented as Warsaw,” said Benjakob. “I can confidently say that we know what happened every day of the war in Warsaw. You can’t go a few steps in the city without seeing some kind of memorial or plaque. So how can this be something that was just missed?” Though Wikipedia demands that its contributors attribute facts to sources, the fake death camp was based on kernels of truth, and therefore the writers were able to get around these requirements. “Here lie 200 000 people who weren’t murdered,” was the title of Benjakob’s investigative article on the matter. The hoax Wikipedia article had claimed that the camp’s files were burned and its gas chambers were blown up, leaving little evidence. “There’s no historical evidence of German gas chambers ever existing in Warsaw, and nowhere near 200 000 people died in the cluster of Nazi internment centres that did stand at the basis of the myth of KL Warschau,” wrote Benjakob at the time. Though the online article on KL Warchau has since been changed, conspiracy theories around it still percolate on the internet. Benjakob says he’s passionate about many topics, including the history of encyclopaedias, but he never imagined being at “the frontline of Holocaust memory”, fighting for truth against powerful forces that want to change the narrative. Yet the discovery of the hoax ultimately changed his life, leading him to become “obsessed” with Poland and the country’s effort to distance itself from Holocaust culpability. The story may be made into a documentary, highlighting how Wikipedia is often a battleground for truth relating to the past and the future.



Omer Benjakob

# Floor1 is food for thought, but digest slowly

REVIEW

JULIE LEIBOWITZ



Dietician Carla Chait’s novel, *Floor1*, feels a bit like a food supplement rather than a nourishing meal – and that’s intentional.

Chait is trying to convey the paucity of care in a South African state hospital, where the turnover of patients, limited budgets, poverty, educational levels, and conventional medicine often renders caregivers impotent to make a difference.

The novel, Chait’s first, is a fictional account of her community service year as a dietician. “During my BSc undergraduate, I read widely on diet and natural medicine, and it was at this time that I discovered macrobiotics,” she says. “I was interested in physiology and the potential that food has to transform us physically and spiritually.”

However, these ideals were punctured during Chait’s community service, when she landed up working within a paradigm that made no sense to her but nevertheless had to toe the line. In an attempt to express her experiences, she began to write stories about a young dietician.

“The narrator is part of a team of healthcare professionals caring for a patient and has very specific and thus limited tasks,” Chait says. “She becomes increasingly distressed by her limitations, her own jadedness, and the neglect she perceives everywhere.”

Chait stresses that the novel is fiction, saying, “The narrator holds on to her beliefs in a way that I was too afraid to as a community-service dietician. Although she despairs not ever really getting anywhere in helping her patients, her compassion in recognising them and standing up for them goes a long way.

“The narrator is confronted by many horrors at the hospital – disease, wounds, injuries, distress, emotional vulnerability,” she says. “There’s a sense of overexposure against which she must protect herself. She confronts all sorts of suffering, but what she finds particularly disturbing is the pervasive air of despair. She’s troubled by how sick people are, how many sick people there are, and how little she can do to actually help them.”

There’s an impersonality, almost a loneliness, to the novel. Doctors are faceless and nameless, rotating between departments, making it difficult for the narrator to form lasting relationships with them, and nurses are equally anonymous and disinterested. The narrator also struggles with the other dieticians in her department, where no-one cares about her seemingly wayward opinions.

“The narrator traverses the hospital daily – up and down floors, through wards, areas and sections – but she keeps returning to floor 1, to the department, feeling empty. The title of the book reflects the impasse that the narrator finds herself in: lost and constrained by her position,” Chait says.

Chait’s writing is spare but hard-hitting, often most powerful in what it omits from the sentence. “I take out Mr Nyathi’s folder and write today’s date and then ‘Deceased’ on the back page. I stare at the date for a long time before refiling the file,” she writes.

Patients reflect the reality of South Africa – there are HIV-positive patients, criminals, young mothers, victims of violence, and those with psychological issues. Some appear to hang around merely to use the office phone.

“The prisoners are chained across their wrists and ankles so that they hobble along floor 1 chiming,” she writes. “Every man has at least one security guard with him. The camaraderie between the prisoners and their guards

intrigues me. ‘Why?’ Anneke has asked. ‘You don’t see that kind of relationship between the staff and the patients in the wards,’ I told her.”

There’s a bit of comedy as the narrator struggles to get through to her patients about nutrition. “Brown sugar doesn’t have any fibre in it,” she tells patients in the slimming clinic. “Even Hulets?” I don’t answer that.”

She conveys dismay at the domestic situation of a lot of patients, asking nurses who one very sick mother in the ward has to care for her at home. She describes mothers who pester the hospital for free formula and then dilute it to make it last longer, and babies who are at crèche all day and whose mothers have no idea what they are being fed there. The book is peppered with nutritional supplements – “feed” rather than food. It’s a metaphor for the passivity

of patients, the lack of holistic care in conventional medicine, and the struggle of dieticians to change eating habits.

“Under today’s entry I put: Dietician. Patient provided with 2L of diluted Energade (approximately 580kcal, no protein) and one 240ml Enlive sip feed (250kcal, 9g protein). If I didn’t have these numbers, I’d have nothing to write. No-one’s interested in my opinion on the situation” she writes.

She’s frustrated with the hospital’s obsession with calculations and numbers, with “right and wrong foods”. “I’d like to know what everyone is writing all the time. You calculate the requirements, order the feed. What are they doing the whole day? Filling out forms, banging on the calculator, more writing... They’re giving themselves lots of work to do. Lots of important work.”

*Floor1* is a hard-hitting novel that offers an unusual glimpse into the difficulties of working in the South African state sector and conventional medicine’s inability to change lives for the better, particularly when it comes to diet. It’s food for thought.

• Julie Leibowitz is the sub-editor of the SA Jewish Report.



Carla Chait

## Craig’s English Channel swim a triumph over tragedy

>>>Continued from page 1

February, he and his four children swam the Midmar Mile, all bringing home medals. They, too, were supporting their beloved dad from Johannesburg as he swam the Channel.

Maxine quips that Craig should be “the mayor of Glenhazel” thanks to his uncanny ability to pull people together and inspire them. She doesn’t know where the global support for his swim came from, except that he’s “warm, funny, and a mensch” and a creative all-rounder. She emphasises that Craig couldn’t have done it without Daniella’s steady support.

“He has wanted to do the English Channel for about five years, but there were various obstacles, including the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Maxine. But it was always about more than his own goals – he wanted to do it in a way that connected to Brett’s life and death and allowed his legacy to live on. She says Brett would have loved the joy that Craig’s swim has brought to so many.

Meanwhile, Brett’s friend, Simeon Angel, remembers the brother who never got to be there for this moment. “While Brett had day-to-day struggles, he was always up for a good time. All Brett really wanted to be able to do was be like everyone else – jump in the pool and go to the beach, splash in the waves, and have a good time with his friends.”

Now, his brother will help others to live those dreams. “I swim for each child who deserves to learn how to swim and be safe,” writes Craig. “I swim to ensure that no child is left without the opportunity to learn and love the wonders of the water. I swim for my brother Brett.”

The *SA Jewish Report* was unable to speak to Craig and Daniella Norwich as the story was written while he was swimming the English Channel.

• To contribute to the Brett Nerwich Swimming Fund, visit [www.walletdoc.com/pay/BrettNerwichSwimmingFund](http://www.walletdoc.com/pay/BrettNerwichSwimmingFund)

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# Tapestry of care takes artist back to her origins

HANNA RESNICK

“When I was exhibiting in Hong Kong, I met a brilliant curator who made a comment which stuck with me – that the soft arts are always the place of ‘the other,’” said artist Bev Butkow, whose exhibition re-weaving m/other opened at the Wits University Origins Centre on Sunday, 20 August.

“It’s women, it’s people of colour, queer people, etcetera, who are the ones often working with sewing and tapestry, weaving, crochet, and knitting and bringing all of that back into the world. And that was really the basis on which I started the show and where “m/other” comes from in the title.

“It’s the place of the other, as the female, the non-dominant in society, the ones whose voices we need to now amplify and reassert back into social structures, whether it’s economic, political, cultural, or social. It’s about amplifying the place of the other, but also recognising that what we have as women is such a valuable way of being in the world.”

Butkow wasn’t always an artist. In fact, she had a successful corporate career as a chartered accountant. However, after she had her fourth child, she gave up work and slowly ventured into the art world. She decided to go back to the University of the Witwatersrand to do her honours in art history and finished her Master’s in Fine Art last year. “It’s been an amazing journey. It’s such a different way to exist in the world,” she said.

“I started painting, and at some point, it just felt so much like my paintings were being painted by an accountant. They felt controlled and not loose or intuitive enough. And then, one day, I started cutting them up and I then had all these strips, so I wove them together.”

Butkow became captivated by the art of weaving, and taught herself to weave all sorts of different materials. She uses scrap material and leftover bits that would otherwise be considered waste. “It’s just such an interesting medium to work with,” she said. “There’s something quite feminine about the materials.”

She has also connected to her grandmother through



Bev Butkow

this medium. “She came from Lithuania, and their lives were financially very difficult and everything was treated as precious. So, for example, she used to take the wrapping paper from gifts, fold it, and put it away. She had drawers and cupboards full of things that were scraps to others, but to her, they were precious.”

As you walk into the exhibition space, woven constructions hang from the ceiling and walls, with projections on the ceiling, and meditative sounds emanating from speakers within the room. Each woven piece feels like a whole world within itself, telling a story with scraps of fabric, string, plastic, beads, and more.

The projections began with a mandala that tracked Butkow’s body. “I lay down and tracked my head and chin and shoulders and it literally tracked my whole body, and it took me months to work on, to build up these beautiful forms and shapes, and then I got a digital animator to take all those shapes and we started working with them.” These animations were then projected through the works and filmed to create an extra layered effect.

“I wanted the audience to know as soon as they walk in here that it’s an experiential place,” she said. “There’s movement, light, colour, and you can get a great sense of the tactility of the materials. You can’t walk in here and think with your head, you’ve got to feel with your body.”

The brutalist concrete structure of the Origins Centre is juxtaposed with Butkow’s soft, hand-made work. “The space is structured and massive, very beautiful, but a cold, brutalist kind of architecture. My feeling was, ‘How do you soften the space?’” she said. “And maybe, in a way, we can equate the space to structure, control, you know, being in a university where knowledge comes from, the kind of structures of our society, and then how we either soften that or disrupt it, play with it, or play against it.”

The Origins Centre is the perfect place for this body of work, she said, “because it talks to the development of people on earth through millennia, and one of the developmental steps is creativity. It’s also interesting to look at this relationship that humanity has with the earth and all the scrap, the detritus, our build-up of excess.”

Just before the exhibition space, the centre displays the development of tools throughout the ages, the topmost

layer being filled with rubbish and debris such as plastic and Coke cans, which this exhibition makes a point of incorporating. “There’s a connection to something much deeper, bigger, and more spiritual than I would have found in a more traditional space,” Butkow said.

The darker entrance opens into a room with large windows that fill the room with light. As you move through the room, there are “hidden treasures” tucked away behind walls and in corners. The air vents allow the hanging elements to move slightly, and every angle gives a new perspective to each part of the installation. Butkow encourages viewers to touch the artwork and get a visceral sense of the texture.

“There are things that I know inside me, but it’s taken a long time to own them,” said Butkow. “I know that I have this strong sense of feminine power, and this show feels very much like it’s standing in female power, but it went even further for me into being about the methodology of care.

“It’s core to being a mother, to being a woman. It’s core to the way I exist in the world. But also, the care that I’ve now given to all the materials, to the forms, to nurturing them, to the time that gets involved, the time that’s trapped within each one of these things is absolutely huge.”

The exhibition runs until 30 September at the Origins Centre at Wits University.

## Sim-ply excellent Jesse named Karate South Africa Superstar

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Karate means “empty hand” in Japanese, but South African national team karateka Jesse Sim has gone anything but empty-handed in his more than 15 years in the sport.

He recently added the 2023 Karate South Africa Superstar of the Year trophy, from Karate South Africa, to his numerous karate trophies in his Goju Kai dojo in Germiston.

This sought-after national award was given to him because in the past 12 months, he was placed first in the Senior Team Kata Male category at the 2022 Commonwealth Karate Club Championships in Birmingham and won silver in the same category at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Sim also won the individual kata category at the Africa Region Championships in May this year against countries in the bottom half of Africa. “Myself and two other members of my team won the team event as well,” he says.

His team was subsequently selected to compete for South Africa at the 2023 African Beach Games in Hammamet, Tunisia. They were placed third, making them the third-best karate team on the continent, while Algeria won, and Morocco came second. Sim also won his individual bronze medal match against Nigeria. Leading up to the tournament, he practised karate on volleyball courts to get used to competing on sand as karate tournaments are normally held indoors on a matted smooth surface.

“I have official Protea colours, so I when went to the Beach Games, I competed with SASCOC [South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee] Olympic rings on my chest,” Sim says proudly.

Sim says the trip to the Games was fully government funded, “which is a first for me because as an athlete, especially in this sport, we have to self-fund consistently”.

He has won every national competition this year, competing against thousands of karateka in the process. “You compete against everyone in your district and the top four from each district compete against each other at the provincial championships. Then you have to come in the top four to qualify for the national championships. If you win at the nationals, you earn ranking points, which

put you in a position to be selected for the national team.”

Sim is ranked second in Africa, and is about 40th in the world.

To be eligible for the Superstar of the Year award, a karateka has to be part of the national team and attend tournaments throughout the year. “The top two in the country are then selected for Protea colours and you have to go and compete overseas, which I do consistently.”

Sim, who is studying finance through the University of South Africa, trains two hours every day, mixing karate training with gym work. “I’ve got my own personal

trainer, but train by myself as well. I teach and train group classes at my dojo as well. My father, Russell Sim, and I run about seven different karate schools for people aged 5 to 100. My father is my instructor. He has been a Protea, and now referees the best athletes in the world. So, karate is a family thing. My father was teaching and when I was five, he eventually caved in to teach me because I kept nagging him.”

Sim received his black belt at the age of 11 before getting his 2nd Dan at 18, and his 3rd Dan last year. The latter gives him the title of sensei.

Sim likes the physicality of karate, and says the sport is good for your physical

and mental health. “I love the competition as well. Competition has always been a big part of my life. I started competing when I was 10 and won my first national title when I was 11. I also love travelling and have got to see the world through karate.”

He says his favourite tours were the African Beach Games in Tunisia, the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, and the 2018 Karate World Championships in Spain.

Sim, who matriculated from Reddam House Bedfordview, swam and played the piano at school. “Everything else revolved around karate,” he says.

“For karate, there are four major styles around the world. My style is Goju Kai, but I compete in all the styles.” In April, Sim won gold for kata and team kata at the Karate South Africa All-Styles National Championships.

Sim hopes to compete at the African Games in Ghana next year, and says his ultimate goal is the Olympics Games. “Karate was in the 2020 Olympics but was then taken out. I’m hoping it’s back for the 2028 Olympics in America.”



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# Unfit for shul or shopping

When the COVID-19 pandemic ended and we returned to places of prayer, I realised that I was no longer “shul fit”. I found that I was less able to endure longer services and was more irritated with time wasted and sermons that taught me nothing and made me feel even less.

Maybe it was because our lives had flashed in front of us and we understood that our days were measured and maybe it was because the “shul” muscle that we had developed over the years needed additional training.

On Sunday, I realised that it wasn’t just in this area where I have lost fitness. Shopping is another. Admittedly it was my fault. Just like a relapsed runner doesn’t start with a 21km run after a few years with no training, so I shouldn’t have tackled Sandton City.

In the same way that an athlete would begin with a 5km or 10km run, I should have started with KosherWorld. Or Pick n Pay Norwood.

But I didn’t. We had things to do, a birthday present to buy, and according to my wife, Sandton was where it was to happen.

I started strong. I was well hydrated, my nutrition was decent - a piece of rye toast with some cheese – and I was reasonably rested. Which is why I moved through the first few shops with impressive patience and focus. I managed to participate in numerous conversations about sleeve lengths, debated how many people would be wearing the same thing, and lamented the increased costs of some poor-quality items.

It was in Country Road that I began to falter. It might have been the prices, but the truth was simply that I didn’t have the stamina I used to have. I recall that after about 20 minutes of standing outside the

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



changing room, I started to lose peripheral vision. I felt lightheaded, and could no longer control some of the things I said. It wasn’t pretty.

My wife, seeing where this was going, sent me to buy myself a coffee. She paid, met me at the coffee area, and shepherded me to the food court, popping into Birkenstock and a few other shops along the way. She deposited me at a table, dumped the bags with me, and skipped energetically back the way we had come (she had missed something because I was a misery).

The hour and a half in the food court passed quickly, after which she ushered me home, fed me lunch, made me consume plenty of fluids, and allowed me to sit on the couch for a period of recovery.

And then she wondered out loud how I would feel about going back to Sandton as she had a few teeny things still to do. Her face was shining, her inspiration was visible, and her anticipation admirable. In contrast, I could sob at the mere thought of it.

And so, she went on her own, relieved and happy, and I remained where she left me, relieved and happy.

I’ve no idea why triathlons consist of running, swimming, and cycling. There’s little doubt that if we really want to get with the Johannesburg times, we should rather include prayer services, shopping, and husbandry. It takes as much training, and the achievement is just as great. Maybe even greater.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# In the mood for Limmud



## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

At the time of writing, we were looking ahead with much anticipation to this coming weekend’s annual Limmud festival in Johannesburg. Each year, Limmud offers our community an unrivalled array of outstanding local and international speakers presenting on every conceivable topic of Jewish interest. Its audiences have been similarly diverse, the common denominator being a shared passion for exploring and learning more about Jewish heritage in all its facets. It’s this as much as the quality of the speakers that contributes to the general sense of excitement, buoyancy, and good fellowship that is one of the hallmarks of Limmud.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has always been a staunch supporter of Limmud, whose commitment to the values of inclusivity and respect for diversity mirrors our own mandate to be as representative of the Jewish community as we can. Board representatives, both lay leaders and professional staff, also feature regularly on its programmes. This year, I will be moderating and National Director Wendy Kahn will speak in a panel discussion on trends in global antisemitism.

At Limmud in Cape Town over the past weekend, our Cape colleagues organised an “immersive session” enabling those present to “see what it feels like to sit around the Board table and tackle community challenges”. Using a theoretical incident loosely based on recent events at the University of Cape Town, audience members were given practical insights into the process the Board follows in addressing such matters, and asked to consider how they themselves would react in the same circumstances if they were in a leadership position. It was a most innovative and effective way of conveying not just the what, why, and how

of the Board’s work, but in helping participants better understand the complexities involved and to appreciate that whatever we do as the community’s representative voice has implications that must always be taken carefully into account.

## HIAS and the SAJBD

Earlier this year, we met a delegation from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which was visiting to assess the situation regarding refugees in this country. We also helped to organise its programme, including facilitating meetings with local refugee organisations. The refugee community comprises the most vulnerable sectors of our society. Since 2008, when South Africa experienced what to date is still its worst outbreak of xenophobic violence against foreign migrants, the Board has regularly involved itself in initiatives on its behalf. Much of the relief work we co-ordinated on behalf of our community during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, for example, was in this area, where not having citizenship prevented many from accessing government-relief programmes. We were thus happy to learn that following its visit, HIAS has decided to establish an office in South Africa. Originally established to assist Jewish refugees from persecution, HIAS today is a humanitarian and aid agency that assists all displaced people around the world. The Board has always had a close working relationship with HIAS, particularly over the past decade. The projected opening of a local office will doubtless provide many further opportunities for building on this.

• 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

# Hirsch Lyons starts chumash journey

The Hirsch Lyons Grade 1 class celebrated a chumash launch dinner with parents, grandparents, and siblings at Sydenham Shul on 20 August to mark the beginning of their chumash journey. Parents proudly presented their children with chumashim, and certificates were distributed to mark the occasion.



The Hirsch Lyons Grade 1 class at their chumash launch dinner



# Yeshiva girls connect on banks of Vaal River

Yeshiva College Grade 9 girls got back to basics on tour from 13 to 15 August. They prepared their own meals and participated in team building and introspective activities while appreciating the serene open space of the Vaal River. They davened at sunrise and learnt Torah by the river. They also had connected with each other without cellphones, and bonded as a grade.

## Sunday 27 August

- Chevrah Kadisha Social Services hosts a symposium on *Healing through mourning*. Time: 10:00. Venue: The David Lopatie Centre, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Contact: 011 532 9711 or samanthad@jhbchev.co.za

## Monday 28 August

- Chabad Seniors hosts its Longevity Club with a memory class by Cynthia Liptz followed by *Meaningful Mondays* with Rabbi Ari Kievman. Time: 09:30. Venue: 27 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Contact: rak@chabad.org.za

## Tuesday 29 August

- Chabad Seniors hosts its Longevity Club with a yoga breathing and stretching exercise class with Dr Helen Kennedy followed by a *Gratitude Seminar* with Rabbi Ari Kievman. Time: 09:30. Venue: 27 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Contact: rak@chabad.org.za

## Sunday 3 September

- Second Innings hosts a talk by Rebbetzin Helene Gruzid on *An Attitude of Gratitude – A Rosh Hashanah Message*. Time: 10:00. Venue: Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost: R40 (R20 for members). Contact: 082 561 3228

## Tuesday 5 September

- The Union of Jewish Women hosts a guided tour of the exhibition *Women in Action – A History of the Union of Jewish Women* on 5 and 6 September. Time: 14:30. Venue: Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre. Contact: projects@ujwcape.co.za



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## Creating communal roots in Limpopo

South Africa Jewish Board of Deputies' national president Shaun Zagnoev attended a tree planting ceremony on 18 August on behalf of the Jewish community at the Cape To Cairo Christian Academy Campus in Modimolle, Limpopo. Zagnoev was invited by Rev Reuben Chapasuka, who invited the community to discuss issues around development.

**SAJBD national president Shaun Zagnoev planting a tree at the Cape To Cairo Christian Academy**



Photo: Rev Reuben Chapasuka

## Friends of Israel brings self-defence to Soweto

Soweto women learnt how to protect themselves and fight back against criminals in a workshop held by Michele Engelberg of the Keep Safe Self Defence Workshops for Women & Young Girls on Women's Day on 9 August. Engelberg was brought to Soweto by Bafana Modise from the South African Friends of Israel.

## A reflection on 90 years of women's activism

*Women of Action*, a book chronicling the history of the Union of Jewish Women (UJW), was launched at the South African Jewish Museum on 7 August in a collaboration between the museum and the Jacob Gitlin Library.

At the launch, which documents the UJW's history since it was established in 1931 as a voluntary service organisation, author Karen Kallmann discussed the book with Dianna Yach of the Mauerberger Foundation.

From inception, the UJW worked for pre-state Israel, and it was the first Jewish organisation in South Africa to reach out into the broader South African community. It did so successfully, and with significant support from Jewish women. The breadth of the work of the UJW is exceptional and in many cases ground-breaking. *Women of Action* acknowledges the women who made a substantial contribution to our community and the country at large over nine decades.



Gavin Morris from the SA Jewish Museum introducing Karen Kallmann and Dianna Yach

## ORT SA honours incredible women

ORT SA brought young female professionals and thought leaders together to celebrate Women's Day, fostering invaluable connections and sparking ideas. It also honoured the women who make ORT shine with an internal event.

The Women's Day event featured a panel discussion with Tanya Sachs, an image consultant; Dr Nokalika Zwane, a dedicated researcher in water quality

and wastewater treatment; Ariellah Rosenberg, who has an exceptional record in education leadership; and Abby Fernandes, a female athlete who has shattered barriers and inspired many.

In ORT's internal event, female staff were showered with carefully curated gifts that spoke to their importance and enjoyed mouth-watering delights.



Ariellah Rosenberg, Tanya Sachs, Dr Nokalika Zwane, and Abby Lobo Fernandes

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