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AbaThembu king unrepentant over deposing Mandela

NICOLA MILTZ

AbaThembu King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo remains resolute following his controversial announcement that Mandla Mandela, Nelson Mandela's grandson, would be removed as traditional chief of Mvezo in the Eastern Cape over his anti-Israel activism.

The king declared that Mandela "does not deserve" the chieftaincy, and accused him of being more concerned with Palestinians than with his own people in South Africa.

"The decision to remove Mandla Mandela was based purely on his actions," said the king's daughter and spokesperson, Princess Ntando Dalindyebo.

"Other than the fact that his chieftainship was already questionable, he continues publicly to insult and undermine the Royal House," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"While we are busy trying to save our own children here, he is saving children in Palestine. Let Palestine give him chieftaincy," the king said. "He is no longer welcome here."

The announcement has triggered immediate legal and political questions, as provincial authorities and traditional leadership bodies have indicated that a king cannot unilaterally remove a recognised chief without following established traditional leadership procedures and constitutional processes.

However, Princess Dalindyebo told the *SA Jewish Report*, "In the kingdom of AbaThembu, the king has the highest authority, no-one can challenge him.

"As the kingship, we find that Mandla Mandela is not an honest man. After he was arrested for entering the state of Israel illegally, he went on social media to lie about being kidnapped. He then publicly tried to mobilise members of the ANC against the king. He cannot be trusted by the king," she said.

"He continues to bring shame and disrespect on the Royal House, and that behaviour can no longer be tolerated."

King Dalindyebo announced that three amakhosi were no longer recognised as chiefs, among them Mandela. The development has sparked debate within traditional leadership circles and raised legal and cultural questions.

The king's decision follows escalating tensions between the two men, linked to the king's engagement with Israeli visitors in the Eastern Cape and Mandela's outspoken anti-Israel activism. Mandela has referred media queries to the king's office.

South African Friends of Israel spokesperson Bafana Modise said, "For many years, the Madiba legacy has been used and abused and Mandla Mandela has always walked in the shadow of his grandfather's name. However, he hasn't offered anything to South Africans, and hasn't done anything for the people of the Eastern Cape.

"While the king was working to build a better life for the people of the Eastern Cape, Mandela chose Palestinians once again. The king has drawn a line between those who are for helping the Xhosa

nation, and those who want to destroy what the people of that region would benefit from," said Modise.

"Mandla has been seen for who he is, an Islamist who chooses hatred of Israel even if Israel helps his own people, and the king has said, 'Enough'."

Dalindyebo accused Mandela of disrespect and of failing to recognise royal authority. "A chief who doesn't see eye to eye with me must take his belongings and leave my father's land," he said. Dalindyebo's remarks were made during a gathering hosted by African Transformation Movement (ATM) President Professor Caesar Nongqunga.

The Eastern Cape Traditional Affairs Department said Dalindyebo wasn't empowered to dethrone traditional leaders without consultation with the premier. The Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) said customary and constitutional processes must be followed, with Contralesa President Kgoshi Lameck Mokoena reportedly saying the removal of a chief couldn't be done by individual decree.

The dispute has unfolded against a geopolitical backdrop, with Israel emerging as the central fault line in the royal feud. In recent months, Dalindyebo has openly engaged with Israeli officials and institutions, arguing that cooperation in areas such as water security, healthcare, and agriculture could help address severe service-delivery challenges in the beleaguered Eastern Cape.

The king travelled to Israel, where he met Israeli President Isaac Herzog and other government representatives and toured facilities specialising in water management and medical innovation. Following his visit, he worked with recently expelled Israeli Deputy Ambassador Ariel Seidman and the director of digital communications at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, David Saranga, to explore potential initiatives in the province. These included discussions about hospital partnerships with Sheba Medical Center as well as projects linked to Innovation Africa, a non-profit organisation that installs solar-powered water systems in remote villages.

Saranga later visited the Eastern Cape, and met hospital management at Mthatha General Hospital and Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital. He also attended a gathering of more than 50 traditional leaders convened by Dalindyebo, with water access and healthcare support central to discussions.

The South African government subsequently gave Seidman 72 hours to get out of South Africa,

Continued on page 3>>

Hear our cry

See page 3



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

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ChevrahKadisha

Andorra's tiny Jewish community reels after local carnival features mock execution of Israeli effigy

An annual festival in Andorra drew condemnation from the country's small Jewish community after an effigy bearing the Israeli flag was staged in a mock trial and then hung and shot.

The incident was part of the traditional Catalan festival Carnestoltes, which occurs yearly before Lent, the 40-day period that precedes Easter. At the festival on Monday, 16 February, in Andorra, where a mock king is typically tried and burned, organisers instead used an effigy wearing blue with the Israeli flag painted on its face.

During the festivities, the Israeli effigy was symbolically tried, hung, shot, and burned, according to social media posts and a report in the Israeli outlet YNet.

The incident drew outcry from the microstate's tiny Jewish community, which only just got its first full-time rabbi, a Chabad emissary, in the past two years.

"This is a ritual they perform every year as part of carnival, where they mock many things," Jewish

Andorra resident Esther Pujol told YNet. "This time, they dressed the effigy in the colours of the Israeli flag, with a Star of David on its face. They put it on trial, sentenced it to death, and carried out the sentence by shooting and burning it. It's completely unacceptable."

Pujol told the outlet that it was the first time she had seen the festival include anti-Israel or antisemitic elements, and that she had contacted Andorran legislators to express her outrage. The mayor of Encamp, the city where the incident took place, and local politicians took part in the ceremony, according to YNet.

The European Jewish Congress also decried the display in a post on X, writing that the mock execution was a "deeply disturbing act that risks normalising antisemitism and incitement".

"This incident requires unequivocal condemnation, full clarification of responsibilities, and concrete measures to ensure that antisemitism is never tolerated in public celebrations or institutions in Andorra or anywhere in Europe," the post continued.

Other Lent festivities have also been the site of antisemitism in recent years, with Belgian celebrations in 2019 featuring antisemitic caricatures and a Spanish parade in 2020 featuring a Holocaust-themed display.

The incident marks a rare instance of open turmoil for Jews in Andorra, which is nestled between France and Spain in the Pyrenees mountains. While France and Spain have experienced widespread pro-Palestinian protests and antisemitic incidents in recent years, Andorra has largely avoided similar tensions.

In September 2025, Andorra formally announced its recognition of Palestinian statehood alongside a host of other European nations during the United Nations General Assembly in New York City.

But local Jews have also sought to remain under the radar, considering that Andorra officially prohibits non-Catholic houses of worship. The Jewish community calls its gathering place a community centre rather than a synagogue. In 2023, Andorra's Parliament elected a Jewish legislator for the first time.

British woman who removed an Israeli hostage poster from a memorial site convicted of theft

A British woman who is married to a Jewish anti-Zionist activist has been convicted of theft in connection with a 2024 incident in which she removed an Israeli hostage poster and threw it in the trash.

Fiona Monro, 58, of Brighton, England, was found guilty of theft, but not convicted of criminal damage for charges stemming from a February 2024 incident in which she took a large laminated poster of Israeli hostage Tsachi Idan and disposed of it.

A relative of Idan who lives in a neighbouring town, Howe, returned the poster to the memorial site after Monro threw it away. A week later, Monro also wrote the phrase, "Pray for the 30 000 murdered Palestinians" on the memorial, but was acquitted of charges related to

"This crime was one out of 50 times the memorial was vandalised, and it took two years to get justice. But it's possible to get a win," Heidi Bachram, one of the memorial's organisers, told the *Jewish News* following Monro's conviction. "We cannot let hateful people get away with attacking us."

Monro told police that the memorial located in Brighton's Palmeira Square "didn't represent the Jewish community", citing her marriage to the prominent activist Tony Greenstein. Greenstein was expelled from Great Britain's Labour Party in 2018 over his social media comments about Israel, which his party deemed antisemitic.

"The board was clearly there to justify the genocide that was happening," Monro said in the police interview. "A large laminated board with a photograph of a hostage was highly inflammatory. Many people in that community clearly found it very upsetting to have that constantly thrust in our face daily."

After Monro's lawyer, Hamish McCallum, requested that the jury consider whether it was proportionate to convict her on the basis she was exercising her right to express her political views, Judge Stephen Mooney rejected the proposal.

"This isn't therefore a case of the state seeking to prosecute the defendant disproportionately for expressing her own views or otherwise interfering with her

rights," said Mooney. "It's a case of the state prosecuting the defendant for putting her views above those of others and causing them wholly unnecessary distress by so doing."

Mooney gave Monro an 18-month conditional discharge and ordered her to pay \$1 637 (R26 230) in prosecution costs.

• All briefs supplied by JTA



Candles and a placard displayed during a vigil in the centre of Brighton, England on 18 January 2025 for people held hostage by Palestinian militant group Hamas in Gaza

the vandalism, according to *Brighton and Hove News*.

The incident came at a time when Israeli hostage posters were being vandalised frequently by activists across the globe who said they were protesting against the war in Gaza. The war began when Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, killing about 1 200 people and taking about 250 hostages. Idan was killed in Hamas captivity, and his remains were returned to Israel a year ago during a negotiated ceasefire.

How to spot gold in a pile of dust

Torah Thought

The incident at Roedean School shook many in our community. Feelings ran high, and it was hard not to be unsettled. Yet even in moments like these, the Torah reminds us that our core, our inner gold remains untouchable.

Parshas Terumah teaches this beautifully. The Torah tells us to build a *Mishkan* covered in gold. My first thought, as a rabbi involved in renovating my shul, is "Gold? Inside and out? Did anyone check the budget?"

The holiest object in the *Mishkan* was the *Aron*, the Ark of the Covenant. The Torah instructs it be made of acacia wood and covered with gold, inside and out. To achieve this, Betzalel, the architect, built three nested boxes: a golden box, a wooden box inside it, and another golden box inside that.

Why the fuss? Why not just plate one wooden box? Because the *Aron* is not about wood or gold. It is about the human soul.

Gold is incorruptible. It doesn't rot, decay, or change under pressure. Wood, by contrast, grows, shifts, and sometimes deteriorates. Life works the same way.

Our core essence is unchanging like gold, it's a divine spark. Around it lies our personality, moods, impulses, insecurities, which can vacillate like wood. Finally, there is the external façade of our actions and behaviour, our outer layer of gold.

Even if our "wood" feels messy or unstable, the Torah reminds us that the gold inside remains untouchable.

Our outer actions can shine too, if we choose to let them.

As a child, I loved watching my father at work in the jewellery trade. He would purchase bags of gold sweeps, dust, and tiny scraps from polishing. To me, it looked like he was collecting dirt. I was embarrassed that my father was buying what looked like dirt, and he didn't work for the sanitation department or Pikitup. But then came the magic. In his refinery, he would melt the dust under intense heat. Slowly, the impurities dissolved, leaving pure, radiant gold.

The brilliance was hiding in the dust the whole time. That lesson has stayed with me. Sometimes gold just needs a little heat to shine.

Life has its own refining moments. Even in challenging times, the gold is still there. Holding our heads high; standing proud of our identity; responding with courage and dignity; that's letting the gold shine.

This week, as our family celebrates my daughter, Sara Rosa's, Batmitzvah, the lesson resonates. A Batmitzvah marks the moment a young Jewish woman begins taking ownership of her choices, not because she is perfect, but because she learns that her words, actions, and behaviour can reflect the gold within,

Rabbi Ari Kievman
Rabbi of the Sandton Central Shul and Chabad Seniors programmes

even when feelings are messy. *Parshas Terumah* reminds us that we are all builders of our own *Mishkan*. We cannot always control our emotions or life's surprises, but we can choose how we act. The gold is already there. Sometimes it just needs a little heat to reveal its brilliance. When we let it shine, we create a sanctuary within ourselves, our families, and our community, one golden choice at a time.

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Joburg protest amplifies Iranians’ cry for freedom

CLAUDIA GROSS

Hundreds of people gathered outside the United States Consulate in Sandton on 14 February, appealing to Washington to help stop the destruction of the Iranian people by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

They stood with photographs of people who had been killed in recent unrest in Iran, chanting a single, repeated appeal, “Please hear us.”

The demonstration, one of a series held in cities around the world, was intended to show that opposition to the Islamic Republic extended far beyond Iran’s borders, and that those living abroad believed international pressure was their only remaining leverage.

Organisers said most of the attendees were Iranian expatriates. Reza*, an Iranian living in South Africa and one of the organisers, described the turnout as good for a community that fears repercussions for relatives at home. “After we got the permit, many people called us and told us to cancel,” he said. Reza said the gathering was deliberately peaceful, and that participants handed out flowers to passersby “to show the nice face of the Iranian people”.

The protest formed part of coordinated global action by members of the Iranian diaspora following a surge of unrest inside Iran and reports by Iranian human rights organisations that tens of thousands of people were killed and hundreds of thousands injured during a crackdown in early January. Large demonstrations took place in cities including Toronto, Munich, and Los Angeles, where media outlets reported crowds in the hundreds of thousands.

In Gauteng, the choice of the US Consulate as a venue reflected the protesters’ focus on American policy. The organiser said participants didn’t want the US to negotiate with the Islamic Republic, and instead to support efforts to bring about political change. “We can’t do it alone,” he said.

For some attendees, the motivation was rooted in what Jacob*, a Jewish South African who attended the protest, described as a breach of the basic obligation between a state and its citizens. “The foremost duty of a government is to protect the lives of the people,” he said. “You are killing your own people. That’s it.” He



Pro-Iranian protesters outside the US Consulate in Sandton

linked the recent unrest to economic pressure, including high inflation and the collapse in the value of the currency, which he said had pushed traders and workers onto the streets before the violence began.

Fear was a recurring theme in accounts of the day. Jacob said many Iranians in South Africa were reluctant to attend because of concern for family members in Iran and uncertainty about future dealings with Iranian authorities. Some had passports due for renewal, and worried that their presence at the protest could be recorded.

The demonstration took place against the backdrop of nearly five decades of hostility between the Islamic Republic and the US and Israel.

Members of Johannesburg’s Jewish community attended in smaller numbers. Howard Sackstein, chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report*, said of his attendance at the gathering that it was important to “show solidarity with the people of Iran, who suffered such unbelievable terror in the past few months”, while stressing that the event was led by Iranians and that Jewish participation was limited. A brief counter-protest by two pro-Palestinian activists carrying flags highlighted the wider regional tensions surrounding Iran. Witnesses

said they were met with boos before leaving the area.

The demonstration took place against the backdrop of nearly five decades of hostility between the Islamic Republic and the US and Israel. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has defined itself in opposition to American influence, and has rejected Israel’s legitimacy. Its support for armed groups across the Middle East, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, has been a central element of its foreign policy and has drawn sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and periodic military confrontation.

For Israel, Iran is regarded as the most significant strategic threat because of its regional alliances, missile programme, and nuclear ambitions. For the US, relations have been marked by sanctions and intermittent negotiations over Iran’s nuclear activities. Those tensions have intensified since the start of the Gaza war, with Iranian-aligned groups launching attacks across the region and raising the risk of direct conflict.

Inside Iran, protests in recent years have been driven by a combination of economic hardship, political repression, and anger about corruption. Demonstrations have often been met with force. The scale of the most recent crackdown has been disputed, but Iranian diaspora activists and rights groups describe it as one of the deadliest episodes since the revolution.

The global response has been uneven. Iranian communities in North America and Europe have

mobilised in large numbers, while the issue has struggled to gain sustained international attention amid other conflicts. In South Africa, the political context has added another layer of complexity for Iranian expatriates, some of whom said they felt exposed

both to the authorities in Tehran and the domestic environment in which the protest took place.

Many of those who attended carried images of friends or relatives they said had been killed. Some chanted for political change and the return of a system they believed could lead to a secular and democratic order. Others focused on drawing attention to what they described as the suffering of ordinary Iranians. “Don’t see only the Iranian government,” Reza said. “We are also from Iran, although we prefer to be called Persian as we long for our King and the kingdom we had before.”

As the crowd dispersed, the flowers handed out during the protest remained with passersby. For participants, the gathering was an attempt to connect the events unfolding in Iranian cities to a street corner in Johannesburg, and to place their demands within the wider confrontation that has shaped Iran’s relations with the US and Israel for nearly half a century.

*Sources asked to have their names changed for security reasons.

AbaThembu king moves to dethrone Mandela

>>>Continued from page 1

declaring him *persona non grata*. While Dalindyebo has been finding practical solutions to problems in the Eastern Cape, Mandela has taken a markedly different position.

The former African National Congress MP has become one of the country’s most vocal anti-Israel activists. At the recent launch of the Global Sumud Flotilla Mission 2026, Mandela declared that the initiative sought to “bring Israel to its knees”.

Diplomatic sources in Israel told the *SA Jewish Report*, “Mandela attacked the king for accepting humanitarian aid from Israel after the floods in August. He has exerted sustained pressure on the king to reject Israeli humanitarian support. Denying disaster relief for political grandstanding comes at the expense of the very people he claims to represent. For a self-styled human rights activist, his silence after thousands were massacred in Iran was deafening.”

Dalindyebo announced the dismissal while unveiling plans to contest the 2026 local government elections in alliance with the ATM. “This royal kingdom remains a

friend of Israel and a friend of the Jewish community because when our people needed help the most, Israel was there for us, and instead of helping his people, Mandla ran off to help Palestinians,” the princess said.

This isn’t the first confrontation between Dalindyebo and Mandela. In 2013, Mandela exhumed the remains of three of Nelson Mandela’s children from their graves in Qunu and reinterred them in Mvezo without broader family consent, triggering outrage within the Mandela family. King Dalindyebo opposed the move, and the Eastern Cape High Court in Mthatha ultimately ordered that the remains be returned to the family graveyard near Qunu.

The dispute has also exposed internal divisions within the wider Mandela family over Israel and Gaza. Mandela’s cousins, Zamaswazi Dlamini-Mandela and Zaziwe Dlamini-Manaway, visited Israel and Gaza last year, saying they were open to seeing the situation for themselves and describing the experience to the *SA Jewish Report* as “eye-opening”, a stance that contrasted sharply with Mandla’s uncompromising rhetoric.

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Ball in Roedean’s court after another resignation

NICOLA MILTZ

The Roedean School tennis saga continues to gather pace, with no promised rematch likely any time soon. Days after the principal of Roedean, a top private school for girls, resigned following an antisemitic incident over a tennis match, the chairperson of the board has now stepped down. A Change.org petition launched by parents unhappy about the decision to apologise to King David for antisemitism is gaining

traction, while an Old Roedeanian has circulated a call for respect and calm. King David has accepted the apology, but Roedean is scrambling to steady its game. Roedean has made no contact with King David High School since apologising on 12 February, despite its commitment to continuing to work with King David and “rescheduling the match for our girls”. In a letter to parents, staff, and members of the Roedean community dated 16 February 2026, the board confirmed that

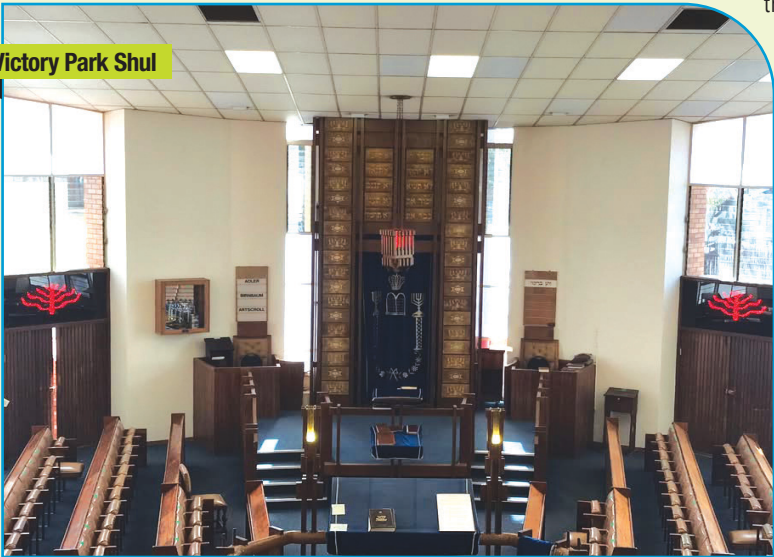
it had accepted the resignation of Chairperson Dale Quaker with immediate effect. It said Quaker’s decision followed “careful reflection” on the pressure the recent period had placed on him and his family, noting that public commentary had crossed acceptable boundaries and affected their sense of safety and well-being. “The stepping down and resignations have much to do with not having been prepared to handle the issue truthfully from the get-go, and thus failing to act with real

Victory Park Shul’s anxiety allayed

LEE TANKLE

Members of the Victory Park Hebrew Congregation heaved a sigh of relief on 13 February when they were sent a letter explaining that their beloved shul wasn’t going anywhere. The letter published by Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the executive director of the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) and the shul’s chairperson, Alan Joffe, said that the King David Victory Park campus hadn’t yet been sold, and that when it was eventually sold, there was a condition that the shul be given at least 24 months to remain on campus to find the ideal permanent, long-term solution, whether that be in the shul, elsewhere on campus, or at an entirely new location. “In line with halachic requirements, we will work with the shul committee to ensure that at no stage will the community be left without a shul,” the letter read. “There was understandable anxiety from the community in not knowing what the future holds,” Seeff said. “Even though the SABJE also doesn’t have complete clarity, a lot depends on the sale. We are working closely with the committee, want to be transparent and give the community all of the information we have, and hopefully to allay its fears that we are working hard on ensuring the best outcome for the shul. I think the letter helped achieve that.” Victory Park Shul’s Rabbi Azriel Uzvolk, said, “There’s a lot of pain in the closing of the [Victory Park] campus because there was a whole culture behind the school, and almost three generations of students had gone through the system. It’s been emotionally difficult for any of the Parkers to handle the news of the closing of the campus. “But to separate that from the actual Victory Park Hebrew Congregation and districts we service like Linden, Blairgowrie, Parkhurst, Parkview, and now Emmarentia, we are still going strong, and intend to do so for many years to come., “We need to be strong and not allow our sadness at the closing of the campus to affect our attendance, community building, and growth,” Uzvolk said. “That’s still there. We have, thank G-d, strong *minyanim* every day, twice a day.” Though the campus hasn’t yet been sold, the SABJE appointed an agent in January 2026 who has begun the sealed-bid sale process and anticipates it will take about two months, with the intention of selling to another school group. Seeff said there had been considerable interest from several buyers, and that the reason they began the process of a sealed-bid sale was that “we didn’t want the sale marketed in an overtly public way as we didn’t believe it to be in the best interests of the community”. One of the conditions of the sale to prospective buyers is that the shul be given at least two years to stay on campus until it finds a perfect long-term solution. “The SABJE has been committed to helping secure the future of the shul. The closure of the Victory Park campus

was a decision that had a significant impact on the Jewish community on the western side of Johannesburg. While closing the school was necessary, we want to ensure that there is Jewish continuity in those suburbs,” said Seeff. “Attempting to secure a longer runway from the potential purchasers will allow the shul and SABJE to plan for the future with the peace of mind that it can continue to operate.” He said all parties involved had agreed on this condition, and that the SABJE had also been engaging with the shul committee to explore the possibility of purchasing a property in Victory Park with a view to developing a standalone shul with the necessary amenities. Seeff said the SABJE wanted to ensure that the shul continued to exist, saying, “There’s a lovely, warm, and vibrant community that the shul serves. It’s a special place, and with the school closed, it has now become the focal point of Jewish life in that area. It’s important that it can continue performing the communal and religious services it does.” Seeff also said there was still a chance that the shul would remain on campus, whether it be in its original location or elsewhere. This would be subject to the offer and negotiations with the buyer. Uzvolk said that though everything was up in the air about where the shul would ultimately be, whether on campus or in a house in Victory Park, the community had been kept in the loop every step of the way with the SABJE. “There isn’t clarity on where the shul will be because there isn’t clarity in this situation yet. No-one is withholding any information. The board is doing its best, it wants to get the best deal that it can get, keeping us very much in mind of whatever will be best for the shul.” Uzvolk said that the shul’s board wasn’t investigating alternative locations for the shul yet, as it didn’t have clarity about whether it needed to find a new location or not, it all depended on the sale. “When there is clarity, the board has also said that nothing will happen straight away,” Uzvolk said. “There will be a good amount of time for us, if need be, to relocate either to another place on campus or to a property in Victory Park. These things do take time, and the SABJE isn’t going to hold back information from us. It’s not in its interest. It wants what’s best for the community. It was a difficult decision for the board to make. Part of the difficulty of the decision was that there’s a Jewish community out here, how it was going to affect the community.” Seeff said that until the campus was sold, the SABJE would continue to support and ensure the day-to-day maintenance and running costs of the campus, including the shul. Depending on the outcome of the sale, the SABJE would also contribute financially to the establishment of a new shul. However, it’s still too early to say what will happen.



The Victory Park Shul



conviction,” said Sara Gon, fellow of the Institute of Race Relations. “So, in having raised issues that weren’t correct or pertinent, the Roedean side came out looking evasive and uncertain about issues on which there should be clear principle. The criticism should be expected in a situation of prevarication. The pressure to resign was clearly considerable,” she said. The Roedean board expressed gratitude for Quaker’s leadership during what it described as a particularly demanding chapter in the school’s history, and said it remained fully constituted and operational, with no disruption to governance or daily academic and co-curricular activities. Thembi Mazibuko was appointed interim chairperson with immediate effect. Quaker’s resignation comes shortly after the departure of Roedean’s principal, Phuti Mogale, intensifying focus on the school’s leadership.

“

**REBUILDING TRUST WILL REQUIRE
TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY,
AND CONSISTENCY FROM THE
BOARD AND LEADERSHIP.**

The board’s apology to King David School has drawn criticism from some within Roedean’s broader community. The petition expresses dissatisfaction with the decision to apologise to King David. While acknowledging the need to reject antisemitism, the petition argues that the board’s statement didn’t sufficiently recognise what it describes as the constitutional rights of parents and pupils to act in accordance with conscience and political belief. It contends that the incident was framed primarily as discrimination, without adequately distinguishing between antisemitism and political objections related to Zionism and Israel. The petition calls for clearer differentiation between antisemitism and political dissent, and urges the school to affirm freedom of conscience and facilitate

internal dialogue. At the same time, an open letter by Gontse Nkwe, a former pupil at Roedean and current parent, South African Old Roedeanian Association (SAORA) committee member, and Roedean School board member, has sought to encourage reflection. Writing in her personal capacity, Nkwe said she was responding to questions, frustrations, and expectations of SAORA during a difficult period. Nkwe emphasised that SAORA was an independent body focused on stewardship of values and continuity across generations, not on day-to-day governance. She acknowledged the pressure on the school to “take a side”, but argued that Roedean had historically taught its pupils “how to think, not what to think”, and to engage thoughtfully with complex issues. Nkwe noted that a formal process was taking place to examine whether systems had functioned as they should, and said the work focused on understanding structural breakdowns and restoring alignment with shared values. “At Roedean, we were taught that it is possible – and necessary – to live and work alongside people whose views, beliefs, histories, and identities differ profoundly from our own. Respect doesn’t require agreement, and holding one’s own position doesn’t require the erasure of another’s. Tolerance isn’t a slogan but a lived discipline,” she writes. The board has stated that with an interim chairperson now in place and a review process under way, the school continues to address concerns raised within its community. In earlier correspondence, the board said the decision to cancel the tennis fixture was taken without the board’s knowledge, and didn’t reflect the views of Roedean’s broader constituencies, including current and past students, parents, staff, and the board itself. “Rebuilding trust will require transparency, accountability, and consistency from the board and leadership,” it said. The ball now rests in Roedean’s court, with King David awaiting word on a rematch.

Joburg businessman is latest in kidnap surge

CLAUDIA GROSS

A Johannesburg Jewish businessman was driving home from OR Tambo International Airport last Wednesday night, 11 February, when he was hijacked and kidnapped.

He had stopped at a yield sign on an offramp while on the phone to a friend when gunmen hijacked him, said CSO Chief Executive Liron Sanders, explaining that hijacking was on the increase across the city.

The man shouted to his friend that he was being hijacked and kidnapped before the line went dead, according to Sanders. Within a short time, he had been forced to hand over access to his accounts, and was later dumped in

Alexandra township without his car or phone.

The friend immediately called the CSO control room, which set off a search that ended with the man being found alive, medically assessed, and escorted home after opening a case with the police.

The incident is one of a growing number of what are known as “express kidnappings”, in which victims are abducted for a limited period and forced to transfer funds or withdraw cash before being released.

“Criminals will kidnap you, generally in your vehicle or in their vehicle, for a short period of time, and they will try to withdraw or transfer funds out of your bank account,” said Sanders. “Once



they've completed what they can do before the banks freeze [your accounts],

they drop you off somewhere, take your car and phone, and leave you stranded. That's what's taking place. It's called an express kidnapping because they're not kidnapping you for ransom. They're kidnapping you for a brief period to extort as much money out of you as possible.”

The most recent victim had parked at the airport and was driving himself home when he was kidnapped. Sanders said the attack didn't happen at the airport itself and that such crimes aren't linked to a particular origin point. “The point is he was on his way home,” he said. The man was eventually dropped in Alexandra, where a resident allowed him to use a phone to send his location to the security teams searching for him.

The speed with which the friend reported the incident was critical. “As it was happening, he shouted that he was being hijacked and kidnapped, call for help, and then the phone died,” Sanders said. “Which is fantastic, because that's how we got the information and started deploying our resources.”

Based on previous cases in which victims had been taken to Alexandra, responders moved into the general area and then into the township once more information became available. The victim was found shortly afterwards.

The CSO dealt with between 12 and 16 express kidnappings in the Jewish community in 2025, Sanders said, an average of at least one a month. He emphasised that the crime wasn't directed at Jews. “It's not targeted at the Jewish community. It's targeted at anyone. We just hear about it because we deal with it.”

Police operations and media reports indicate that the pattern extends beyond the community, with several high-profile rescues and arrests in Gauteng linked to express kidnappings

for financial gain. Banking and risk specialists have warned that the immediacy of digital payments and the availability of large sums through electronic transfers have made the crime attractive to syndicates.

Sanders said the locations most often associated with these incidents are areas with lower security visibility, particularly highway offramps that allow perpetrators to move quickly between major routes and densely populated areas. He identifies roads near Alexandra as examples, but stresses that the crime is opportunistic and can occur anywhere. “Hotspot areas we are seeing are offramps and low-secured areas in terms of security presence,” he said. “It's more opportunistic. They see an opportunity, and that's why they do it.”

The crime places pressure on banks as well as victims. Perpetrators typically force victims to unlock banking applications, reveal PINs, or accompany them to ATMs. Once suspicious activity is detected and accounts are frozen, the victim is usually released. Disputes over liability for transfers made under duress have become an increasing feature of the aftermath. For CSO, the key factor is time. Immediate reporting and the ability to track a victim's location can determine whether a search begins within minutes or hours.

Sanders said the first step for community members in an emergency is to call the CSO control room. He also recommended that families use live tracking applications that allow responders to locate them quickly. Other precautions include driving on familiar, well-secured routes, and maintaining awareness.

“Being compliant and not aggravating the kidnappers is obviously a good one,” he said. “Driving trusted routes that you know that are well secured, and in areas that you feel comfortable with and then having awareness, vigilance, and a family tracking app.”

Although physical detention in an express kidnapping is brief, the impact on victims is severe. In the latest case, a shouted warning during a phone call made the difference between a disappearance and a rapid recovery. The pattern it represents, Sanders said, is becoming an established feature of Johannesburg's crime landscape.

• The CSO's 24-hour emergency number is: 086 18 000 18.

Christian leader calls for fasting, prayer on Purim

LEE TANKLE

In the spirit of Esther's ancient call to “gather all the people and fast”, South African Christian Rachel Kalidass is calling for other Christians to unite in a sacred day of prayer, fasting, and repentance this Purim.

Kalidass leads the Prayer and Repentance Movement, a faith-based coalition of leaders and congregations calling believers to collective prayer, fasting, and spiritual renewal, particularly at moments they view as critical for the nation's moral and spiritual direction.

She said she wants all Judeo-Christians like her to join on this day of prayer and fasting on 2 March because she feels that the story of Esther is especially relevant to the situation Jews and Christians are in.

The fast of Esther, taking place on 2 March, is observed on the day before Purim to commemorate the fast of Queen Esther and the Jewish people, recorded in the Book of Esther, a fast undertaken before Esther went to the King to tell him of Haman's plan to kill the Jewish people.

“The story of Esther is about courage, but it is also about G-d's faithfulness that He will always save Israel and the Jewish people,” said Kalidass, “especially [regarding] what we're going through globally, but also in South Africa. I think it's really a message of hope, not just for the Jewish community but also for the Christian community, as there's so much Christian persecution, and Judeo-Christian values are being challenged globally.”

This is far from the only collective prayer that Kalidass has set up. Since 2023, she has organised many, including on the top of Table Mountain for Yom Kippur last year; and a national day of prayer at a historic church in Sharpeville and the FNB Stadium in Johannesburg.



Rachel Kalidass

“We lit the menorah on top of Table Mountain, and it was just beautiful to bring the nation before G-d in repentance. We feel that especially now with Purim, the message, and the times that we're living in, we need to gather Judeo-Christian believers and the common values of the love the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has for

His people, and the Purim story is just a beautiful way to bring everybody together,” she said.

Kalidass urged people to get involved by fasting; taking some time out of their day to pray; or going to the suggested prayer points across South Africa, no matter what religion they are. “We have so much more in common than what divides us,” she said. “We have such a shared love for the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have a shared love for the land of Israel and for the Jewish people.”

Saying that she wants as many people as possible to take part she said, “I believe prayer is going to shift Africa in a greater way than politics would.”

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Jewish Report

Feeding the hateful narrative

I was sure that Roedean School apologising for the antisemitism behind its refusal to play tennis with King David High School would make everything right. I believed it would put a full stop at the end of what was an ugly rigmarole concerning the schools, their pupils, parents, educators, and everyone else who felt the need to have their say.

Apologies are generally significant, and make a real difference if truly meant, or so I have always believed. And in this case, I believed those who wrote the apology and agreed to it really meant it. I don’t know what their personal beliefs are. I imagine most of them don’t believe that antisemitism is acceptable, nor any kind of racism. Perhaps some saw the backlash to their actions and realised that trying to get around any form of racism wouldn’t be good for the school or anyone else.

I cannot say, but I was thrilled that there was a real apology. However, perhaps I was naïve to believe that the apology would be the end of it, because those who hate us and are truly antisemitic were never going to accept an apology as an end to the racist saga.

Unfortunately, those who ultimately suffer in all of this are school kids on all sides, but our haters are not interested in them. It’s all about the narrative and making Jews – or as they now like to call us by the new derogative, “Zios” – look bad. Their aim, or so it seems, is to ensure that the world lumps us all together as supporting and encouraging genocide. Their idea – the same as that of the Nazis – is to dehumanise us and take away anything that identifies us as individuals in order for people to be able to hate us all. Amazingly, I do not know one single person who supports genocide or wants anyone to be killed for their race or religion.

In terms of what originally happened between the schools, I have to admit, I don’t for one moment believe that the refusal to play against King David was 100% in the adults’ court. I have teenage and young adult children, and I was once one of those too. I had very strong beliefs, and was never afraid to voice my opinions. In fact, as a teenager, I believed I was invincible. And so, while I do understand that it’s the adults and educators who allow the teenagers to do and say what they want, I wouldn’t be surprised if the teens refused to play.

Unfortunately, antisemitism has become the popular narrative, and our government has allowed it and, in fact, encouraged it. And so, by taking a stand against King David scholars, the teens probably saw themselves as woke, following the trendy folk, and also supporting their government.

How sickening is it that hating and demeaning us is trendy! So, though the school did the right thing, our haters have not let it go. No, they have continued with the narrative, and even made Roedean look weak and foolish by having apologised.

They claim that hating Zionists – Jews in any other language – is absolutely acceptable because we are simply bad people in supporting the Jewish State. Said like that, it’s easy to believe them, right? Then, many trot out their favourite Jew-hating Jews to confirm how right they are and how evil we are.

Only, we live in a country in which racial hatred is outlawed. However, as we have witnessed around the world and during the Holocaust, the more you dehumanise people and make hating them the popular narrative, the easier it is to harm them.

Australia is a case in point. The Chanukah massacre could have happened only if people believed it was acceptable to kill Jews. Just two days after the 7 October 2023 massacre, there were hoards outside the Sydney Opera House calling for the murder of all Jews. This was just one of the scene-setters that led to the Chanukah massacre.

Our government has to change its stance to protect the Jews in this country. Or do our leaders no longer believe we are South African, and are happy to make a mockery of the Bill of Rights and Constitution?

This isn’t about Israel. It’s about South African Jews going to a Jewish school. Anybody who insists it is anything else is lying. Nobody asked what those King David tennis players believed about Israel. Nobody cared to ask. They just blanket refused to play with them because they were pupils at a Jewish school.

I’m so tired of people making excuses for their hatred and calling it by other names. Most South African Jews are Zionists because we simply believe how essential it is for the Jewish State to survive and thrive. It’s not about the present-day government. Nor is it about the many issues in Israel we may have opinions on.

I feel like a stuck record saying the same thing over and over because it seems that as many times as Jews explain this, so many simply won’t accept it. They have their own explanations for their hatred.

I’m so tired of hearing how hating Zionists isn’t hating Jews. It is. Simple. Every single day when we pray, we pray for Jerusalem and to return there. And I take offence with those who aren’t Jewish who believe they know who and what we are and what we believe.

My point is that the Roedean-King David saga is actually over, but the haters won’t let it go. They will continue to use it to spread their hatred. They will continue to push for it to enhance their ugly narrative about us.

Here’s the thing: we will not bow down to them! We will not let them take our power! We have nothing to be ashamed of, and will hold our heads high as Jews and Zionists.

Shabbat shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



We are no longer that sort of Jew!

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



Earlier this month, the New England Patriots were trounced in a lacklustre football performance at the American Super Bowl, losing convincingly to the Seattle Seahawks. The most exciting moment of the game was a performance by Puerto Rican singer Bad Bunny. But during this year’s Super Bowl broadcast, one of the most talked-about moments had nothing to do with football. It was an advert funded by Patriots owner Robert Kraft.

Kraft reportedly spent around \$15 million (R240.3 million) on a 30-second Super Bowl advertisement through his Foundation to Combat Antisemitism. It wasn’t the first time he has used America’s biggest television stage to confront Jew-hatred. The Super Bowl remains the most watched annual sporting broadcast in the United States, and Kraft decided to use that platform to address rising antisemitism in America.

Kraft’s advert depicts a young Jewish schoolboy being bullied by classmates who stick a Post-it note reading “Dirty Jew” onto his backpack. A tall, lanky black student approaches, places an arm around the Jewish child, and quietly covers the hateful note with a blue Post-it of solidarity. It’s a poignant moment of fraternity, one that has divided opinion within the Jewish world.

Some critics argue that the advert portrays Jews as weak, pigeonholing us as victims in need of protection from a benevolent “older brother”. “We are no longer that sort of Jew,” they say. We are strong enough and proud enough to stand up for ourselves and, if necessary, fight.

Social media, powered by the miracle – and mischief – of artificial intelligence, quickly reimagined the advert. In one version, the Jewish boy beats up his tormentors. In another, he grows up to become a world-famous scientist and doctor while the former bully lies helpless on an operating table, passing him a note that, this time, reads, “Thank you.”

I’m enormously grateful to Kraft for his willingness to spend vast sums in defence of our community. But if I’m honest, the revenge edits resonated more instinctively with my worldview. Personally, in my darker moments, I might even have preferred the world-class doctor to leave his patient on the operating table and walk away. They don’t have to like us, but if they don’t, they must fear us.

When I was three years old, my parents scraped together enough money to move our family out of Hillbrow. I remember watching the Hillbrow Tower being built from our kitchen window. We moved a kilometre away to the corner of Carse O’Gowrie Road and Boundary Road in Parktown, directly opposite Roedean School.

Our first visitor was the domestic worker from the house across the road. She explained that she worked for the Laurence family. They had asked her to deliver a message: they did not like Jews and did not want their children playing with Jewish children. We should please stay away.

I never met the Laurences. I don’t know whether their children attended Roedean. But as the recent Roedean tennis saga unfolded,

my mind kept returning to that domestic worker forced to deliver a message of hate and exclusion: “We do not want our children to play with Jews.”

The *SA Jewish Report*, which I have the honour to chair, had the Roedean tennis story days before it broke publicly. King David Schools tried to dissuade us from publishing the story, and arguing that a newspaper report could threaten student safety. We disagreed with that argument. I told Peta, our editor, “not playing tennis doesn’t constitute a safety threat to our students, allowing Jew-hating racism to flourish does”.

We took the decision to continue with the story, but as often happens, the story had leaked and gone viral long before we put pen to paper.

But then something very strange happened. The alumni of Roedean started standing up against Roedean’s decision to cancel the tennis match; current students started demanding they leave the school that colloquially became known as “Hitler High”; and parents stood up, one by one, to demand that they not be tarnished with the brush of antisemitism. One of the trustees called me and sobbed, irreconcilable with grief over the hurt the school had caused to the Jewish community.

Suddenly, we weren’t alone. We found ourselves surrounded by love and respect, supported by students, parents, teachers, and alumni who believed that the school needed to acknowledge the harm it had caused, and make amends by apologising and, of course, play the tennis game.

The loudest dissenters were the usual Jew-hating professional agitators, the Temu version of Candace Owens, without her polish or following.



Screenshot from the advert addressing antisemitism at the Super Bowl

And in that moment, I realised that perhaps Robert Kraft had understood something profound. There are times when strength means standing alone. And there are times when strength means accepting the arm placed around your shoulder.

At moments of hatred and isolation, the embrace of that tall, lanky black kid isn’t weakness. It is solidarity. It is alliance. It is the reminder that we aren’t alone.

For that, and for having the courage to say so on America’s biggest stage, I’m forever grateful to Mr Kraft.

• *Howard Sackstein is an internationally renowned human rights activist, writer, and speaker. He hosted Nelson Mandela in Brussels to introduce him to top European diplomats and businesspeople. He is an award-winning marketer and political analyst. He has had a personal relationship with every South African president since the end of apartheid. He is chairperson of the SA Jewish Report, but writes in his personal capacity.*

Hermanus case exposes global safeguarding risk

OPINION

WENDY HENDLER



The Hermanus surf school case, initially reported to Koleinu SA in 2021, is on its way to trial. Last week's confirmation that a pre-trial hearing has begun marks an important legal step not only for the complainants, but for every young person who travels abroad to participate in recreational sporting programmes, gap-year programmes, holiday trips, and residential experiences.

The accused, a surf instructor offering accommodation linked to his school, faces multiple charges relating to alleged assaults spanning several years. According to prosecutors, international complainants are expected to testify remotely from their home countries. A co-accused is reportedly facing an additional charge.



Nearly two years ago, survivors first contacted Koleinu SA. At the time, their experiences were documented in an investigative report published by *Daily Maverick*. Koleinu SA assisted complainants to understand their options and supported them in initiating the legal process that ultimately led to the opening of a criminal case.

Those disclosures helped move the matter out of silence and into the legal framework, initiating reporting pathways, assisting survivors to navigate jurisdictional barriers, and enabling South African authorities to investigate allegations involving foreign nationals.

The allegations relate to incidents said to have occurred between 2014 and 2022. Though the accused has denied wrongdoing and the case remains before the courts, the unfolding legal process highlights safeguarding lessons that extend far beyond one individual case.

One of the most significant challenges highlighted in this matter is that several complainants were foreign nationals who had already returned to their home countries after their experiences. South African criminal procedure generally requires that a

complainant be physically present in the country to lay a charge. Reports indicate that the case gained legal traction only once a complainant who was still in South Africa was able to open a case locally.

This reflects a reality Koleinu SA frequently encounters – that abuse doesn't respect borders, yet justice systems often do.

Recent developments confirmed by the National Prosecuting Authority include the possibility that the state may apply for witnesses to testify remotely from their respective countries. Should such an application be granted, it may set an important precedent for handling cross-border sexual-violence cases more sensitively and practically. Though remote testimony may reduce logistical barriers, survivors still require

extensive emotional, legal, and practical support to participate in proceedings taking place thousands of kilometres away.

Another significant challenge emerging in cases of this nature is the difficulty in alerting international booking platforms and tourism sites to potential risks. When allegations take years to be reported or investigated formally, it becomes extremely difficult for platforms to act without an open criminal case or formal findings. During these delays, individuals may continue operating businesses, rebranding

accommodation or services, or creating new online identities, making it harder for victims or authorities to track patterns of concern. This highlights a broader global safeguarding gap in which digital marketplaces often lack clear mechanisms to respond to credible safety concerns before legal processes are finalised.

Survivors frequently delay reporting due to fear, shame, uncertainty about whether they will be believed, and concern about personal and social consequences. When alleged perpetrators operate in environments combining travel, hospitality, mentorship, and authority, these barriers can be even more pronounced.

Programmes that combine coaching or mentorship, accommodation, and social activities create a power imbalance. Participants are far from home, parents and support networks are far away, and leaders control housing and schedules. These are known safeguarding risk environments, namely settings where dependency increases vulnerability.

Though communities often focus safeguarding efforts on schools, youth organisations, and religious institutions, this case underscores vulnerability in

recreational environments such as sports training, travel programmes, and holiday accommodation. These spaces often include isolation from family, cultural or language barriers, alcohol-fuelled social settings, and blurred professional boundaries.

Legitimate programmes should provide a written code of conduct and reporting protocols. For young travellers especially, recognising and responding to uncomfortable situations can be extremely challenging. If concerns must be reported to the same person running the programme, reconsider participation. To ensure safety for children under 18 years old, ask whether safeguarding policies exist; whether staff are screened against the National Sex Offender Register and have a police clearance certificate; and whether accommodation is separately managed from coaching staff. If the instructor owns the residence, supervises social activities, and controls daily life, it represents a heightened risk environment.

Adult travellers should take note of the following safety measures. They shouldn't rely solely on online reviews. Ratings measure customer satisfaction, not safety. Travellers should maintain external communication channels; share location with family; keep emergency funds for relocation; arrange scheduled check-ins; and know about alternative accommodation options. If outside communication is discouraged, leave immediately.

Before arrival, research local police procedures, embassy contacts, and support organisations. Many victims delay reporting simply because they don't know who will believe them or where to go in a foreign country.

The lengthy timeline between alleged incidents and legal proceedings reflects the emotional and logistical challenges survivors often face. Court processes can be intimidating, particularly for victims living overseas who must revisit traumatic experiences within unfamiliar legal systems.

The Hermanus case reminds us that abuse can occur in environments that appear relaxed, recreational, or trustworthy. It challenges communities to remain vigilant, to listen carefully when concerns arise, and to treat safeguarding as a shared responsibility.

Most importantly, it highlights the courage of survivors who came forward, often years later, to seek accountability and prevent harm to others. If silence may cross borders, accountability should too.

• *Wendy Hendler is the co-founder and director of Koleinu SA, the helpline for victims of abuse in the South African Jewish community. The helpline number is 011 264 0341, operating on Sunday to Thursday, from 09:00 to 22:00, and after Shabbat until midnight.*

Holocaust survivor embraces Jewish identity with Hebrew name

GILANA LAB

Wanda Helena Albińska has taken a bold step in her 90th year – she adopted a Hebrew name, Channa, after having lived her life as a Catholic. Born to a Jewish physician mother, Dr Halina Rotstein, and a Polish Catholic father, Stefan, in Warsaw, Poland, Wanda Rotstein survived the Holocaust by growing up and living as a Catholic.

For most of her life, Wanda kept this history a secret, not even telling her precious son, Luc. Wanda lost her mother in the Holocaust, and spent decades building a life far removed from the identity that had once placed her in mortal danger.

Now, at 89 – turning 90 on 11 May – she took a step that reflects a quiet but profound return to that past. She adopted the name Channa at Norwood Chabad on Saturday, 14 February.

The name wasn't chosen lightly. According to her son, Luc Albinski, who recently took on the Hebrew name Menachem Zachariah, the decision was both personal and symbolic. "Channa means grace or favour of G-d," he said. "My mom was favoured by G-d by surviving the Holocaust and emerging unscathed from the Warsaw Ghetto." After he acquired his own Hebrew name, "my mom was encouraged to do the same," he said. For a woman who spent decades keeping that part of herself hidden, the moment



Wanda Channa Albińska and her son, Luc Albinski

carries generational weight.

By the age of five, Wanda was living inside the Warsaw Ghetto, where her family survived in the basement of the Czyste Hospital where her mother worked. She remembers the ghetto as a place of darkness, hunger, and typhus, with fleeting glimpses of sunlight when she and her siblings were allowed to play in the hospital yard. In September 1942, as deportations intensified, her mother made an impossible decision. To save her children, Halina arranged for Wanda

and her two brothers to be smuggled out to the "Aryan side" of Warsaw. They were taken in by Dr Andrzej Trojanowski, a friend of her mother's, and his wife, Stefania. To protect them from Nazi persecution, the children were given false identities and later baptised as Catholics in 1945. Wanda grew up in a Catholic children's home she remembers as nurturing and happy. She would go on to study chemistry at university, meet her future husband, Wojtek Albiński, in a café while on holiday, and build an adventurous life that took her to Iraq, Paris, Switzerland, Botswana, and eventually South Africa.

Survival, however, came at a devastating cost. Wanda's mother had obtained what was known as a "life ticket", a document that could have secured her escape. Instead, she gave it to a nurse and chose to remain with her patients whom she believed depended on her for their survival.

She was deported to Treblinka in 1942 and murdered at the age of 35. For much of her life, Wanda grappled with that loss, holding both the pain of feeling abandoned as a child and, later, a deep pride in her mother's courage and selflessness.

Continued on page 10>>

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Don’t withdraw in face of antisemitism, experts urge

LEE TANKLE

“I don’t think it’s the job of Jews to cure antisemitism. Antisemitism is an unfortunate sickness that afflicts antisemites. It’s our job to be good Jews and good humans.”

So said American journalist, author, and podcaster, Mark Oppenheimer, speaking to South African lawyer and hate-speech expert of the same name, Advocate Mark Oppenheimer. They were in a webinar conversation hosted by the Jewish National Fund South Africa, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), and the SAZF Cape Council on 17 February.

The American Oppenheimer explained that Jews shouldn’t be afraid of antisemitism and shouldn’t withdraw from places because of its threat.

“We shouldn’t withdraw from spaces we want to be in. If you want to go to Harvard because it has the laboratory you want to work in or it has a crew you want to row on, you shouldn’t not go because there are antisemites,” he said.

The South African Oppenheimer said that though the Jewish community must build its own spaces, he has witnessed, particularly as a member of the University of Cape Town Council, that if we want Jews to continue to play a pivotal role in the societies in which we live, we cannot allow ourselves to surrender the spaces we occupy.

“As Mark says, if Jews are American citizens, then Jews in South Africa are South African citizens. We need to explain our history to people and how we continue to be inspiring people who punch above their weight, and also, get your muscles ready, because you have to have some fights,” Oppenheimer said.

He said that what he found interesting when looking at the situation in which Roedeian School refused to play a tennis match against King David two weeks ago was the idea of downplaying the Jewishness of the school and inflating the “Israeliness” of the school to justify Roedeian’s reason for not wanting to take part.

Said American Oppenheimer, “I was struck reading about the controversy in South Africa, especially as a tennis player and father of teenage girls. If even girls’ high school tennis cannot remain depoliticised, what can? What stood out was the clear dissembling: private remarks referring to Jews, later reframed publicly as being about Israel. Similarly, there was the Swiss broadcaster who, instead of simply critiquing the Israeli bobsled team’s performance, felt compelled to label them ‘Zionists’ and ‘genociders’. For some, the terms have become interchangeable. This is a shift that speaks volumes.”

He said he knew people who were sincerely anti-Zionist. “They have no problem with Jews; they just have a problem with Israel,” he said. “Then, there are people who have to stop themselves and say ‘Zionist’ when they really mean ‘Jew’, and those in between.

“I know people across the spectrum on this issue. At one end are those I believe to be sincere anti-Zionists who genuinely don’t harbour hostility toward Jews. Some are Jewish, some are not, and many have demonstrated consistency over decades,” he said. “They hold all countries to the same moral standards – speaking out about atrocities in Sudan; China’s treatment of the Uyghurs; or the persecution of LGBTQ people in parts of the Muslim world. There’s integrity there, but they are a small minority.

“At the other extreme are those who clearly mean ‘Jew’ but consciously substitute ‘Zionist’ or ‘Israeli’. The distinction is cosmetic; the hostility isn’t. In between are many others, where the slippage



American Mark Oppenheimer

between ‘Jew’ and ‘Zionist’ may be unconscious, careless, or at times deliberate. That ambiguity leaves Jews constantly trying to discern intent: who genuinely disagrees with Israeli policy? Who harbours animus? Who is being dishonest?”

He said that in terms of American universities, there are two different scenarios: those universities that allow for encampments to continue on their campus, even though it clearly breaks the rules of the university; and those like Washington

University, where he teaches, which cleared out the encampments but still allowed students to hold placards and demonstrate.

“Protests are legitimate. Encampments aren’t because campuses are shared spaces for all students. That’s especially true when encampments barred ‘Zionists’ or journalists from entering. As a journalist, I found the hostility toward the press striking. Journalism is essential to the free-speech ecosystem for the left as much as the right, yet many protesters treated any reporter as an adversary,” he said.

Campus journalists, in many cases, failed as well, he said. They often colluded with protesters, avoiding photographs, withholding names, and declining to investigate funding sources. Important stories went uncovered because student papers were either sympathetic to the cause or accepted claims that identifying participants would harm their future careers.

“Campuses clearly struggled,” Oppenheimer said. “Administrators, in many cases, have since reconsidered their approach, particularly the practice of issuing institutional statements. Many are returning to the Chicago neutrality principles: universities don’t take official positions on political issues; faculty and students are free

to speak for themselves.” Both Oppenheimers agreed that though antisemitism has become vicious and it’s important to shut hate speech down, it’s also important to uphold the right to free speech and freedom of expression.

“So long as people aren’t harming others or harassing them to the point where they really can’t go about their daily lives, they should kind of get to say what they want, and society has to make space for that,” said the American Oppenheimer.

South Africa’s Oppenheimer said that South Africa has strong protections for free speech, and that though we should “be able to swing to the edge of someone’s nose and no further”, we should also learn from hate speech as it can give valuable information and a warning.

“One argument for allowing offensive speech is that it provides information. Before the Bondi Beach attack, there were clear warning signs: antisemitic graffiti, synagogue vandalism, and open hostility. The instinct is to silence that speech. But if you drive it underground, you lose the early warning system,” he said.

Instead, he said, hateful speech should alert us that there’s a serious problem that needs to be confronted through counter-speech, community response, and, where necessary, monitoring groups that may move from rhetoric to action. Suppressing speech entirely can mean missing signals that could help prevent violence.

“That said, there are circumstances where speech can incite imminent harm.



South African Advocate Mark Oppenheimer

And it’s crucial to distinguish between speech and conduct,” he said. “A student expressing extreme views on campus is one thing. Setting up encampments that block Jewish students from accessing public spaces isn’t

speech, it’s action. Too often, universities conflate the two. Protecting harassment, property invasion, or shouting down speakers under the banner of ‘free speech’ misunderstands the principle. Suppressing someone else’s speech isn’t an exercise of free speech; it’s the opposite.”

Eli Sharabi’s Hostage memoir named Jewish book of the year

ANDREW SILOW-CARROLL – JTA

Eli Sharabi’s memoir *Hostage*, recounting his experience in Hamas captivity after the 7 October 2023 attack, has been named Book of the Year by the National Jewish Book Awards, organisers announced on Wednesday, 18 February.

The awards, presented by the Jewish Book Council (JBC) and considered among the most prestigious honours in Jewish literature, recognise outstanding English-language books of Jewish interest across dozens of categories. Founded in 1950, the programme is the longest-running North American awards initiative devoted to Jewish books.

Sharabi’s memoir, which details his abduction from Kibbutz Be’eri and the more than a year he spent in captivity, became a bestseller in Israel and was later released in English in the United States.

“This recognition means so much to me, not only personally, but for the memory of my family and all those we lost,” Sharabi said. “*Hostage* is my testimony, a story of my survival, written so others could bear witness. I hope it helps ensure that what happened is never forgotten.”

Other major winners reflect the breadth of contemporary Jewish writing, spanning scholarship, fiction, memoir, and children’s literature.

In American Jewish studies, Pamela S Nadell won for *Antisemitism, an American Tradition*, a look at the forms antisemitism took in the country from the early Dutch settlers to the present day. Russian-born journalist Julia Ioffe took the autobiography and memoir prize for *Motherland: A Feminist History of Modern Russia, from Revolution to Autocracy*. The book blends memoir, journalism, and history to examine modern Russia through the lens of women’s experiences.

Jack Fairweather’s *The Prosecutor: One Man’s Battle to Bring Nazis to Justice*, the story of a Jewish judge and Holocaust survivor from Stuttgart who pursued Nazi perpetrators in post-war Germany, won the biography award.

Fiction honours went to Allison Epstein for *Fagin the Thief*, a retelling of the Dickens novel *Oliver Twist* from the perspective of its Jewish antihero, and Zeeva Bukai received the debut fiction prize for *The Anatomy of Exile*, about the multigenerational echoes of a secret love affair between an Israeli Jewish woman and a Palestinian poet.

The Hebrew fiction-in-translation category recognised *Dog*, by Yishay Ishi Ron, translated by Yardenne Greenspan, which also earned a selection in the book club category. The novella’s protagonist is an Israeli combat veteran haunted by his service in one of the Gaza campaigns prior to 7 October.

This year’s awards arrive as the Jewish discourse has been reshaped by the aftermath of 7 October, a global surge in

antisemitism, and the polarising debate over Israel that followed. Last year’s winner for book of the year, *10/7: 100 Human Stories* by Lee Yaron, was also an account of the attacks and their aftermath.

Jewish anxiety in light of 7 October is the subject of Sarah Hurwitz’s *As A Jew: Reclaiming Our Story From Those Who Blame, Shame, and Try to Erase Us*, which won in the contemporary Jewish life and practice category. Hurwitz, a speechwriter in the Obama administration, provides a primer on Jewish history, texts, and practices in order to counter what she calls misinformation among Jews, their allies, and their critics.

“Especially amid rising antisemitism and Jewish authors facing increased scrutiny, Jewish books have the power to create and sustain community,” said Naomi Firestone-Teeter, chief executive of the JBC, announcing the winners.

In *Hostage*, Sharabi writes about the terror of his abduction and the daily struggle to survive after Hamas fighters stormed Kibbutz Be’eri. He would spend 491 days in captivity, much of it in tunnels beneath Gaza, before being released on 8 February 2025, as part of a negotiated deal. Throughout the ordeal, Sharabi clung to the hope of rescue, writing, “I refuse to let myself drown in pain. I am surviving. I am a hostage. In the heart of Gaza. A stranger in a strange land. In the home of a Hamas-supporting family. And I’m getting out of here. I have to. I’m getting out of here. I’m coming home.”

Other nonfiction winners included Elissa Bemporad’s *Jews in the Soviet Union: A History: Revolution, Civil War, and New Ways of Life, 1917–1930, Volume 1* which won in history; Anna Hájková’s *People Without History are Dust: Queer Desire in the Holocaust*, honoured in Holocaust studies alongside translator William Ross Jones; and Tobias Schiff’s *Return to the Place I Never Left*, which won the Holocaust memoir award, with Dani James recognised for translation.

Awards recognising contemporary Jewish thought and scholarship included Lawrence Grossman’s *Living in Both Worlds: Modern Orthodox Judaism in the United States, 1945–2025*, and Debra Kaplan and Elisheva Carlebach’s

A Woman Is Responsible for Everything: Jewish Women in Early Modern Europe, which won multiple prizes, including scholarship and women’s studies.

In children’s and young readers’ categories, Alison Goldberg’s *The Remembering Candle*, illustrated by Selina Alko, won for children’s picture book; Janice Shapiro’s *Honoria: A Fortuitous Friendship* took the prize for middle grade literature; and Eugene Yelchin’s graphic memoir *I Wish I Didn’t Have to Tell You This* won in young adult literature.

Other winners include Miriam Udel’s *Modern Jewish Worldmaking Through Yiddish Children’s Literature*, which won in education and Jewish identity; Raegan Steinberg, Alexandre Cohen, and Evelyn Eng’s *Arthurs: Home of the Nosh*, honoured in food writing and cookbooks; Ariella Aïsha Azoulay’s *Golden Threads*, which won for Sephardic culture; Elizabeth E Imber’s *Uncertain Empire*, for writing based

on archival material; and Aharon Shabtai’s *Requiem & Other Poems*, translated by Peter Cole, which won the poetry award.

The winners will be honoured at an awards ceremony in New York next month hosted by the entertainer Jonah Platt. At the ceremony,

journalist Sam Feedman will be presented with the council’s Mentorship Award, named in honour of Carolyn Starman Hessel, longtime former director of the JBC. Freedman, a former *New York Times* reporter and professor at Columbia Journalism School, taught a popular course that helped more than 100 students turn their ideas into books, including *When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry*, Gal Beckerman’s 2010 history of the Soviet Jewry movement.

“Sam Freedman changed my life as a writer,” Beckerman said. “He believed in me before I believed in myself, pushed me to take my work seriously, and opened doors I didn’t even know existed. With tough love and deep generosity, he guided me through the daunting process of writing a book as if it were his own. What he did for me, he did for dozens of writers.”



Photo: Harper Influence

HOSTAGE

ELI SHARABI

Eli Sharabi's memoir recounts his 491 days as a Hamas hostage in Gaza

After 7 October, Jews reclaim identity boldly

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It’s not just the Hollywood actor who recommitted to his Judaism after 7 October 2023. It’s the woman who lit Chanukah candles for the first time since she was a child; it’s the people who began wearing *chais* and *Magen Davids* around their necks; and it’s many of the hostages themselves.

For Jews around the world, 7 October 2023 marked a turning point, a desire to reconnect to their Jewish identity or express it in more obvious ways. This shift was so prevalent, there’s even been a term coined to describe it: “October 8th Jews”.

Arguably the most prominent among them, American actor Michael Rapaport, an outspoken Israel-supporter, has frequently discussed how his relationship with his Judaism evolved since 7 October. “My Judaism has changed 100%,” he said in an interview with Israeli news and content website *Ynet*. “I’m more in tune with it. I’m more proud, I’m more aware, I’m more educated. I’m more proactive in every single way possible, and I’m really glad about that.”

Closer to home, Tania Levy, who lives in Johannesburg, says she feels she’s been in the process of “reclaiming” her Judaism since 7 October. “Before that, being Jewish was always part of my identity, but it was one of several things,” she says. “I’m South African, I’m a woman, etc.” So, while she’d always been quite traditional, celebrating *chaggim* with family and so on, her Judaism was never central. “I wasn’t particularly connected to the Jewish community other than peripherally.”

Levy says her connection to Judaism completely changed after 7 October. “The Jewish segment of how I identify myself has become much more prominent. It’s mainly internal, but it’s also extended to observing more of the holidays; going for Shabbat more often; and reading more about Judaism and Jewish issues.”

Having returned from a trip to visit family in Israel just more than a week before 7 October, Levy says



she was devastated by the attacks. “My response to it was visceral. It shook the hell out of me. It felt like something had happened to me and my people.”

It has continued to feel personal for Levy in

the more than two years that have followed, with feelings magnified by the hostages and war in Gaza.

“I was consumed by it. On top of that, I was in an environment, socially and at work, where people’s reactions to what was going on were so very different to mine, which made me feel even more Jewish.”

Though she wishes it hadn’t taken something as terrible as 7 October to draw her closer to Judaism, she’s happy to have reclaimed that part of herself. “It’s

like going back to what my late mom and dad taught me. I lit candles this past Chanukah for the first time since I was a kid, and earlier in the year, I went to the communal Yom Ha’atzmaut celebration, which I never do. I’ve started learning Hebrew. It takes different forms.”

Amanda Horwitz has always been aware of her Judaism. “One part of my life is comedy, and my flavour of humour is Jewish, so it’s part of who I am,” she says. “I never felt I needed to make a statement about my Jewish identity though. But somehow, after 7 October, I wanted to.”

Yet, it was the recent Bondi Beach Chanukah shooting in Sydney that spurred her to action. “It was no longer just a Palestine-Israel issue,”

she says. “It was such blatant antisemitism. For me, it’s unbelievable, because I integrate so comfortably into society. I love being with different people. So, it’s bizarre to think someone would dislike you because you’re Jewish. It just felt so alien.”

Horrified that this could happen in a democratic country like Australia, something in her shifted. “I needed to come forward, to step up, to identify with Jews, and be part of a community. So, I put on my *chai* and *Magen David*. I’m certainly not going to shy away from my Judaism, downplay it, or be ashamed. You

need to know who I am, and if that’s a problem, I have a problem with you too.”

The fact that the Bondi shooting happened just months after her mother passed away, added another element to Horwitz’s desire to express her Jewish identity. “My mother had my *bobba*’s candelabra and menorah in her home. It became important to me to start lighting candles and understand what each candle meant. It was enriching to reconnect again. There was a level of security and something comforting in identifying with other people who, on different levels, are going through the same horror.”

Reflecting on connecting more deeply to Judaism post-7 October, Rabbi Levi Avtzon says that when things are going well, we can generally get away with a skin-deep narrative on the purpose of life. “It’s when the façade of what we think life is about – being successful, wealthy, strong, beautiful, and so on – is ripped apart, that we question what purpose is.”

He applies this to the hostages, who almost all emerged from captivity saying that their faith was stronger. “You may say, ‘What do you mean? Faith stronger? G-d, let you down.’ But yet they’re there, sitting in a tunnel. There’s nothing – no home, status, Facebook, Instagram, popularity contest, bank accounts. There’s nothing. Absolutely powerless in the face of their captors. They then discover, ‘I’m not hopeless; I’m not powerless; I have faith that G-d is with me,’ and it tears away the façade.”

We pray that such moments will never come, Avtzon says. “But how do I start seeking G-d, not only when granny passes away, not only when I go bankrupt, not only when there’s a terrorist attack? How do I find meaning and purpose in my life in the day to day? How do I find time to reconnect, not to buy into what this physical world seems to tell us is important, to remember that there’s something much bigger than us? That’s our soul, our G-d, and our destiny, and that’s our Judaism.”

Glenhazel records safest year since CAP’s inception

LEE TANKLE

For many in Johannesburg’s Jewish community, safety isn’t abstract, it’s personal. It shapes where families live, how children walk to shul, and how businesses operate.

Since launching in Greater Glenhazel in 2006, Community Active Protection (CAP) has achieved an average 84% reduction in serious violent crime across the areas it serves, many of them home to large Jewish populations.

“What started in Greater Glenhazel just more than two decades ago has grown into a city-wide network of organised, information-led community safety initiatives,” said Sean Jammy, CAP deputy chief executive.

Today, CAP operates across numerous areas including Houghton, Oaklands, Orchards, Norwood, Savoy, Waverley, Saxonwold, Victory Park, Sandown, Strathavon, Emmarentia, Greenside, Morningside, and others.

“Across these diverse suburbs, the long-term data tells a consistent story: when communities organise and invest in prevention, crime drops, and stays down,” said Jammy.



At the end of 2025, CAP reported that Glenhazel had recorded the safest year in terms of violent crime since the organisation’s inception 20 years ago, with an average of two violent crimes per month, compared to 18 per month in 2006.

Jammy said that in Greater Glenhazel, serious incidents had declined from 216 per year before the company launched to 24 incidents in 2025, an 88.9% reduction. In Houghton, incidents reduced from 126 per year to 11, a 91% decrease. In Melrose and Birdhaven, contact crime, meaning crimes committed directly against people, including murder, sexual offences, assault, and robbery, fell from 114 annually to just four, representing a 96% reduction. Sandown and Strathavon declined from

154 serious violent crimes per year to nine, while Saxonwold reduced from 62 incidents to only two per year, a 96.8% decrease. Similar sustained reductions are evident across Highlands North, Oaklands, Orchards, Norwood, Savoy, Waverley, and Victory Park.

“Crime remains fluid and adaptive. Criminal syndicates evolve their tactics, and we evolve our response accordingly,” Jammy said “Sustained crime reduction requires consistency, partnership, and long-term investment, not short bursts of activity. Our results across Johannesburg demonstrate that organised, well-funded, community-driven prevention works. The continued safety of our areas depends on residents remaining engaged, contributing financially where possible, taking sensible precautions, and reporting crime to the SAPS [South African Police Service].”

These statistics cannot be directly compared to the SAPS 2025 crime statistics as it uses a financial year reporting cycle, meaning April to March, not the calendar year, and it focuses on the country and individual provinces.

Contact crime dominated the statistics, with 161 672 incidents reported nationally in the fourth quarter of 2024/2025. This remains the biggest challenge for law enforcement and communities nationwide. South Africa recorded a 2.91% drop in all crimes when comparing the fourth quarter of 2023/2024 to that of 2024/2025.

In the second quarter of the 2025/2026 cycle, SAPS reported that though contact crimes were lower nationally, Johannesburg was still the country’s crime hotspot, with

Gauteng accounting for 26% of the country’s contact crimes.

However, the overall incidence of contact crimes in Gauteng has reduced. Murder has steadily declined from a five-year high of 6 424 cases in April-June 2022 to 5 770 in April-June 2025. A significant decline has also been observed in robbery with aggravating circumstances, which declined by 8.7%; rape (5%); and common robbery (3.8%).

Contact crime decreased 3.1% overall compared with the same period in the previous year. Gauteng recorded a 3.8% decrease in contact crimes across the province for the July to September 2025 period when compared to the same period the previous

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Banker beats obstacles, closing on Olympics dream

CLAUDIA GROSS

By the time Johannesburg banker Ashley Benatar reached the beginning of the road race in the Open Masters Games in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) last weekend, the start gun had already gone off. Benatar had stopped on the way to take part in the Presidential Guard Running Championships in Sharja in the UAE, where he won a silver medal for the 5km.

Benatar, who is passionate about obstacle course racing, had flown in to Dubai two days earlier, won his age group in a 10km obstacle race in Abu Dhabi, sprinted into a 2km event straight afterwards, and won that too. Then he found out about the running championships in Sharja and travelled there to participate. Now, without a warm-up and without his race number, he lined up anyway.

“I landed up coming second in the 50-plus category,” he says.

At the Open Masters Games last week, where he participated in the international event for athletes over 30s, he entered three races without realising they started half an hour apart. He ran the 10km first and, although he won his age group, he placed second overall across all the age categories. As he finished, he saw the 2km start, and ran straight into it. He won that as well.

For Benatar, the pursuit of podium finishes is a continuation of a goal that began in the swimming pool. As a teenager, he trained four hours a day with the national team under the guidance of his grandfather, who was his coach, and competed at the 1996 Olympic trials.

“My dream was always to go to the Olympics,” he says. The demands of doing his Chartered Accountancy Honours forced him to stop. “It left a big gap in my day.”

That gap was later filled by touch rugby until a serious leg injury just before his 40th birthday led to hospitalisation and ended his involvement in the sport. He was then encouraged to enter a Warrior Race, South Africa’s largest obstacle course race series, and finished eighth in his first attempt.

“I wanted to improve,” he says. Two second-place finishes in amateur races followed before he moved into the elite division.

He has since travelled across Europe and the Middle East doing obstacle course racing. In 2023, competing on his Italian passport, he finished eighth at the European Championships. In February this year, he and his racing partner won gold at the Deadly Dozen Africa Championships and recorded what he describes as the fastest time in the world for their age group.

Benatar maintains that his girlfriend, Sabrina Daolio, a professional obstacle course racing athlete who regularly wins elite women’s events, is central to his sporting progress.

“She got me to train harder by making sure I trained at least eight or nine times a week,” he says. They met through the sport, and now travel and compete together.

Because there are only a handful of major races locally each year, most of his competition takes place overseas. “Obstacle racing in South Africa is quite weak,” he says. “In Europe there’s a race every weekend. In the Middle East, there’s big prize money. We have to travel to race.”

His approach to competition is direct. “Going for gold is the key. I hate coming to events just to do them for fun,” he says. After winning a bronze medal at the Spartan Beast World Championships, he returned the following year aiming for the title and finished sixth. “That was disappointing.”

What stood out for him at the Masters Games was not only his own results but the athletes around him. “We met a 68-year-old who runs a 35-minute 10km. There was even a 90-year-old who won the 200m,” he says. “If you stay healthy and keep fit, the longevity you get out of it that is incredible. You can choose how you want to live your older age.”

Although he qualifies for age categories, he often chooses to race in the professional division.

“Sometimes it gets easy to beat guys my age,” he says. “You race pro and they destroy you, but the goal is still to run within the



Ashley Benatar winning gold in Abu Dhabi

limitations of my age.”

Alongside his sporting career, he has built a career in investment banking, private equity, and structured finance, and is currently head of Structured Lending and Mezzanine Finance at Standard Bank. Training sessions are fitted around a demanding work schedule and international races are often short trips built around

tight timelines.

The Olympic dream from his swimming days remains the reference point. “I’ll give up when I’m world champion,” he says. “You never say never. I hope I don’t have to wait until the 90-plus age category to do it.” For Benatar, the objective isn’t only to compete, but to continue improving.

Life unapologetic: the memoirs of Merle Levin

Having just released her memoirs, *The World According to Merle*, writer Merle Levin chats to the *SA Jewish Report* about being her true self.

How would you describe yourself?

At 76, I’m excited to be alive. I have been a writer all my life. I get up each day, and open a blank page. I love the process of “mining for words”, for honesty, for communion with the authentic, ageless part of me. I play many roles, some more eloquently than others. I’m a daughter, mom, granny, wife, friend, partner, an overweight, clumsy, inner-ballet dancer. I love to laugh, to pull my fridge apart into something nutritious and delicious. A groaning table with silent eaters smiling is my happy place. I am equal parts sane, mad, committed, and I take myself way too seriously. My ambition is to end my life honestly and authentically. No more asking for permission.

What drew you to write this book?

“Write funny” was the brief from the publisher. She liked the way I was able to fuse tragedy and comedy into my experience. She told me I was able to navigate that edge, and offered me a book contract on that basis. I had forgotten I could write funny. It took a deep dive to find the situations in my life that I could poke fun at. It took me two years to write. It’s the third book I’m publishing.

How would you describe your life so far?

I had a protected childhood in Vereeniging growing up in a strong Jewish community. I chose boarding school for my last years at school, where I excelled. In 1967, I interrupted my studies at the University of the Witwatersrand to volunteer in Israel, which changed the course of my life.

I have led a blessed life, punctuated by challenges and a vigil on the “dark side of the moon” – a crisis of identity in my 40s, where I took myself off on a “silent retreat” for three months of wintering alone at my cottage in Northern Ontario.

I have sat at the feet of many great teachers, and follow an eclectic path of prayer and meditation in my search for the understanding of the mystery of life. I see myself as a student who walks barefoot on the path of life, enjoying the soft feel of sand in one breath, *kvetching* about the stones and roughness in the next.

Tell us a little about your “soggy bottoms” swimming group, and what you get up to.

The “soggy bottoms” are a motley swim group of Stanford residents of all shapes and ages who swim year-round in all weather and water temperature. They are a fun group of people who welcomed us warmly to the village.

How would you describe your marriage and your husband, Jeff?

The short version: 56 years of hilarity and white-knuckled terror at what my darling husband is about to invent himself into. Jeff’s life direction is fuelled by trust; mine by fear. He is the eagle landing perfectly on my rock; I am the rock waiting with solid patience to the landing of his eagle. We enjoy being together, and also being separate. We have each forged our own path, and when by chance we meet, it’s beautiful. We walk a fine balance, giving each other space to grow and be pruned by our collective field. We are dedicated home-movers, explorers, and edge

Merle Levin



dissolvers. Our parenting skills were limited and have hopefully improved as we’ve developed grandparenting skills. At the core of our marriage is deep commitment to supporting our strengths; understanding our weaknesses; and not really having the first clue what the mystery of marriage is really about.

To what do you ascribe your rollicking life to date?

Probably the ability to throw the chips up into the air and see where they land. We seem to have a reckless gene that is open to what life has to offer, and be malleable and fluid enough to listen and act on strange impulse. It helps that we are mad together and that our children understand they have chosen crazy parents who love the road less travelled. When we sense a cycle has ended, we act on it, even if it means moving house, town, country, or continent.

What made you come back to South Africa and settle in Stanford?

We emigrated in 1977 to Canada and became Canadian citizens. As a family, we have all returned to live in South Africa, becoming full-fledged South African

taxpayers since 2025. Although we had made a rich life for ourselves in Canada, we realised that this was home for us. We love being back here.

We moved to Stanford after reading *The Blue Zones* by Dan Buettner and watching the series on Netflix. It highlights places where people grow old in a highly functional way. We have a sense that Stanford has many of the properties he outlines in his research. It has a vibrant community spirit and outreach into surrounding areas with the needs of a disadvantaged community. We realised that we wanted to live and contribute to life in a village, and Stanford seemed to fit the bill.

Who do you believe this book will appeal to and why?

From the feedback we have received, the book has wide appeal to people of all ages. It’s funny, has depth and insight, and is a story of an ordinary woman’s sometimes clumsy attempts at navigating the perils of the human journey.

What does being Jewish mean to you?

We aren’t *shomer* Shabbat, nor do we belong to a Jewish community shul, yet we celebrate our Jewishness in many ways. We love to gather as a family on Shabbat, light candles, and celebrate our Jewishness with family, traditional food, and loving generosity. We take care of each other. No-one in our extended family is without home or hearth.

We support Jewish charities. Israel

is our beloved homeland. Jeff and I met each other and studied in Israel, and we visit often and have many close friends and students. To me, Jewish means roots and history; and it means triumph over suffering with fellow members of the same tribe. It means goodness and charity and care for the underprivileged. It means living a life of *mitzvot*. It doesn’t mean separation. Our family includes many non-Jews, and we embrace their religious and cultural persuasions as our own. Being Jewish is a calling and a responsibility to live a life of goodness.

What impact has being Jewish had on your life?

As a child at a convent primary school, I experienced taunting about my Jewishness and was accused many times of “killing Christ”. I learned to smile through adversity, and not be ashamed. I’m proud to be Jewish and take the responsibility on fully. I don’t shout it out. I don’t seek to be friends with other Jews. It’s not an issue for me.

Where can people get your book?

It’s available at bookstores, via the Merle Levin website, and Amazon.

Holocaust survivor embraces Jewish identity with Hebrew name

>>>Continued from page 7

For 40 years after the war, Wanda didn’t speak about her Jewish heritage. She raised her children as Polish Catholics, believing it would protect them from the burden and confusion of a dual identity. It was only in 1990, during a visit to relatives in the United States, that Luc discovered his Jewish roots. That revelation began a slow and deliberate process of rediscovery for him, one that would unfold over decades.

In her later years, Wanda began sharing her testimony publicly, travelling with her son to the March of the Living in 2018, and speaking at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre.

According to Holocaust historian Tali Nates, Wanda’s decision to take a Hebrew name is part of a broader, deeply human process. It reflects “a process of identity formation”, Nates said, moving from feeling “victimised by history” to reclaiming pride in what once made one a target.

Choosing a Hebrew name, she said, is “to reverse the fact that history targeted you. Now you are choosing a name that showcases that you are proudly embracing Judaism.”

Though many survivors changed their names immediately after the war, especially when immigrating to Israel, Wanda’s decision came much later.

Nates cautions against framing it as unprecedented, but acknowledges its power. “Identity evolves and changes until we are very old,” she says. “It’s an amazing story that at the age of almost 90, she’s coming back to her Jewish side, to her Jewish identity.”

For Wanda, who still describes herself as “Polish first”, embracing her Catholic upbringing and her Jewish roots isn’t a contradiction. She sees in both traditions values of compassion, redemption, and moral responsibility, principles embodied most clearly in her mother’s final act.

Her life has since become the subject of her son’s book *The Varsovian Covenants*, as well as the documentary and stage play *Nobody Told Me*, works that explore the silence that shaped their family and the long journey toward truth.

Taking the name Channa doesn’t erase the decades Wanda spent as a Catholic wife, mother, and global citizen, she said. Rather, it completes a circle that began in a hospital basement in Warsaw. Nearly nine decades after surviving the ghetto, the child who was hidden, baptised, and protected has chosen, on her own terms, to reclaim the identity that once endangered her.

At 89, Wanda Helena Albińska isn’t rewriting her story. She is finally naming it.

