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Hadassah Magazine

JULY/AUGUST 2025



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Winemaker Roni Saslove. See story on page 36. Photo by Ben Yuster.

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16 A STONE FOR ELKA

By Jennifer Wolf Kam

"In 1901, my maternal great-great-grandmother, Yetta Bloomgold, lost a child," writes Jennifer Wolf Kam, the self-described genealogist of her Ashkenazi Jewish family. "Her 16-year-old daughter, whose name would remain a mystery for generations, disappeared while en route to the United States from London. The tragic story spans three continents, from Bialystok to London to New York City and, finally, to Buenos Aires, where the young woman's trail runs cold."

20 FERMENTING A COMEBACK

By Uriel Heilman

When war came to northern Israel in October 2023—bringing with it intense exchanges of fire with Hezbollah in Lebanon, massive Israeli troop movements and blazes sparked by rockets and other weaponry—it wreaked physical and economic havoc on the local wine industry. Vineyards were scorched, tourists disappeared and many of the workers either fled the region or were unable to reach the fields because of the dangers.

30 EIGHTEEN WOMEN WITH ZIONIST CRED

By Alexandra Lapkin Schwank

Hadassah is once again recognizing 18 women who are committing their time, talents and reputations to speaking out for Israel. This year's list features influencers, politicians, business leaders, artists, Hadassah leaders and even a Hollywood actor and a Muslim Zionist. The 2025 cohort models the diversity and passion of pro-Israel advocacy, as exemplified by the four honorees profiled in this issue.

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Shoulder to Shoulder

Generations have followed in Henrietta Szold's footsteps

By Carol Ann Schwartz

Before becoming a catalyst of history, Henrietta Szold was a witness. One of her earliest memories was watching from her father's shoulders as Abraham Lincoln's funeral procession passed through Baltimore.

She was 4 years old.

At Hadassah, we are moved deeply by our founder's immense contributions to Israel's development. But she was also an icon and trendsetter of American achievement and values: visionary yet pragmatic, traditional but ready to breach boundaries.

The daughter of Rabbi Benjamin and Sophie Szold, she was the first of her family born in the United States. Though a newcomer to America, Rabbi Szold became a prominent pro-Lincoln figure in a city where slavery was legal, and his eldest daughter became his translator, editor and adviser.

After high school, Henrietta Szold taught English, French and algebra at a secular school for girls as well as Bible and history at the religious school of her father's synagogue. Still in her teens, she became the Baltimore correspondent for the newspaper *The Jewish Messenger,* giving her national exposure—albeit writing under the pseudonym "Shulamith."

Szold was always both educator and pupil. She established a night school for immigrants that taught English and civics, but from her Eastern European Jewish students she was exposed to ideas about Zionism and became a founding member of the Baltimore Zionist Association in 1894, three years before Theodor Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress. Years later, she was the first woman to enroll as a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City—on the condition that she not seek rabbinical ordination. Many of the seminary's teachers were recent immigrants themselves, and Szold became their English tutor.

After several years as the only woman on the board of the Jewish Publication Society, Szold became the organization's first paid employee. Although she was designated "secretary," in reality, she was the editorial director. In her more than 25 years with JPS, she edited dozens of books. This included translating French and German manuscripts into English.

MORE THAN A CENTURY ON, STUDY GROUPS REMAIN A HALLMARK OF THE HADASSAH ETHOS.

As the 20th century began, America's Jewish population was exploding, Zionist groups were proliferating and Szold gained a reputation as the nation's pre-eminent Jewish female scholar and educator. Against that backdrop, in 1907 she joined the Daughters of Zion women's study circle. In 1909, she made her transformative first visit to Palestine, where she witnessed the dismal public health conditions.

Back in New York City, she poured her energy into the overwhelmingly male Federation of American Zionists, but she ultimately gave up on the existing order and resolved to create an independent women's movement. Aligning her own study group with several others, she founded Hadassah in February 1912.

From there, it was one small step—the first mission of two Hadassah nurses to Jerusalem in 1913—and then a giant leap. The American Zionist Medical Unit, the mobile hospital Hadassah formed at the behest of the Zionist movement, reached Palestine in 1918 and became the nucleus of the Hadassah Medical Organization and the foundation of modern Israel's health care system.

Part of Szold's frustration with the Zionist establishment was its sole focus on the political strategy of creating a Jewish state—and dying as she did in 1945, she never lived to see its founding. In Jerusalem, she had seen an unborn nation in need of a social safety net. Hadassah ultimately filled the void with hospitals, clinics, baby welfare stations and dispensaries, eventually adding a nursing school (the first of many medical training institutions that bear Hadassah's name). And taking the helm of Youth Aliyah in the 1930s, she developed the education component of Hadassah's welfare system.

Generations of Hadassah women have followed in Szold's footsteps. More than a century on, study groups remain a hallmark of the Hadassah ethos. Today, as we build institutions, educate ourselves, view and repair the world, we stand on our founder's shoulders. H

Together We Will Heal.
B'yachad Nerapeh.



When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 and war ensued, Hadassah responded immediately. The threat to Israel has escalated to include aggression from Hezbollah and Iran. Hadassah's hospitals must now expand capacity to treat mass casualties and serve as a strong wartime asset to the people of Israel. Hadassah's Youth Aliyah villages must continue to provide safe haven to students.





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Together we will heal. *B'yachad Nerapeh.*

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Amid the Anxiety and Stress

Raising a glass to hope and our collective well-being

By Lisa Hostein



We could all use a glass of wine these days. After the murder of two young professionals in Washington, D.C., and other heinous antisemitic acts in the United States and worldwide; nearly two years of Israel's war with Hamas, with hostages still languishing in Gaza; political chaos and divisiveness in America; and the Israel-Iran war, a little vino to temper the anxiety and stress we are experiencing is more than justified.

Israel's surprise attack on Iran came just as we were going to press with this issue. Even as we watch with awe Israel's military and strategic prowess, we mourn the Israeli victims of the Iranian ballistic missile attacks on residential neighborhoods and we wonder when and how this war will end, hoping and praying for a decisive defeat of Iran's nuclear capabilities and a quick path to peace.

With our cover story, "Women With Vintage Appeal" (page 36), our goal was to inject some lighter fare for our midsummer issue, focusing on the growing number of female winemakers in Israel. But as the related feature, "Fermenting a Comeback" (page 20), demonstrates, even the Israeli wine industry has been adversely affected by the wars in Gaza and Lebanon, as has nearly every sphere of life for Israelis.

Meanwhile, Jewish historian Pamela S. Nadell, whose new book on the history of antisemitism in America is coming out this fall, is asking the question: Do the recent murders and attempted murders of Jews in America constitute "A Turning Point?" (page 12).

In our arts section, "Never Forgetting, on Film" explores whether the steady stream of Holocaust films does—or even should—make a difference in the way audiences understand anti-Jewish bias (page 38).

For those of you who will be in Miami for Hadassah's National Conference in August (and of course even for those who can't make it), be sure to check out our timely travel piece on the city that is reinventing itself, again (page 32). It's not too late to register for the conference, where I'll be hosting the *Hadassah Magazine Presents* podcast with a panel discussing "From Shield to Scapegoat: Jewish Literature's Past, Present and Future." (See page 45 for panel and conference registration details.)

On the health and science fronts, read the inspiring stories of cancer patients using art therapy as a path toward emotional healing (page 24) and learn about the fascinating ways that artificial intelligence is transforming health care at the Hadassah Medical Organization (page 26).

As we seek to focus on our collective and personal well-being in these troubled times, here's a suggestion: Find a good book to go with that glass of wine. Our reviews (page 44) offer a tantalizing array of new titles.

However you find respite, we wish you a safe and peaceful summer. H



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MAGENV69

IN SEARCH OF UNITY

As a Reform Jew deeply committed to justice and *tikkun olam*, I found Ashira Boxman's feature in the May/June 2025 issue, "Unity Without Uniformity," disturbing. I read her message as a criticism of Reform Jews, whom she believes prioritize justice for all people over particular care for Jews, regardless of denomination and practice.

But it is many of the Orthodox who seek to exclude specific kinds of Jews from being fully accepted into Israeli society. *Tikkun olam* encompasses the whole world—the land, flora, fauna and all people—and supports the idea that we are all made in the divine image and the precept of "love your neighbor as yourself."

While Boxman may want to see Jews of all denominations come together and accept and support each other, I am unconvinced that Reform Jews should redirect *tikkun olam* to a more "Jewish" focus.

Andy Amend
Highland Park, Ill.

I welcome Ashira Boxman's sentiment that the principles of *tikkun olam* and *ahavat yisrael* are not mutually exclusive but should be practiced by all. She uses the moment at Mount Sinai, when Moses witnessed the entire *Bnei Yisrael*, the offspring of Israel, standing side by side and what it must have felt like at the foot of the mountain as well. And yet, upon descending from the heights, Moses shattered the first set of the Ten Commandments when he observed the apostasy of the Golden Calf.

We all know the expression, "Two Jews, three opinions." Or the joke about the Jew stranded on a deserted island who built two synagogues. We Jews may not be monolithic, but we do share a common history and fate. More importantly, we share a set of values rooted in the Torah and interpreted by each generation, if not each individual.

We are if nothing else a *mishpachah,* and in every family there is diversity. We do not necessarily agree on everything, but we should respectfully agree to disagree. When a Jew suffers in one part of the world, we as brothers and sisters feel it in another.

May we always be motivated by the prophetic and universal ideal of *tikkun olam* while we hold dear the precious practice of *ahavat yisrael,* caring deeply about our fellow Jews.

Rabbi Aaron Rosenberg
Waterford, Conn.



UNNECESSARY LABELING OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

In the interview with Idina Menzel in the May/June issue, the actor's character in the play *Redwood* is introduced as "Jesse, who is gay, leaves her wife and job and travels…."

I am unclear why Jesse's sexual orientation is labeled. Would you categorize another character as, for example, "Jonathan, who is straight, leaves his wife and job and travels…."?

While telling stories about same-sex relationships is important as we work toward greater acceptance and inclusivity, I take issue with this unnecessary labeling. Simply saying that Jesse left her wife would have been sufficient.

Amy J. Goldstein
Bucks County, Pa.

CLIMATE ON COLUMBIA'S CAMPUS, AND BEYOND

After reading the magazine's recent stories about campus antisemitism, including Valerie Gerstein's "When Mom Was a Columbia Student" in the May/June issue, I have wondered why there has been nothing said about the latest confusion among some Jews: that the Trump administration is using campus antisemitism as an excuse to stifle free speech and make universities bow to its will.

Even if we don't agree with what pro-Palestinian activists say, are we ready to approve of them being arrested and deported without due process? Is the enemy of our enemy really our friend? I think it's time to explore this issue.

Laura Davids Todd
Phoenixville, Pa.

How things have changed at Columbia since I was a student! When I first registered there as an undergraduate in 1980, I had to sign a document stating that I would not participate in subversive activities. In consternation, I asked the registrar why I had to sign such a statement, and she was surprised that I didn't know what had happened in the 1960s on the campus. At that time, I lived out of state and was just a child, so I had no idea about the student takeovers of buildings during the Vietnam War.

Now, apparently, the practice of

students signing such a declaration is no longer in effect at Columbia.

May Hashem protect and vindicate modern-day Maccabees like Valerie Gerstein as well as Shabbos Kestenbaum, who sued Harvard, and President Trump for demanding that universities take a stand against antisemitism.

Shoshana Averbach
Brooklyn, N.Y.

SUPPORTING A 'CANCELED' JEWISH AUTHOR

After reading Leah Lax's letter to the editor in the March/April 2025 issue about being a "canceled" Jewish writer, I immediately ordered her book, *Not From Here: The Song of America*. I hadn't read a single review—it didn't matter. I simply wanted to support her. But once the book arrived, I couldn't put it down.

Lax weaves together a stunning collection of stories from immigrants hailing from South America, Asia and Africa. With grace and emotional honesty, she connects their experiences to her own—most poignantly, drawing parallels between their journeys to the United States and her personal escape from the insular world of Hasidic Judaism.

Her writing is rich, layered and moving. It's filled with pain, resilience and even moments of humor. *Not From Here* reminds us why people endure so much to come to this country, and what their stories reveal about who we are.

It is beyond sad that Lax was canceled simply for being a Jew. That fact alone makes her courage in telling these stories—and her own—all the more powerful. *Not From Here* isn't just a memoir or a collection of immigration narratives; it's a necessary book for our time.

Leslie Gonzalez
Newton, Mass.

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New Israeli Airline Takes Flight

When Air Haifa launched last fall, becoming Israel's first new commercial airline in over 30 years, the startup faced a major problem: It couldn't operate out of Haifa due to war.

Israel's conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon, which had been on a low burn for a year, exploded into a full-scale war just as Air Haifa was due to take flight in October 2024. Rather than miss the winter holiday travel season, Air Haifa began its flights in and out of Israel's main airport, Ben-Gurion Airport, near Tel Aviv, until the January 2025 ceasefire enabled the reopening of Haifa's airport.

Today, Air Haifa, a low-cost carrier that offers one-way fares, flies its twin-engine turboprops from Haifa to four destinations: Athens, Eilat and the Cypriot cities of Larnaca and Paphos—all popular spots for Israeli tourists. "Our mission is to offer convenient flights, quality and simple service, and comfortable fares," airline co-founder Michael Strassburger said in an interview. "Since there has never been an Israeli airline based in the North, we identified a real need and demand."

With dozens of foreign carriers having suspended or cut back flights to Israel since the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing war, travelers have flocked to Israeli carriers. Since the war's start, Israel's national carrier, El Al, has logged record profits, hitting $545 million in net profits in 2024, up a staggering 470 percent from its 2023 figure of $116 million.

Meanwhile, Israel's smaller airlines, Arkia and Israir, have expanded their routes, including to the New York area. Last December, an Israeli startup airline cooperative, TechAir, announced that it planned to offer flights between Tel Aviv and New York.

Israelis are getting involved in the aviation industry outside the country, too. The Israeli company Holiday Lines Group (Kavei Hufsha) bought Blue Bird Airways, a Greek airline, in 2016, and in January acquired all the outstanding shares of Tus Air, a Cyprus-based airline. Both airlines run regular flights out of Tel Aviv, with Blue Bird ranking as Ben-Gurion's sixth-most frequent carrier. Holiday Lines also reportedly is setting up a new Israeli carrier—a process with a licensing period of at least 18 months.

For its part, Air Haifa was founded by several veterans of El Al with a vision of serving residents of northern Israel. Haifa's airport offers advantages for travelers from anywhere: It's small, it's quiet and parking is free.

Air Haifa has three aircraft in its fleet and will add a fourth this summer. Over time, airline officials say, it plans to increase the frequency of its flights and launch new destinations.

—Uriel Heilman

SHUTTERSTOCK (TOP AND RIGHT)





Returning the Landsmanns to Their Country

Leah Davenport stumbled, almost literally, upon a method to raise awareness of one murdered Jewish family rendered almost forgotten by the Holocaust.

Davenport, a 2025 graduate of the College of Charleston in South Carolina, had seen some of the more than 100,000 Stolpersteine (German for "stumbling stones") while on a study abroad program in Poland, Germany and the Netherlands. The 4-by-4-inch brass plates are found in sidewalks throughout Europe near the last-known residences of Nazi victims; each is inscribed with the name of a murdered resident who had lived at that address.



The Landsmanns' Stolpersteine

PABLO CASTAGNOLA/ANZENBERGER

The Jewish student—a double major in Jewish studies and women's and gender studies—was offered the opportunity by her college adviser, Chad Gibbs, to write an article on a collection of letters written in German that had been housed for decades in the college's Addlestone Library Jewish Heritage Collection. The correspondence was between first cousins Minnie Baum of Camden, S.C., and Malie Landsmann of Berlin.

The two had never met but, throughout their correspondence between 1938 and 1941, Landsmann desperately sought Baum's help in getting herself; her husband, Chaim; and their two daughters, Ida and Peppi, out of Germany





Andras Szanto stands beside the pulpit in his tiny synagogue, which also houses memorabilia such as Shabbat candlesticks and a document signed by Jewish prisoners in Bergen Belsen (right).

This Might Be the Smallest Synagogue in the World

When you enter the Szanto synagogue in the picturesque town of Szentendre, about half an hour north of Budapest, it is hard to imagine that religious services could be held in the 130-square-foot space. But Andras Szanto, the man behind the Szanto Memorial and Prayer House, guarantees that "a minyan can just fit in here."

"It was my father's dream to build a synagogue in honor of my late grandparents and the town's Jews who were murdered during the Shoah," Szanto said of the diminutive house of worship, which opened in 1998 and follows rites of Neolog Judaism, a Hungarian liberal sect. "Unfortunately, due to his untimely death, he was unable to complete the project."

So Szanto stepped in, financing construction with his own money as well as through grants from the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities and private individuals. The single-room synagogue, complete with ark and pulpit, stands in the courtyard of the home that once belonged to Szanto's grandparents, Laszlo and Rosalia Szanto, whom the Nazis deported in 1944. The couple did not survive. Since its opening, the site has become a top attraction in Szentendre, a Danube River town popular with tourists.

Inside the building, display cases house artifacts and documents pertaining to the local Jewish community. Included in the display is a frayed sheet of paper adorned with dozens of signatures and the words "We want to go home!" in Hungarian at the top.

Jews from Szentendre imprisoned during the Holocaust in the Bergen Belsen concentration camp managed to sign their names to this piece of paper and hide it from their guards. Sadly, only a few had their wish fulfilled. Out of 250-plus Jews deported in June 1944, 15 survived—and one of them brought the signed sheet back to the town after liberation. The names of those who died in the camp are commemorated on a large marble plaque in the courtyard adjacent to the synagogue.

In October 2024, two new plaques were unveiled: One for the victims of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack in Israel and a separate one for victim May Naim, who was murdered at the Nova music festival. Szanto lived in Israel from 1985 to 1988, when he became friends with Naim's mother and grandfather.

The synagogue has around 60 members, including Szanto, who serves as its president. Another congregant is Veronika Gonda-Strasser, who joined after bringing foreign friends to see it on a sightseeing excursion. She has been an active member ever since.

"What Andras has done is fantastic!" Gonda-Strasser said of his initiative to build a commemorative synagogue for his family and the other victims of the community. "I am not aware of anything similar."

—György Polgár

PABLO CASTAGNOLA/ANZENBERGER (BOTTOM); GYÖRGY POLGÁR

and then Poland "before we are completely destroyed," as she wrote in one letter.

Baum tried to help but ultimately was unsuccessful. Malie and Chaim were murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. The fate of the girls is unknown, though they are presumed to have died with their parents.

Davenport could have ended her involvement after completing the article. Instead, she decided that was just the beginning.

"The article itself theoretically will exist forever, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the Landsmanns will live on in people's memory forever," said Davenport, who will be pursuing a master's degree in social work this fall at Boston College. "I didn't want that responsibility of being the only person to remember all of this."

That's when she recalled the Stolpersteine—and decided to arrange the commemoration for the Landsmanns. "These stones could be that place, that piece, that keeps them in the public memory."

On March 9, 2025, Davenport took part in the installation ceremony outside 17 Hirtenstrasse in Berlin, where the Landsmanns had lived. She was joined, among others, by the building's current residents. "I was incredibly happy," she said, "to be the one to bring them back." *—Avi Dresner*



Leah Davenport attended the Stolpersteine installation with her college adviser, Chad Gibbs.



A vigil for the murdered couple outside the White House

UPI/ALAMY

A Turning Point?

Once again, antisemites murder Jews in America

By Pamela S. Nadell

The murder of two young professionals outside Washington, D.C.'s Capital Jewish Museum on the evening of May 21 was not the first time that Jews, and Christians who dare to get close to them, have been victims of antisemitism on American soil. Yaron Lischinsky, who followed the faith of his Christian mother, was born in Israel. Sarah Milgrim earned a master's degree at American University, where I teach Jewish history.

Like so many young couples, they had met where they worked—at the Embassy of Israel. Leaving a reception sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, which combats antisemitism around the world, they were gunned down. The alleged murderer, Elias Rodriguez, a resident of Chicago, shouted "Free, Free Palestine" as the police carted him off.

Eleven days later in Boulder, Colo., a man reportedly yelling "Free Palestine" threw Molotov cocktails at peaceful marchers calling to bring home the hostages still being held in Gaza. According to an affidavit, the Boulder suspect, an Egyptian national named Mohamed Sabry Soliman, told investigators that he "wanted to kill all Zionist people" and that he had planned the assault for a year.

These attacks affirm that American Jews' angst over contemporary antisemitism is not overblown. The FBI and Department of Homeland Security agree. They have issued an "elevated threat" of more violence targeting Israelis and American Jews.

Amid their dismay, many Jews think: "This must be a turning point." But what kind of turning point is this?

Despite the long-held perception that America is a safe haven for Jews, antisemitic violence in the United States is not new. In *Antisemitism, an American Tradition*, to be published in October, I trace its long history. We all remember the 11 Jews murdered on Shabbat at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue in 2018. Meanwhile, the musical *Parade*, currently touring the country, spotlights anti-Jewish hate inflaming Leo Frank's 1913 murder trial.

When Georgia's governor commuted Frank's death sentence to life imprisonment, leading citizens of Marietta kidnapped Frank from jail and lynched him.

Frank's story is well known, but almost no one remembers the attack on a Russian Jewish immigrant in Denver a decade earlier. On December 25, 1905, a group of men spotted Jacob Weisskind working on Christmas Day. They beat him so severely for what they perceived as his disrespect for their savior's birthday that he died from his wounds.

Antisemitic violence does not always end in murder. In September 1967, white supremacists bombed Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Miss., to send a message to its rabbi, Perry Nussbaum, also a civil rights activist. They later bombed his home while he and his wife slept. Miraculously, neither was injured.

Josh Shapiro, the governor of Pennsylvania, and his family were similarly targeted just a few months ago, when a former Army reservist from Harrisburg set fire to the governor's mansion the first night of Passover. The man said he targeted Shapiro because of "what he wants to do to the Palestinian people," according to a police search warrant.

I fear that the most recent incidents in Harrisburg, Washington and Boulder may be old news soon, superseded by additional violence. Now not only white nationalists kill Jews. Anti-Zionist, anti-Israel zealots justify their attacks on Jews as the only way to eliminate the evils of Zionism and Israel.

These blows are aftershocks of the great earthquake of October 7, 2023, when Hamas invaded Israel, massacred some 1,200 people and abducted 251 hostages to Gaza. From the epicenter of these atrocities in Israel a tsunami of antisemitic hate has flooded the globe. Although many missed earlier signs of increased radicalization among the anti-Israel crowd, smaller tremors preceded that

catastrophic quake.

Six months after the Second Intifada, or Palestinian uprising, broke out in Israel in September 2000, a law school graduate—yelling "You f-----g Jews, You f-----g Zionists, Killers of Palestinians"—beat a rabbi and his congregant in San Francisco. A year later, an Egyptian national who supported "violent jihad" and the Palestinians stormed the El Al counter at Los Angeles's LAX airport. He left two people dead.

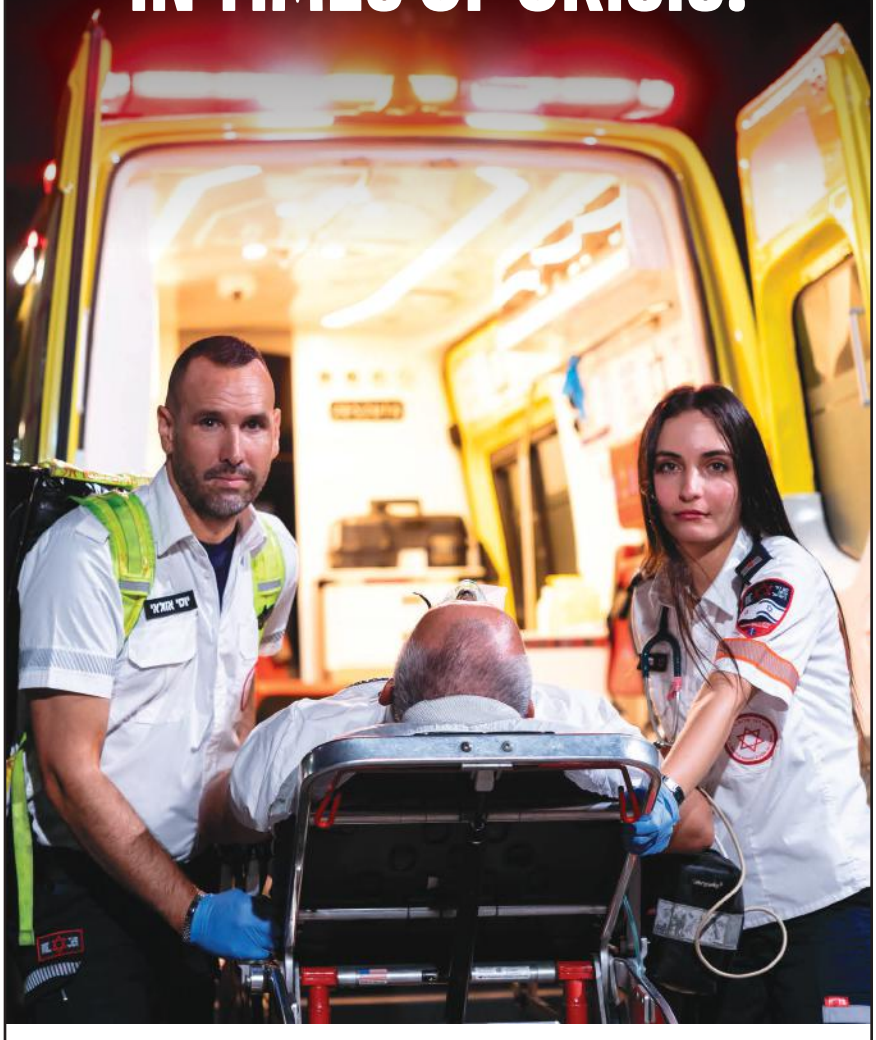
Smaller shocks have long rocked American campuses. In 2018, New York University's Students for Justice in Palestine targeted students celebrating Israel's birthday. They burned an Israeli flag. Police charged a student protestor with assault after he snatched the microphone from a Jewish student and yelled "Free, free Palestine."

In May 2021, when fierce fighting broke out in Gaza during Israel's Operation Guardian of the Walls, haters of Israel attacked Jews on America's streets. In Times Square in Manhattan, a half dozen men viciously beat a man wearing a yarmulke. On the other side of the country, Jews dining at a sushi restaurant in West Hollywood were punched and had glass bottles thrown at them.

This cluster of tremors preceded the cataclysmic fracture of October 7. We live with its aftershocks. Were the murders of Yaron and Sarah one more incident in this tragic history of antisemitic hate? Or do they signal a turning point, an irrevocable change from the past when American Jews rarely worried about their safety? It is too soon to tell. H

Pamela S. Nadell, a professor at American University, is the author of *Antisemitism, an American Tradition*, which is slated to be published by W.W. Norton on October 14.

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CREDITS

The Spiritual Side of Thrifting

Finding a coat, sweater or dress that is a gift from above

By Deborah Fineblum

To coin a phrase: one woman's reject is another woman's gift from above. My friend Helen and I walked into our local WIZO thrift shop in Pardes Hanna-Karkur and, like someone in a dream, Helen headed right for the coats. And there it was: a full-length, green wool number with satin lining, fur cuffs and collar, with the tags still on. Within seconds, she was buttoning it up and heading for the mirror.

Whoever made that coat had Helen's tall willowy body in mind. It was, in a very spiritual sense, a gift from above, put there just for her by a generous Creator who wanted her to have it. You don't think the Master of the Universe bothers Himself with such mundanities? I'm about to prove to you otherwise.

Take my friend Tirtza, who lives in Jerusalem. When packing for Florida vacations, she makes extra space in her luggage for the treasures she hopes to unearth in a state known for its fabulous thrifting. Retired women who have the time and money to regularly restock their wardrobes often unload older designer frocks at thrift stores.

It's not only savvy fashionistas who engage in the sport of thrifting; the environmentally minded prefer pre-loved garments to limit waste and spending. Indeed, a 2023 report from the online secondhand marketplace ThredUp revealed that 85 percent of Americans see thrifting as better for the environment than buying new clothes.

It appears the penchant for secondhand passes down through DNA, since both my daughters are confirmed thrifters. Rebecca and Leah have been outfitting their own children thriftfully since infancy. But one recent find was a true reminder that each one is a blessing put there just for you.

While flipping through the girls' section at the Savers shop in West Roxbury, Mass., Rebecca, my older daughter, could not believe her eyes: a sweater for $3.99 in the perfect size for her 10-year-old, and with the words *Yerushalayim shel zahav* (Jerusalem of gold) knitted in Hebrew along the bottom. What else can you do when presented with such an obvious gift except gaze heavenward and issue a sincere "thank you?"

Leah hit pay dirt at the WIZO shop in Pardes Hanna-Karkur after someone her size and with precisely her style dropped off an entire wardrobe: dozens of designer sweaters, skirts, jackets and dresses, one of which Leah wore proudly to her son's bar mitzvah party.

The truth is, one lovely perk to purchasing secondhand clothes—or *yad sheini*, in Hebrew—is that you look far wealthier than you are, and only your closest friends and family ever know the truth. Still, you do need to decide how open you're going to be about your thrifting, and with whom.



COURTESY OF DEBORAH FINEBLUM



A Family Affair *The author's daughter Leah finds a steal at a secondhand shop in Israel and her granddaughter (below) models a thrifted 'Jerusalem of gold' sweater.*

When a friend admired the frock I wore to my grandson's bris last spring, I had to decide quickly: Do I muster my self-control and demure with a genteel "thank you," thereby letting her think I'd picked it off a mall store rack? Or do I throw all pretense to the wind and whisper into her ear, "Thrift shop, m'dear, thrift shop." Which is exactly what I did.

That look of incredulity on her face? Deeply satisfying. But to realize such a moment, you first have to enter a thrift shop with the faith that there's a treasure put there just for you, and it is your sacred responsibility to find it.

So I am imagining that when Helen wears her thrifted greet coat, there is something of a Mona Lisa smile playing on her lips. As if she's remembering the moment she slipped it on for the first time and, in the thrift shop mirror, recognized it for the gift that it was. H

Deborah Fineblum is a journalist and author who made *aliyah* in 2013 and now thrifts internationally.

HADASSAH THRIFT SHOPS

Several Hadassah chapters across the country used to run thrift stores, from Brighton, Mass., to West Orange, N.J. Today, Scene II in Pikesville, Md., is the only one left. Did you ever thrift at a Hadassah shop? We'd love to hear about your finds. Please send news and photos of your treasures to **letters@hadassah.org**.



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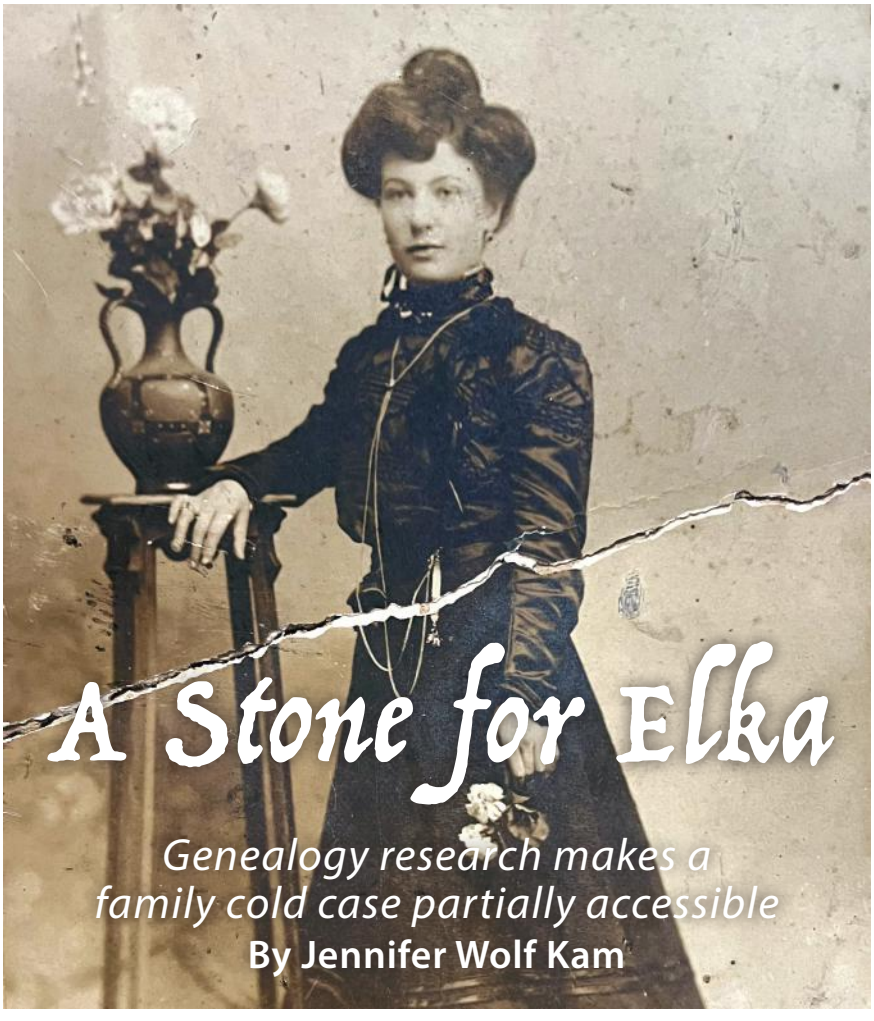
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A Stone for Elka

Genealogy research makes a family cold case partially accessible

By Jennifer Wolf Kam

Whereabouts Unknown *Elka's mother shared this photo of her teenage daughter with the 'Forverts' (opposite page, top).*

COURTESY OF JENNIFER WOLF KAM (TOP)

In 1901, my maternal great-great-grandmother, Yetta Bloomgold, lost a child. Her 16-year-old daughter, whose name would remain a mystery for generations, disappeared while en route to the United States from London. The tragic story spans three continents, from Bialystok to London to New York City and, finally, to Buenos Aires, where the young woman's trail runs cold.

The Bloomgolds' exodus from Bialystok had been one of hope—an escape from poverty and pogroms, and a new beginning in the *Goldene Medina*. The price of that freedom, however, proved impossibly steep.

Yetta was given tiny glimpses of her daughter's fate in the few letters she received from her, but sadly those letters were lost decades ago. The information they contained, however, must have been worrying to Yetta who, in July 1913, appealed to readers of the Yiddish daily *Forverts* for help in the front-page story "Desperate Mother Searches for Missing Daughter Through '*Forverts*'."

I first heard about Yetta and her "desperate search" as a young child, but exactly what that search included was family lore that I would get barely a hint of back then. Yetta's deep fears for her daughter were only revealed to me a few years ago when that 1913 article resurfaced.

Now, my cousin Matt Brown and I, as the family genealogists, hope to discover our great-great-aunt's fate and with it, her grave, to place upon it a long overdue stone.

Grandma Sally, granddaughter of Yetta, was keeper of the family history. I knew the stories by heart: her hardscrabble Brooklyn childhood, her mother's untimely death. When I was 9 years old, she told me that her aunt had disappeared in Argentina.

"What happened?" I asked.

Grandma wiped her hands on her apron and left the kitchen. She returned with a delicate, yellowing newspaper clipping.

"The *Forverts*," Grandma said.

"It's in Hebrew."

"Yiddish," she said.

"What does it say?"

"Nothing good." Grandma extracted the clipping from my hands. "She was my mother's twin."

I stared at the beautiful young woman in the photo, her dark hair swept into a loose bun.

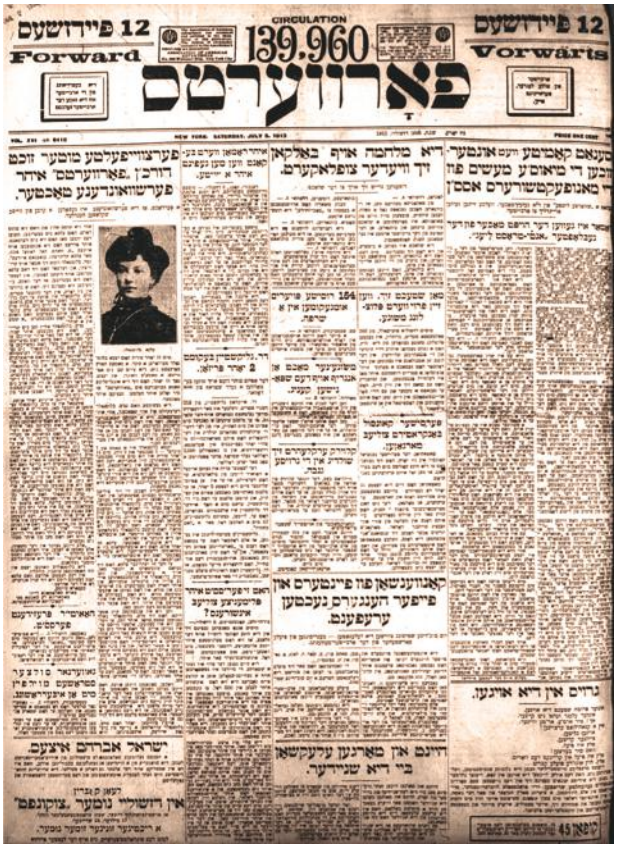
"She wrote letters. Then the letters…stopped." Grandma's voice trailed off. "She fell in love. Maybe… she was tricked."

She never told me her aunt's name.

For the past several years, Matt and I have been painstakingly disentangling the gnarled branches of our family tree. We are a good pair: obsessive about genealogy, resourceful and multilingual. Matt speaks Bulgarian and some Russian; I speak French and some Hebrew.



Many years ago, Matt interviewed Grandma to get our complex tree straight in his head. When I told him about my childhood memory of


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Grandma recounting a missing great-great-aunt, he was intrigued. Then my own aunt fortuitously opened an old box that had belonged to Grandma, who had since passed away, and found the *Forverts* article.

Matt had the article translated. We had a name for our missing great-great-aunt: Elka. Sadly, the article also provided insight into the unfortunate fate that our family believed befell her. It also revealed the depth of Yetta's heartache. "Everyone in the family is well," she told the *Forverts*. "I could be happy, but the pain outweighs everything."

In 1888, Yetta's son Alter had established a foothold in Manhattan. The rest of the family arrived piecemeal—the trip was costly—and in 1901, Yetta began the journey with twin daughters Chana and Elka. Delayed in London due to an illness Elka suffered, they temporarily settled in its labyrinthine, overcrowded East End. London was foreign to them, making life there difficult to navigate and leaving them vulnerable.

Out of funds, and with her husband, Israel, still in Bialystok, 56-year-old Yetta made a heart-wrenching decision. She left her 16-year-old daughters in London and joined her son in Manhattan to earn money for the girls' passage. Chana stayed with Bialystoker friends, Elka with a local dressmaker.

In New York City, Yetta worked grueling hours as a sick nurse. After five months, she'd saved enough to bring the girls to America.

In London, however, "a young man, also from Bialystok had sidled up to the 16-year-old Elka," as recounted in the *Forverts*, and convinced her not to go with her sister to America. He claimed he was traveling to New York City soon and promised they would go together.

In December 1901, Chana—my great-grandmother—landed at Ellis Island. Alone.

In the Jewish consciousness at that time were reports of the well-heeled, attractive landsman who visited cities and villages throughout Europe, deceiving young women into false marriages or employment and then trafficking them into prostitution in South America. Such a character is featured in Sholem Aleichem's 1909 short story "The Man from Buenos Aires," in which he boasts: "What do I deal in? Ha ha! Not in Hanukkah candles, my friend, not in Hanukkah candles!"

Was Elka's young man a sex trafficker? That had been Yetta's fear.

The Varsovia Society, the notorious Buenos Aires-based traffickers later called Zwi Migdal, is perhaps familiar to contemporary readers from Talia Carner's novel





Generations *Jennifer Wolf Kam acknowledges the sacrifice her great-great-grandmother Yetta Bloomgold (left) made to settle her family, including the author's great-grandmother Chana (seen here on her wedding day), in New York City.*

COURTESY OF JENNIFER WOLF KAM



Memory Keeper *The author (seen here as a young woman with grandparents George and Sally Schneider) inherited family stories—and hints and whispers—from older relatives.*

COURTESY OF JENNIFER WOLF KAM

The Third Daughter. The group operated for decades until taken down in 1935 by former prostitute Raquel Liberman in conjunction with law enforcement. One coercion method sometimes used by Jewish traffickers was the *stille chuppah*, meaning "silent wedding" in Yiddish, which was a religious marriage without official documentation and holding no civil weight. Such arrangements deceived "brides" while offering no legal marital protection.

And while Jews were not the only group involved in sex trafficking at the time, they did organize their own forces to try to fight it. The Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW), founded in London in 1885, and Ezras Noshim, established in Buenos Aires in the 1920s, worked to combat sex trafficking, often dispatching agents to identify vulnerable women. In 1910, JAPGW agent Samuel Cohen reported receiving "contradictory answers" that convinced him that a Jewish girl traveling with a man in the English port of Southampton—they were set to sail to South America—was being trafficked.

In the 2017 documentary *The Impure*, director Daniel Najenson uncovered 6,000 requests for help from women to Ezras Noshim. Was Elka among the "impure," that tragic designation that for more than 100 years has followed the people stained by working in the sex industry—prostitutes, madams, pimps and traffickers?

In 1904, after two excruciating years, the Bloomgolds in New York City received a letter from Elka. She was in Buenos Aires. Elka didn't mention the man from London, nor why she was in Argentina, according to the *Forverts*' report. Her address, in care of an "M. Wachs," was on Calle Lavalle in the heart of the Jewish neighborhood Once—but also near brothels. The article explains that Wachs had a brother in Manhattan, whom Yetta visited to demand answers. He offered that Wachs was a synagogue shamash in Argentina, but he was otherwise evasive.

Yetta and her husband, both now in New York City, attempted to reach Elka, but their letters went unanswered.

Modern genealogical tools enable Matt and me to examine digitized records and DNA. Still, challenges abound. Our queries to multiple sources in Argentina have gone unanswered. Cemeteries are best searched by name. But if Elka is buried in an "impure" plot, for instance, in the overgrown, graffitied and inaccessible "impure" area of Avellaneda's Jewish cemetery, we may never discover her resting place. Mainstream Argentine Jews of Elka's era actively separated themselves from "the impure," including with separate synagogues and burial grounds.

Beyond these obstacles, there is a reluctance to discuss what may be one of the seediest chapters in Jewish history. This is evident in Najenson's film when he's challenged by Abraham Lichtenbaum of Argentina's IWO, the Jewish Research Institute, for dredging up the past. Even Grandma Sally gently shut down our long-ago conversation, and a now-deceased elderly cousin once said to me, "The twin? She fell off the ship."

Lost at sea was a preferable outcome.

For years, no more letters arrived. Then, in 1911, a stranger visited the Bloomgolds. He claimed Elka had been sending her parents money, but the couple's daughter-in-law, Mary, wife of their other son, Jake Bloomgold, was stealing it. As written in the *Forverts*, Mary denied this but somehow had an address for Elka in Rosario, Argentina, care of "Salomona Reinu." Who was Salomona Reinu?

According to Mary, Elka now called herself "Señora Siems/Seymes." Was she married? Matt and I found a July 30, 1903, article in *The Evening World* detailing Mary's arrest for defrauding Jewish immigrant women. Given Mary's criminal activities and correspondence with Elka, is it possible Mary knew of or was connected to Elka's fate?

Yetta wrote to Elka at the Rosario address. Her daughter responded, but with little information other than that she wasn't well and spent her

money on doctors.

It was the last the family would hear from her.

Did Elka travel to Argentina by choice, marry and have a family? If so, Matt and I believe she'd have told her parents. We hope she lived a long life. That no letters arrived after 1911 tragically suggests otherwise.

While visiting Tel Aviv a few years ago, I met Najenson, the director, for coffee. We discussed Elka's story. "It still impacts our family," I said.

Najenson considered me.

"Does it?"

Did it?

Those directly affected by Elka's disappearance are long gone. Why are Matt and I so resolute? Who benefits when tragedy is unearthed, when closure remains forever out of reach for those who would most need it?

Matt summed it up well. "I love this research for the potential for justice and memory to finally come for Elka," he told me, and "for the challenges genealogy hits us with—linguistic, historical, archival, cultural."

If I could reach across time, I'd take Yetta's hand into my own. I'd reassure her that life has been infinitely kinder to her descendants. I'd tell her the sacrifice she made over a century ago to immigrate to New York City saved us.

In the final scene of Najenson's documentary, women place stones on prostitutes' graves in the "impure" plot of La Tablada's Jewish cemetery near Buenos Aires. It's an act of grace and solidarity—a gesture indicating those buried there, who'd lived on society's margins, are not forgotten.

We may never learn exactly what happened to Elka, but we gave her back her name and documented that she lived and was loved. A vast, evolving network of genealogical resources has made our family cold case at least partially accessible.

For now, our research and intent serve as a testament to a life remembered—and perhaps, in a small way, a stone for Elka. H

Jennifer Wolf Kam writes books for children and young adults. She lives in New York with her family. Visit her at **jenniferwolfkam.com**.



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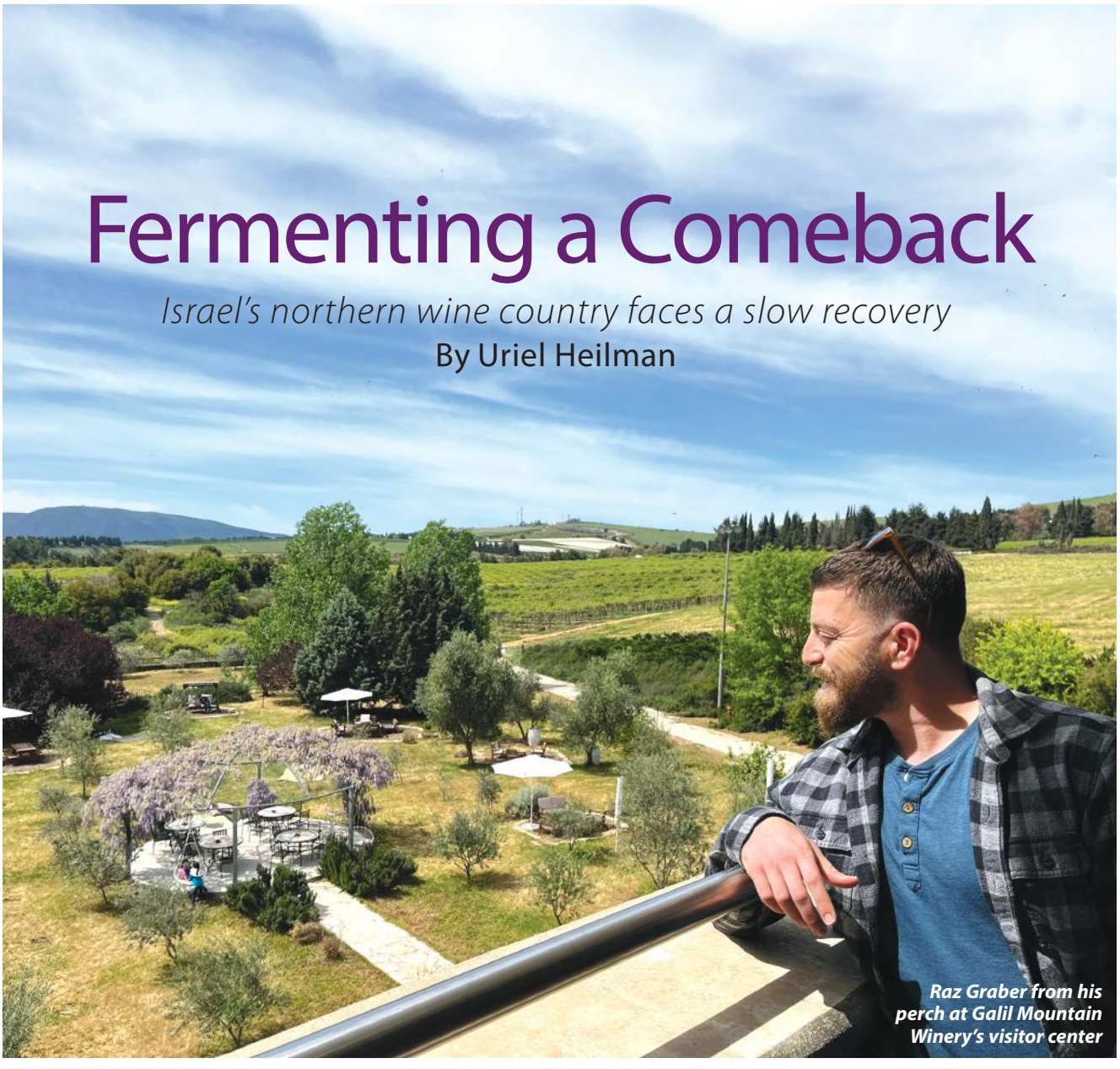
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Fermenting a Comeback

Israel's northern wine country faces a slow recovery

By Uriel Heilman



Raz Graber from his perch at Galil Mountain Winery's visitor center

URIEL HEILMAN

Grapevines are such delicate and beloved plants that some vintners describe them as children. Each one is unique and requires tender care as it matures. It usually takes three years until a vine's fruit is worthy of winemaking. Even mature vines require constant attention. They must be pruned in winter so they can grow new shoots in spring; monitored and tweaked through early summer to ensure ideal grapes; and harvested at just the right time in late summer or early fall depending on the soil, the weather and even the angle of the sun.

So, when war came to northern Israel in October 2023—bringing with it intense exchanges of fire with Hezbollah in Lebanon, massive Israeli troop movements and blazes sparked by rockets and other weaponry—it wreaked physical and economic havoc on the local wine industry. Vineyards were scorched, tourists disappeared and many of the workers either fled the region or were unable to reach the fields because of the dangers.

"About one-third of our vineyards were burned in fires caused by the war," said Raz Garber, manager of direct sales at Galil Mountain Winery, whose winemaking facility and visitor center at Kibbutz Yiron is located less than 600 yards from the Lebanon border. "It was very difficult to deal with. The vintners would run with hoses to put out the fires themselves. Some vines could be salvaged, some not."

A number of the vines that survived were nevertheless rendered useless because their grapes were fouled by smoke and excessive heat.

"Last year's harvest, in summer, yielded many grapes that were unusable because they smelled like smoked meat," said Garber, whose winery produces about 1 million bottles per year, including syrah, merlot, rosé and a variety of white blends. "It's very heartbreaking because there's great



Lost Tourism Revenue *Ben Zimra Winery's patio cafe, which offers stunning views of the Galilee, is now open two days a week instead of the usual six.*

significance to aged vines," he added about some of the vines that were lost. "Aged vines yield fruit that is higher quality, more concentrated. It's like losing an investment. You invest 20 years in a vine and then it's gone. It's very painful. Rehabilitating the vineyards will be a long-term process."

The war that began with the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, has taken a tremendous toll not just on southern Israel but on the North, too. More than 110 Israeli soldiers and civilians were killed in northern Israel after Hezbollah began its own attacks the day after Hamas's rampage, and at least 50 more soldiers were killed during Israel's ground war in Lebanon in fall 2024. Over 68,000 Israelis from the evacuation zone in the North were displaced from their homes during the war; by early June of this year, six months since the ceasefire with Hezbollah, approximately 50 percent had yet to return, by many accounts.

The harm to Israel's northern wineries is not a mere footnote. Nearly 50 percent of the country's vineyards are located in the North, with some 4,000 acres in the Galilee and slightly less in the nearby Golan Heights. (The Galilee is the northern part of Israel adjacent to Lebanon; the Golan, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, is further east and borders Syria.) Wineries in the Golan were largely unharmed because of their relative distance from Lebanon. The northern Galilee was hit hardest.

"Wine is a significant sector for the region," said David Chapot, author of a recent report by ReGrow Israel, a project of the Israeli agricultural nonprofit Volcani International Partnerships, which assessed the war's impact on agriculture in northern Israel. "It's not just about the vines that were destroyed; it's about the processing, the wineries, agrotourism. There are all these ancillary sectors around them, all of which are dependent on this sector and all of which have been pummeled by this war."

Overall, Israel has around 300 wineries, producing about 40 million bottles annually, though it is too soon to know total numbers for 2024 vintages. Before the war, Israel exported close to $57 million worth of wine per year, comprising roughly 20 percent of the country's wine production. A drop-off in exports was avoided in 2024 thanks largely to increased sales to the United States—and despite a decrease to sales in Europe, where anti-Israel sentiment is more pronounced.

In Israel, the war exacted a toll both on production and on domestic consumption, particularly in the early months when many restaurants were closed and demand was dampened. While Israeli demand for wine has recovered, wineries in war-affected areas are still far from fully operational.

Ben Zimra Winery, which produces about 50,000 bottles annually, including cabernet, syrah, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and others, takes in 50 percent of its revenue from its visitor center, according to manager Hila Buju. Visitors come for tastings, tour the vineyard on golf carts and enjoy cheese and wine in the courtyard. The visitor center's patio cafe, set amid olive trees, grapevines and fragrant sage bushes, offers stunning south-facing views of the Galilee's rolling hills, including rival vineyards.



Business Not as Usual *Galil Mountain Winery's Bat El Yehudai says events and festivals are still on hold because of the security situation.*

COURTESY OF BEN ZIMRA WINERY (TOP); COURTESY OF GALIL MOUNTAIN WINERY



Defenseless *Moshe Alon of Ancient Safed Winery works without a bomb shelter or siren.*

COURTESY OF ANCIENT SAFED WINERY

But for a year and a half, Buju said, "the visitor center was closed, and even now it takes time to get things going again." Due to staffing shortages, the center is open just two days a week, instead of the six it was open before the war.

To make up for lost tourism revenue, the winery focused extra effort on remote sales and harvested fewer grapes so it wouldn't have more inventory than it could sell. Ben Zimra uses only 5 to 7 percent of the grapes it harvests; the vast majority is sold to other wineries—a common practice.

Israeli labels regularly snag prizes at the Decanter World Wine Awards, the largest and most influential international wine competition. While many of the top honors for Israel go to the country's largest wineries in the center of the country, including Barkan, Carmel and Teperberg, a number of well-known brands from the North also have earned international renown, such as Dalton, Recanati, Tabor and Golan Heights. Dalton, located close to the Lebanon border, took particularly heavy fire during the war, with over one-third of its vineyards suffering damage, according to the winery.

But it is smaller operations that have been most affected. Keren Alon, who runs the Ancient Safed Winery along with her husband and eight children, said the war pushed them into near poverty.

"We and many other businesses in Safed made a good living from foreign tourists. Then came the war, and tourists stopped coming completely," Alon said.

Her adult children visited on their days off work to help, and the business stayed afloat through remote sales, including to customers overseas. Her husband, Moshe Alon, spent most days working in their vineyard, where there is no bomb shelter or siren to warn of incoming fire. He was saved once purely by chance when a rocket struck the vineyard on a rare day when he wasn't there, Alon said, and their land suffered only minimal damage.

Alon said she kept the visitor center open during the war just to stay sane, often welcoming off-duty soldiers in the area. "Fighters came to us on their days off, including air force officers," she said. "It helped because we didn't go bankrupt, but it's very, very hard."

The government has provided some assistance to businesses impacted by the war, but getting the funding, which typically only covers some losses, takes time. The level of assistance varies depending on a host of factors, including whether the business was in the official wartime evacuation zone.

There's some hope that Safed will see more Israeli tourists this summer, but as long as Israel is at war, there's little optimism that foreign tourists will return anytime soon.

Until the ceasefire with Hezbollah took effect in late November 2024, northern Israel sustained over 9,000 direct hits by missiles, rockets and drones. Fires caused by explosions scorched about 110 acres of vineyards, and another 60 or so were left to wither because they are located in restricted military zones. Some of those are not expected to survive. Replanting destroyed vineyards will cost an estimated $3 million, according to ReGrow Israel.

Avivim Winery, in the border town of the same name, was hit by rockets four times—destroying 300,000 bottles and heavily damaging its cellar, facilities and visitor center—and prompting its owners, according to one local vintner, to shut down. (Avivim Winery did not respond to inquiries for this story.)

Galil Mountain Winery's production facility was spared such a fate because the Israel Defense Forces took up a position on a nearby border hill early on, according to Garber, the direct sales manager. On a recent visit to the winery, which is co-owned by Kibbutz Yiron and Golan Heights Winery, the largest producer in northern Israel, blooming wisteria in the garden cafe below the visitor center's deck made for an idyllic scene in a space that before the war had been a magnet for weddings and other events.

Before the war, visitors would pack the winery on Fridays for brunch and a full tasting menu prepared by chef

Almog Sabag. Now the visitor center offers just tours, wine tastings and a limited cheese menu. The big summertime parties and late August grape harvest festival won't happen this year.

"We need permission for events from IDF Home Front Command and the police, and we haven't gotten that," said Bat El Yehudai, manager of Galil Mountain Winery's visitor center. "Everything is up in the air because of the security situation."

Even though about 30 percent of the winery's eight vineyards were destroyed during the war, the business was saved by a surge in wine orders from Israelis and Jews worldwide.

"What helped us make up the loss was the insane solidarity of Israeli society, which sought ways to support businesses like us, whether in frontline communities in the North or the Gaza envelope," Garber said. "We felt a huge embrace, especially from Jews in the United States and Canada. In Europe, we saw a huge decline."

Yitzhak Cohen, who owns a boutique winery in the picturesque town of Ramot Naftaly, located on a mountain ridge just a couple of miles from Lebanon, said he was able to sell out his 2024 stock of 15,000 bottles of reds and whites also thanks to Israelis motivated to support businesses impacted by the war. The missing piece was visitors to the Ramot Naftaly Winery.

"Our visitor center was completely dormant for the entire war," Cohen said.

His home is right behind the visitor center and wine cellar. He grows most of his grapes on four acres in the nearby Kedesh Valley, but he has a small vineyard in his backyard along with a smattering of fruit trees and a chicken coop. As we spoke, a pair of men inside the winery were busy bottling barbera, a red variety with origins in Italy. Cohen said he was the first to bring it to Israel.

"I built this winery out of love and passion for winemaking," said Cohen, who produced his first bottle in 2003. "Working here is my retirement."

Another family business in the northern Galilee, Adir Winery, produces 350,000 bottles per year of reds, whites and dessert wine in addition to milk and cheese from its dairy. The only direct war damage it sustained was a vineyard fire that destroyed about one acre, but the war nevertheless has hit hard.



Boutique Brand *Ramot Naftaly's Yitzhak Cohen says he built his winery out of a 'love and passion for winemaking.'*

CEO Yossi Rosenberg has been serving in military reserve duty nearly nonstop since the conflict began, and it's been difficult managing the winery remotely. When well-meaning people reached out to invite Adir Winery to join sales fairs designed to help war-impacted businesses, neither Rosenberg, who was busy with combat, nor his brother, who was needed in the vineyards, could attend.



Empty Seats *Adir Winery awaits the full resumption of its events calendar.*

Because the family's hometown, Kerem Ben Zimra, is located just beyond the government-designated evacuation zone within two and a half miles of the Lebanese border, the Rosenbergs didn't qualify for temporary relocation funding, so they stayed put. Visitors, however, stayed away, and the winery that in normal times hosts workshops, meals and an annual fall harvest festival took a significant financial hit.

Speaking by telephone while on deployment, Rosenberg said his work in agriculture is no less critical to Israel's future than his service as a soldier.

"Agriculture is Zionism," said Rosenberg, whose son is also an IDF soldier fighting in the war. "Settlement of the land without agriculture isn't full settlement, in my opinion. There's nothing greater than agricultural work to connect you to the land." H

Uriel Heilman is a journalist living in Israel.

COURTESY OF ADIR WINERY (TOP); URIEL HEILMAN





Online, In-Person *Both Nicole Fuchs Sausen, here leading a Zoom painting class (left), and Jenna Benn Shersher highlight the power of creativity to foster connections.*

COURTESY OF NIKKI FUCHS SAUSEN (LEFT); COURTESY OF TWIST OUT CANCER

Creative Healing

Using art, dance and sculpture to cope with illness

By Alexandra Lapkin Schwank

When Chicago native Jenna Benn Shersher was 29, she was living life to the fullest, enjoying a burgeoning career as associate regional director at the Anti-Defamation League as well as an active social life in the city. But that same year, 2010, she learned she had Grey Zone Lymphoma, a rare and aggressive type of blood cancer that affects only around 300 people worldwide.

The diagnosis changed everything for Shersher. While going through chemotherapy treatments, she lacked the energy to meet with friends or enjoy many of the things that once made her happy. "As a young adult facing cancer, I felt lonely and desperate for connection," Shersher recalled. "In general, cancer is a very isolating experience. It forces you to turn inward and focus on what you need physically and emotionally."

Just one year after her diagnosis, Shersher founded Twist Out Cancer, an organization that connects those struggling with the disease with the creative arts to provide support to patients and their families. Today, she is CEO of what has become an international nonprofit that has helped more than 250,000 individuals affected by cancer, in cities as far-flung as Philadelphia, Montreal and Tel Aviv.

"There is something about having your hands on art materials and being able to create," said Shersher, who now lives in Bryn Mawr, Pa.

When coping with illness, group art therapy, she said, "allows for really interesting conversations with other people in the group, and it is an opportunity to confront some of the things that come up for you."

Musical instruments, paintbrushes and canvases may not be the first tools that come to mind when thinking about healing. Yet research over the years has shown that art therapy can help those struggling with disease and the resulting loss of self-worth feel more in control of their lives, relieve anxiety and depression and even help manage pain by moving the mental focus away from painful stimulus. Most recently, studies conducted by the National Institutes of Health in 2023 and 2024 found significant psychological benefits to creative arts therapy in cancer patients of all ages.

Shersher is one of several Jewish women who have drawn on their experiences with illness to develop therapy programs and rituals that incorporate visual arts and other forms of creativity.

Another is New York-based art therapist Nikki Fuchs Sausen, who has observed the benefits firsthand. As the founder of Paint With Me!, Sausen leads in-person and Zoom classes that guide participants through replicating the painting chosen for that event. Similar to classes at nationwide painting studios like Muse Paintbar or Pinot's Palette, participants chat as they recreate a predetermined scene. Included among the Paint With Me! options are landscapes, still lifes and Jewish themes such as Jerusalem cityscapes and scenes of people lighting Shabbat candles.

Because they are recreating another's art piece, this kind of activity is not strictly considered art therapy —generally defined as a discipline that encourages free self-expression through painting, drawing, sculpture and other art. Nevertheless, her clients find it therapeutic, Sausen said.

Her program, she added, "is step-by-step, so you are being taught what to do. It's a creative outlet that is spelled out for you." Plus, she said, being shown how and what to paint alleviates the anxiety of facing a blank canvas with no direction.

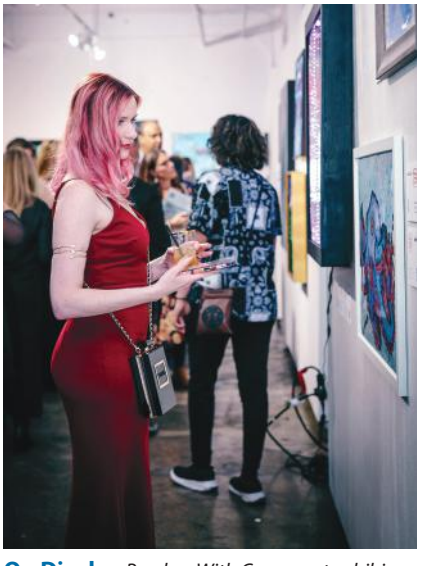
Sausen has led events all over the country, including a virtual program in March for Miami-based

cancer survivors and those undergoing treatment. It was organized by the Greater Miami Jewish Federation and Sharsheret, a New Jersey-based Jewish breast cancer nonprofit.

Art therapy can extend beyond the visual arts. In her 2018 book, *Dancing with Cancer: Using Transformational Art, Meditation and a Joyous Mindset to Face the Challenge,* Israeli American author Judy Erel wrote that any creative or physical activity could be a source of joy.

From acting, baking and embroidery to yoga and tai chi, "just enjoy the doing," emphasized Erel, a Herzliya resident, who passed away last year from multiple myeloma after battling the bone marrow cancer for 17 years.

An artist, poet and meditation guide, Erel had been diagnosed with cancer when she was 60. She chose to document her journey with drawings, journal entries and poetry as she underwent several rounds of chemotherapy and other treatments.



On Display *Brushes With Cancer art exhibitions showcase the collaborative creations of artists and individuals impacted by the disease.*

"Writing and drawing focused me in the present, and being present in my imagination seemed more real than the hospital room I was in," Erel wrote. Before she received her diagnosis, she experienced debilitating back pain, a result of a collapsed vertebra eaten away by malignant cancer cells. As Erel began "drawing her pain," she wrote, she felt that she became an observer, entering a calm, meditative zone that allowed her to feel lighter.

Even as she was managing her own illness, Erel ran art and meditation workshops, both in-person and through Facebook, to help others cope with their disease. Several of her guided meditations can still be found online.

Numerous art therapy programs are available throughout Israel, both virtual and in-person, including at the Hadassah Medical Organization. Currently, HMO employs three dedicated art therapists—two working full-time in the pediatric psychiatry department and one part-time serving adult psychology patients.

When Shersher of Twist Out Cancer was undergoing treatment, to lift her spirits, she recorded herself dancing the twist to Chubby Checker's namesake song and posted the video on YouTube as part of a social media challenge.

Her dance video went viral, sparking an online following, and helped create a virtual community of cancer patients, survivors and caregivers. It also paved the way to the creation of Twist Out Cancer, which today sponsors several cancer-related arts programs. Among them are TwistShops, art therapy workshops that typically focus on the visual arts, and Brushes With Cancer, which pairs working artists with individuals impacted by cancer to create paintings, collages or sculptures and culminates in art exhibitions and auctions.



'Enjoy the Doing' *Author Judy Erel, who died after a long battle with cancer, recommended drawing to help cope with pain.*

"Art has a way of expressing the depth of what words cannot capture," said Charlotte Safrit, a breast cancer survivor and Brushes With Cancer participant from Allentown, Pa. "I wanted to be part of something that honored the stories that often go unheard. Stories that can fill the world with inspiration and hope. Stories that can heal."

She paired with Chicago-based ceramicist Molly Stepansky, another cancer survivor who, like Safrit, was diagnosed when her children were very young. Their collaborative piece is called *Just a Moment*. A green stoneware clock that touches on mutual fears and new awareness of moments in time, it questions whether they will be alive for a child's next birthday and showcases the determination to make "enough time for the small things that make life so important," Stepansky wrote in her artist's statement on the piece.

"Cancer takes and takes so much from us—our certainty, our time, our sense of control, sometimes it even takes our sense of self," Safrit said. "But in the midst of trauma it can reveal something extraordinary—the resilience of the human spirit." H

Alexandra Lapkin Schwank is a freelance writer for several Jewish publications. She lives with her family in the Boston area.

COURTESY OF TWIST OUT CANCER (BOTTOM); COURTESY OF THE EREL FAMILY



SHUTTERSTOCK

Artificial Intelligence Takes on Health Care

AI-driven solutions transform the practice of medicine at HMO | By Wendy Elliman

A 43-YEAR-OLD WOMAN HURRIES into Hadassah Hospital Ein Kerem in Jerusalem late one Thursday afternoon. Her cancer in remission, she has come for a routine follow-up CT scan and is blindsided when the radiologist sends her to the emergency room. It has nothing to do with cancer, he tells her. The artificial intelligence (AI) software that evaluated her scan has flagged a life-threatening blood clot in her lung.

"With Israel winding down for its weekend, it's unlikely a radiologist would have read the scan until the following week, a potentially critical delay," said Dr. Jacob Sosna, chair of radiology and nuclear medicine at Ein Kerem. "Fortunately, our AI tool detected the pulmonary embolism, staff was immediately notified, and she was hospitalized and successfully catheterized" to remove the clot.

This patient, who asked that her name not be used, is one of some 30,000 individuals whose medical images are analyzed by AI servers at the Hadassah Medical Organization each month—and among the 10 percent in whom a clinical concern is identified.

AI, which generally means any human-like behavior displayed or conducted by technology or a machine, has made headlines as a driver of both innovation and transformative change across many fields. In health care, AI is defined as the use of machine learning—computational models that use algorithms and vast amounts of data to recognize patterns—to assist and improve patient experience and streamline research and diagnosis.

Hadassah is gaining renown for its research and use of the technology in a broad array of fields, from oncology to women's health. Amid the groundbreaking work are a number of AI-focused startups developed by Hadassah doctors that are beginning to transform medicine. In 2025, *Newsweek* ranked HMO as one of the world's top smart hospital centers—the fourth year it has received the accolade. *Newsweek*'s latest ranking of 2,400 hospitals in 30 countries also named Hadassah as one of the best medical centers worldwide.

WHILE MANY AI INNOVATIONS are still in their infancy, and much of their use at Hadassah is still in the research phase, the radiology department is one area where AI already is making a significant and practical impact.

"Radiology is technology driven, and it's pioneering AI in medicine," said Dr. Sosna, a key figure in the adoption of AI in the department.

Integrating AI into radiology—like integrating it into every other medical and nonmedical field—requires a significant shift. Radiologists are experts in anatomy, pathology and image interpretation but not necessarily in data science or machine learning, so time and training are needed to interpret AI-generated findings. At the same time, AI rollout in hospitals is costly and innovative, so it varies widely across hospitals.

Three-quarters of the more than 1,000 AI medical applications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are in radiology, with 15 of them used at Hadassah, Dr. Sosna said, "putting us ahead of many academic hospitals in the United States and Europe."

For radiologists, he explained, "AI is a super-smart assistant. It finds patterns, analyzes floods of data and detects early signs of disease.

"I believe AI tools will be used routinely to predict and prevent disease—screening for osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, genetic mutations and more, long

before clinical symptoms appear."

In addition to scanning patients, the technology will also personalize medical care. "Treatment is traditionally based on what works for the majority," Dr. Sosna explained. "This saves countless lives, but doesn't reflect the genetic, biological and environmental differences that make each patient unique. AI does this, enabling highly personalized care plans."

It also has the potential to transform oncology. Working together with Hebrew University computer scientist Leo Joskowicz, Dr. Sosna is developing an AI-based tool that monitors and analyzes tissue changes in cancer patients by comparing their data across multiple scans. When it was tested on a 52-year-old man with neuroendocrine tumors where no changes were visible to the human eye, AI detected an increase in the number and size of his cancer lesions.

"This told us he wasn't responding to treatment," Dr. Sosna explained, "and his therapy was changed."

The two men are aiming to commercialize this tool, called HighRAD, through their startup of the same name. The tool was developed through Hadasit, Hadassah's technology transfer and innovation arm.

Beyond radiology, AI technology is poised to revolutionize diagnosis and treatment throughout HMO. Neuro-oncologist Dr. Shai Rosenberg, who heads AI development in the oncology unit, is another key player.

As a young man, he pursued both his love for math and physics and his medical vocation. He completed medical school while creating his own math-physics-computer science program at the Technion's Excellence Program, then earned a Ph.D. in statistical genetics and performed postdoctoral work in computational biology. Now a senior physician and researcher at HMO, he said that he teaches digital medicine and computational medicine to the Hadassah-Hebrew University medical faculty so that physicians "understand the language of math and computer science."

Dr. Rosenberg is also co-founder and chief scientific officer of GenoCure.AI, a startup built on his cutting-edge research. Together with Hadassah oncologist Dr. Adar Yaacov, Dr. Rosenberg has developed an AI tool for precision oncology—an approach that tailors cancer treatment to the specific characteristics of each patient's tumor. Named MESiCA, the tool profiles a tumor's genetics by identifying the unique mutations in a patient's DNA that triggered the growth of cancer cells. By interpreting these mutations as molecular fingerprints or unique signatures, MESiCA helps reveal the underlying mechanism of the disease and guides personalized treatment.

"Detecting these signatures traditionally requires expensive, time-consuming, whole genome sequencing," Dr. Rosenberg said. "MESiCA identifies them from a subset of genes, enabling patients to be tested locally without advanced lab facilities."

All HMO oncology patients now have their genomes sequenced using MESiCA as part of a study in collaboration with Swiss health care giant Roche. Hadassah's medical center is one of just five worldwide participating in this study, its contribution led by Sharett Oncology Institute head Dr. Aron Popovtzer and medical faculty dean Dr. Eli Pikarsky.

Although still in the research phase, patients from the United States and Israel already turn to Dr. Rosenberg to identify the genetic signatures of their tumors. He hopes MESiCA will soon be more widely available.

AI is also being leveraged at Hadassah in reproductive medicine, such as in vitro fertilization. "It's bringing new hope to the IVF journey, boosting precision, personalizing treatment and transforming trial and error into data-driven insight and smart prediction," said Dr. Assaf Ben Meir, director of the fertility and IVF unit at Hadassah Ein Kerem.

With IVF success influenced by a range of factors—maternal age, ovarian reserve, male fertility, egg and sperm quality and embryo development—it can be difficult to pinpoint a cause when it fails. In 2016, Dr. Ben Meir, along with HMO and Hebrew University colleagues, began investigating AI's potential to improve embryo selection before implantation in the mother. Within five years, they had developed an AI-powered embryo grading platform called CHLOE (Cultivating Human Life through Optimal Embryos), which predicts

HADASSAH ON CALL

Decode today's developments in health and medicine, from new treatments to tips on staying healthy, with the *Hadassah On Call: New Frontiers in Medicine* podcast. In each episode, journalist Maayan Hoffman, a third-generation Hadassah member, interviews one of the Hadassah Medical Organization's top doctors, nurses or medical innovators. In July, Hoffman will discuss PTSD with Shiri Ben David, chief psychologist at HMO, and in August, she will highlight the Gandel Rehabilitation Center in a talk with Dr. Elior Moreh, head of HMO's department of physical medicine and rehabilitation. Subscribe and share your comments at **hadassah.org/hadassahoncall** or wherever you listen to podcasts.

successful implantation 10 percent more accurately than expert embryologists—and does so hundreds of times faster.

This is the basis of their startup, Fairtility, which has successfully marketed its technology to a host of fertility clinics in Turkey, Spain, Greece and other parts of Europe as well as in the United States. (CHLOE is not used in Israel as IVF is publicly funded and the AI tool uses costly, cloud-based data.) Fairtility's latest development is applying AI to the soaring demand for oocyte cryopreservation, or egg freezing, particularly in the West.

"Previously, we could assess only whether an egg was ready for fertilization, not its quality," said Dr. Ben Meir. "We now image oocytes before freezing, using AI to evaluate the potential of what is preserved."

While Dr. Ben Meir uses AI to support conception, HMO obstetrician Dr. Simcha Yagel, past head of obstetrics and gynecology, harnesses it in research to guide safer deliveries. "In a major hospital like Hadassah, prediction is a large part of what we want to accomplish with AI," he said. "We're developing AI tools to integrate into real-world obstetric care to improve outcomes and enhance a woman's birth experience."

With ob-gyn colleagues Dr. Yishai Sompolinsky and nurse researcher Michal Lipschuetz, Dr. Yagel is gathering data from thousands of past births at HMO. "We're collecting information about the mother's age, ethnicity, demographic background, general health and parity," he explained. "We also track pelvic measurements, lab results, vital signs, ultrasound data, labor progression, delivery type and complications, and use all this to train AI models to predict the course and outcome of labor and delivery."

The project has another two years to run, but early results leave the researchers confident of its success. "We expect hospitals everywhere will find it useful for triaging high-risk patients, guiding mother and baby protocols, and improving satisfaction and safety for everyone involved," Dr. Yagel said.

AI IS BRINGING 'NEW HOPE TO THE IVF JOURNEY... TRANSFORMING TRIAL AND ERROR INTO DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHT AND SMART PREDICTION.' —DR. ASSAF BEN MEIR



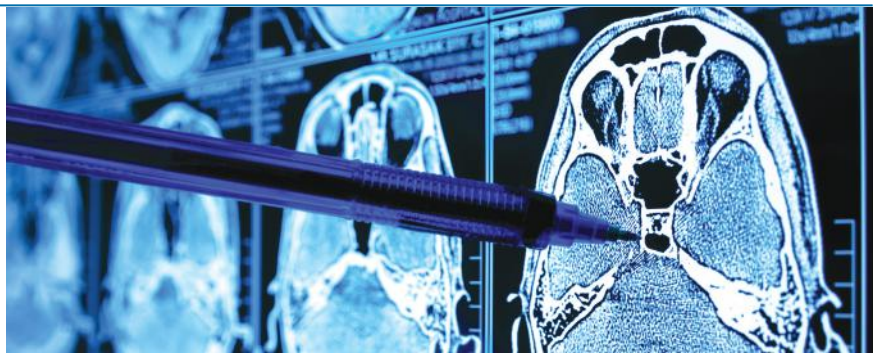
COURTESY OF HMO

Heart patients in Israel may also soon benefit from AI. In collaboration with Hadasit, global telemedicine leader SHL Telemedicine and the Hebrew University, HMO cardiologists are developing a tool to detect cardiac risk markers invisible to the human eye, identifying at-risk patients within milliseconds. "This will be a tool that every ECG clinic can use to detect life-threatening cardiac events before they occur and enable fast, potentially critical care," said Dr. Yitschak Biton, a senior cardiologist at HMO.

With all this, Hadassah is still at the start of its AI journey. Actively fostering its use in health care, the medical center has for the past seven years welcomed digital health startups into its clinics, wards, laboratories and operating rooms as part of the unique Hadassah Startups Program. Established by HMO and run by Hadasit in collaboration with IBM Alpha Zone, it is driving a wave of AI-powered innovations across medicine.

"One of our startups is Olive Diagnostics, which has pioneered a sensor for your home toilet seat that picks up anything from urinary tract infection to prostate cancer, kidney disease and heart disease," said Masha Zavin, director of marketing, R&D and data collaborations at Hadasit. "Another is Tongo, which enables people who can't use their hands to control phones, keyboards and other digital devices with their tongues. PathKeeper Surgical, another great example, has developed super accurate real-time optical navigation technology to help spinal surgeons operate more accurately and safely."

These AI startups are among more



than 30 that are alumni of the first digital health accelerator ever established at an Israeli hospital.

"Hadassah's clinical expertise combines with IBM's worldclass AI in a 20-week incubator program in which early stage startups develop and test biotechnology solutions in real hospital settings," Zavin explained. Operating from Hadassah's BioHouse—a collaborative workspace for biomedical startups initiated at the Ein Kerem campus in 2018—Zavin said that fledgling enterprises are "paired with clinical mentors, advised by IBM, hosted on its cloud and have access to legal, financial, regulatory and marketing advice, without strings, equity or payment.... The program's 34 graduate companies have realized some $90 million, and a third have agreements with us."

Many in the field agree that employing AI in health care is likely one of history's greatest medical advances, on par with vaccines, germ theory, medical imaging, antibiotics and immuno- and stem-cell therapies.

Said Dr. Sosna, "it will become a core part of the digital health system, shaping and supporting modern medicine, transforming health care by earlier and more accurate diagnoses and more targeted therapy, driving breakthroughs and augmenting and amplifying human intelligence."

Does this mean that our future health care will rest with robotic computers? "Not at all!" Dr. Sosna said. "Health care is a human interaction. You trust your doctor, not your computer. AI is a tool that will help physicians, not make them disappear." H

Wendy Elliman is a British-born science writer who has lived in Israel for more than five decades.

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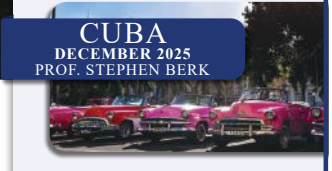
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18 Women With Zionist Cred

Hadassah honors a new crop of advocates and activists | By Alexandra Lapkin Schwank

Hadassah is once again recognizing 18 women who are committing their time, talents and reputations to speaking out for Israel. This year's list features influencers, politicians, business leaders, artists, Hadassah leaders and even a Hollywood actor and Muslim Zionist. The 2025 cohort (**hadassah.org/18women**) models the diversity and passion of pro-Israel advocacy, as exemplified by the four honorees profiled here.

BELLAMY BELLUCCI

Bellamy Bellucci knew she wanted to convert to Judaism when she was 10 years old.

Jewish friends from her dance school in Johannesburg, South Africa, would invite her to Shabbat dinners, and Bellucci, who was raised Methodist, fell in love with the warmth and togetherness cultivated in their homes. Today, the 34-year-old activist is proud to be a trans, Black and Jewish Zionist.

Bellucci moved to the United States to attend the Washington School of Ballet and, 16 years ago, settled in New York City, where she still lives. In 2011, while touring Israel for the first time, Bellucci decided she was ready to join the tribe after visiting the Kotel.

"I felt safer and more at home in Israel," she recalled, "and I had less anxiety about being myself, all of me."

Ultimately, she converted under the supervision of a New York rabbi.

Bellucci was born in 1990, the same year that apartheid in her native country officially ended. As a digital creator, that perspective informs her activism on social media, she said, where she routinely defends Israel from those who accuse it of being an apartheid state.

Now retired from professional ballet, she focuses on advocacy full time and currently is working on a documentary, *Finding Home*, that will explore contemporary Israel through the lens of her own life.

Bellucci's Zionism is surprising to some, she said, because "apparently someone who looks like me, with my background, is not supposed to love Israel.

"Israel is not a utopia, but it's the best dysfunctional family in the world," she continued. "When I'm there, I truly feel like I'm not trying to fit some kind of narrative and explain my Jewish pride and my Zionism."

HILARY HAWN

Hilary Hawn sees her work combatting antisemitism online as "harm reduction." After becoming active on Instagram to support Black Lives Matter, today she uses her megaphone—she has over 28,000 followers on Instagram—to counter the antisemitism she discovered in that movement as well as on social media well before the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023.

Indeed, it was while attending the University of California, Berkeley, as a 30-something undergraduate prior to those attacks that she first understood the takeover of antisemitic voices on college campuses. At Berkeley, she said, some of her professors espoused clearly anti-Israel views.

"I sensed an extreme bias at Berkeley," said the 40-year-old, who now lives in Southern California, "and it wasn't against policy and the Israeli government, it was just against Israel existing."

So she began to speak out, educating her followers about antisemitism—current and historical—and, in an effort to spread joy and positivity, sharing personal experiences related to Ashkenazi Jewish culture and food.

Much of Hawn's advocacy today focuses on the return of the hostages and the safety of Israelis. In March 2024, she traveled to Israel with Havurah, a Jewish creative collective, and Sachlav Israel, a Birthright Israel partner, to volunteer at Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, where she helped repaint a mural on a wall breached by Hamas on October 7.

"Jewish values of community and connection, and being there for each other, are the biggest things for me," Hawn said. "It's about looking out for one another."

ALLISON TOMBROS KORMAN

For Allison Tombros Korman, Zionism advocacy goes hand-in-hand with another mission: supporting reproductive rights. The Red Tent Fund, the organization she launched in 2024, is rooted, she said, in some of the Jewish values she was raised with—the right to dignity, bodily autonomy and self-determination. Those values led to her activism after a visit to a Planned Parenthood clinic as a teen.

Also as a teen, Korman traveled to Israel for the first time with Young Judaea. Since 2009, she has visited the country three times, including a trip last year.

Korman, 46, started the Washington, D.C.-based Red Tent Fund to help women around the country who need financial support to access abortions, regardless of their



Bellamy Bellucci *Hilary Hawn*

COURTESY OF BELLAMY BELLUCCI; COURTESY OF HILARY HAWN

HADASSAH HONOREES

Galia Amram | Attorney and Jewish nonprofit leader

Anila Ali | President of American Muslim & Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council

Emily Austin | Sports journalist and influencer

Bellamy Bellucci | South African-born digital creator

Suzanne Patt Benvenisti | Executive director of Hadassah Offices in Israel

Stephanie Bonder | Hadassah National Board member and Chair of Hadassah Speakers' Bureau

Caroline D'Amore | Businesswoman, DJ and model

Hilary Hawn | Educator and digital creator

Patricia Heaton | Actor and Catholic ally

Michal Ilai | Press strategist and Israel educator

Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll | Advocate for women's rights in Orthodox Judaism, co-founder of Chochmat Nashim

Allison Tombros Korman | Founder of the Red Tent Fund

Esther Panitch | Member of the Georgia House of Representatives

Mazi Pilip | Ethiopian-Israeli-American legislator in Nassau County, N.Y.

Yocheved Kim Ruttenberg | Co-founder of Sword of Iron-Israel Volunteer Opportunities

Deborah Villanueva | Chair of Evolve Hadassah for Long Beach and Orange Counties and Hadassah Southern California board member

Samantha Vinokor-Meinrath | Managing director of the Jewish Education Project

Elena Yacov | Executive director of the Milstein Family Foundation and TalkIsrael Foundation leader

religion or background. But this is not her first foray into the reproductive health space.

When Korman, who lives in Arlington, Va., became the senior director at the DC Abortion Fund (DCAF) three years ago, she thought she had landed her dream job. After October 7, however, working for the organization became untenable when she saw that her support for Israel was alienating her in the pro-choice community. DCAF's communications team refused to release a statement on the atrocities committed by Hamas against Israelis, including sexual violence, but did vocalize its support for Palestinians.

"I was devastated that organizations that were so adamant about believing women stayed silent," Korman said. "How can you be a feminist organization and not have something to say about rape as a weapon of war?"

Since starting the Red Tent Fund, she said she has heard from fellow Jews working in women's health who have felt similarly isolated: "A lot of folks just reached out to say that they felt seen."



Allison Tombros Korman



Yocheved Kim Ruttenberg

YOCHEVED KIM RUTTENBERG

When she arrived in Israel on October 20, 2023, Yocheved Kim Ruttenberg planned to stay for two weeks. More than a year and a half later, the 24-year-old has rented an apartment in Tel Aviv and said she never wants to leave.

Ruttenberg was living in Dallas and working in construction sales at the time of the Hamas attacks. She then flew to Israel to see her brother, an Israel Defense Forces soldier stationed in the South of the country.

What she encountered when she landed was an Israel still numb from the invasions and in immediate need of both volunteers and a system to organize the legion of men, women and even children who wanted to help. So Ruttenberg co-created, with Israeli American Yael Yomtov-Emmanuel, the Facebook group Sword of Iron-Israel Volunteer Opportunities to connect English-speakers with opportunities throughout Israel, from visiting injured soldiers in hospitals to rebuilding kibbutzim and aiding farmers. The Facebook community today has over 40,000 members.

After months of developing her organization without pay—relying on grants and donations to keep it running—in April, she received her first paycheck.

Ruttenberg, who was raised in an Orthodox home in Baltimore, visited Israel for the first time on a Birthright Israel trip. Although her Jewish identity was always strong, she said that her connection to Israel only solidified after October 7, culminating in her decision to make aliyah.

"I've never felt such a pull to do something in my entire life," Ruttenberg said. "It was a gut feeling I knew I needed to chase." H

Alexandra Lapkin Schwank is a freelance writer for several Jewish publications. She lives with her family in the Boston area.

COURTESY OF ALISON TOMBROS KORMAN; COURTESY OF YOCHEVED KIM RUTTENBERG



Ocean Drive in South Beach

Miami Reinvents Itself—Again

Ubiquitous Jewish heritage from the Art Deco era to today | By Hilary Danailova

As we strolled down Collins Avenue in Miami Beach, my daughter and I marveled at the royal palms and the high-rise resorts shimmering brilliantly against an impossibly blue sky. My mother gazed upward, too, but I could tell she was seeing something else entirely.

"I remember the year my parents and I vacationed at the Eden Roc. I was about 13," she said, referring to the 1950s-era oceanfront resort, a landmark designed by famed Jewish architect Morris Lapidus that is still in business. "One morning, I drank what I thought was orange juice at the brunch buffet—and got really sick." It turned out to be a screwdriver.

As we walked, salsa music wafted from passing cars, mingling with snippets of conversations in German, Russian, Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese. It was a distinctly modern soundtrack, the latest iteration of a beguiling and ever-shifting cultural mélange that has long been Miami's calling card. (Miami Beach is the barrier island across Biscayne Bay from downtown and technically a separate city within the larger Miami-Dade County.).

Like every great metropolis, Miami is continually reinventing itself, but lately, the pace of that evolution has accelerated to a frenzy. I've been visiting South Florida all my life, and I have never witnessed the kind of energy I've seen in the past decade: an explosion of building, population and affluence that has the feel of a modern-day gold rush. Entire skyscraper neighborhoods in Brickell and Edgewater have sprouted practically overnight; other neighborhoods have gentrified at a dizzying rate; and prices for everything from condos to croissants have soared sky-high. It's a spirit familiar from the Marx Brothers' *The Cocoanuts*, a 1929 caper that sends up, among other things, the entrepreneurial ethos fueling Miami's Art Deco-era boom.

Jews have played an outsized role in Miami's economy and civic and cultural life since the city was founded. According to a 2024 population survey from the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, Miami-Dade County boasts more than 130,000 Jews—around 5 percent of the total population (though the proportion is several times higher in some neighborhoods like Surfside and the suburb of Aventura).

Miami also stands out for the way Jewish heritage is ubiquitous and woven into the landscape, and not siloed in Jewish institutions, historic districts or memorials, though there are plenty of those as well.

In Miami Beach, for instance, it's hard to find a block without an evident Jewish imprint. Along the Collins Avenue oceanfront, the Eden Roc stands near another Lapidus-designed hotel, the Fontainebleau, each with a 21st-century facelift. Seemingly around every corner from these and other hotels stand a yeshiva, kosher pizzeria or street named for a Jewish icon—like Isaac Bashevis

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Staying Presence *The Morris Lapidus-designed Fontainebleau Hotel remains an icon along the Collins Avenue oceanfront in Miami Beach.*

Singer Boulevard in North Beach, the now very Argentinian district where the great writer once lived.

Jews were permitted to settle in Florida in 1763, when the Spanish ceded the colony to Great Britain in exchange for Cuba. But Miami remained a literal and metaphorical backwater until more than a century later. Its first Jewish community coalesced in the 1890s, when Eastern European immigrants migrated south from New York and, by 1896, owned 12 of Miami's 16 fledgling businesses.

Isidor Cohen, a retail pioneer considered the father of Miami Jewry, was among the 400 some men who voted to incorporate the city in 1896. Known for his civic leadership and inclusive relations with Miami's Black community, Cohen recently was honored by having a portion of Southwest Second Street named for him.

The Jewish population mushroomed along with the city, reaching nearly 4,000 in the 1920s, when automobiles and airplanes put the tropics in reach of winter-weary Northerners. During those scrappy prewar decades, Jews flocked to the opportunity offered by boom-and-bust business and tourism cycles—despite restrictions on Jewish ownership and occupancy that only lifted in the late 1940s.

Enthralled by the sunshine and a frontier culture, Miami's Jews were prominently involved in founding not only the city's enduring hospitality sector but also its retail scene, its universities—including the University of Miami in Coral Gables—and its civic institutions and elected offices. Miami Beach, for instance, has had 15 Jewish mayors.

There are close to 5,000 Hadassah members, associates and donors in Hadassah Greater Miami, a region that includes Puerto Rico, the Keys and Miami-Dade County. It is one of four regions that make up Hadassah Florida. Statewide, there are over 45,000 Hadassah members.

Over recent decades, Jews have maintained a steady migration from colder climes to settle suburbs like Aventura, where Hadassah will be holding its National Conference from August 10 to 12. Earlier, in the 1970s and 1980s, retirement communities sprouted along the so-called Gold Coast from Miami north to West Palm Beach.

But anyone who still thinks of South Florida as a retirement mecca hasn't been paying attention. Greater Miami feels younger, less seasonal and more diverse than in years past thanks to the nation's largest net international migration rate. Newcomers are arriving from virtually every corner of South America as well as Canada, Israel and Eastern Europe. The Israeli influx is driven largely by the appeal of Florida for entrepreneurship—and its proximity to both North and South American markets—with roughly 430 Israeli-founded companies in the state, most in the Miami vicinity.

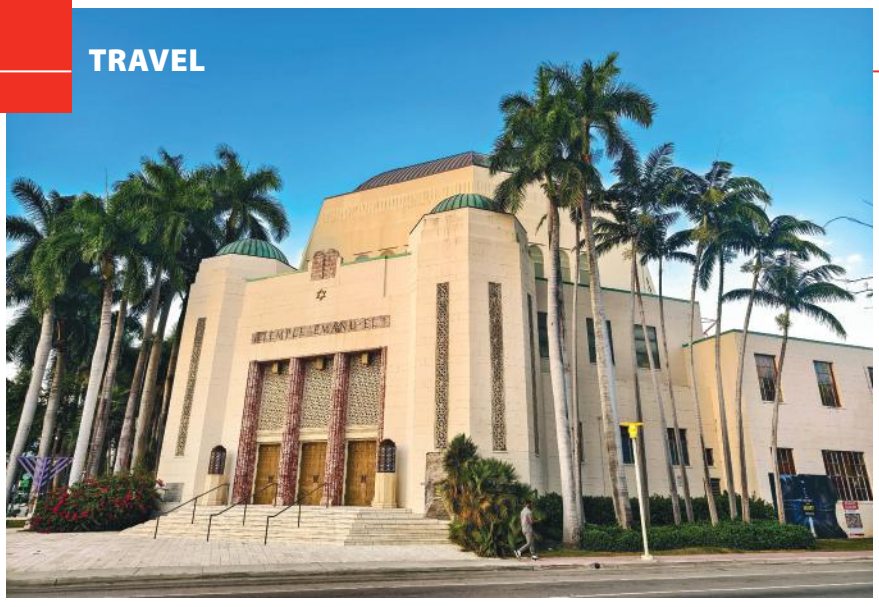
All these forces have contributed to a metro population that grew at more than twice the national rate last year, with an average of 155 people arriving each day. Miami's Jewish numbers grew by 9 percent over the past decade, with the proportion of children increasing at twice the rate of older people.

As a result, Miami has a notable



Raw Reflection *Miami's Holocaust memorial was dedicated by Elie Wiesel in 1990.*

SHUTTERSTOCK



Synagogue Splendor *The Byzantine-Moorish Temple Emanu-El dates to the 1940s.*

cosmopolitanism that is evident in everything from the splashy annual Art Basel show and Miami Book Fair to tech bros paying for empanadas with crypto. Downtown in particular has matured from a rather sterile, featureless district into a bustling high-rise neighborhood alongside the revitalized Bayfront Park.

One thing that hasn't changed is the ubiquity of Spanish as Miami's lingua franca, rather than a minority tongue confined to ethnic enclaves. While "Hispanic" in Miami was once synonymous with "Cuban"—the city remains ground zero for that country's politically exiled diaspora—now it could mean anything from Puerto Rican to Mexican to Argentinian.

Kosher areperías (bakeries specializing in arepas, Caribbean-rim corn patties) speak to the burgeoning presence of Jews who have escaped here from troubled Venezuela, while Argentina's inflation-plagued economy has prompted thousands of its residents, many Jewish, to settle in neighborhoods like North Miami Beach's "Little Buenos Aires."

A few years ago, I met members of the Plutzik family—father Jonathan, a financier and philanthropist, and son Zach—at their then-newish Ocean Drive hotel, The Betsy. Like generations of Ashkenazi Jews before them, the Plutziks saw opportunity—in this case, an aging Georgian colonial mansion—and opened the latest Jewish-owned hotel. Partly out of passion, partly as a tribute to Jonathan's late father, the noted poet Hyam Plutzik, The Betsy has become a South Beach cultural hub, hosting live events and writers-in-residence, including, in May, *My Salinger Year* author Joanna Rakoff, who also contributed an essay to the 2024 anthology *On Being Jewish Now.*

Indeed, Miami's arts scene, long overshadowed by its beach culture, has evolved in ways that feel organic to a place where life is largely lived outdoors. At downtown's Pérez Art Museum, for instance, I've often felt the modern art inside is rivaled by the stunning interplay of light, color and design in the sculptural courtyards and terraces that showcase views over Biscayne Bay.

On Miami Beach's Lincoln Road, outdoor concerts and sculpture installations give the pedestrian thoroughfare the feel of an open-air gallery. Nearby, at the New World Center, warm nights bring picnicking crowds to an outdoor film series, dubbed "Wallcasts," projected on the center's facade. And in Wynwood, a formerly industrial district north of downtown, the aesthetic experience is immersive for those who stroll amid murals, painted sidewalks and colorfully rehabilitated buildings.

In spite of the heat, the hurricanes and the hype—all of them relentless—Miami retains a beguiling energy that few cities can match. It's what



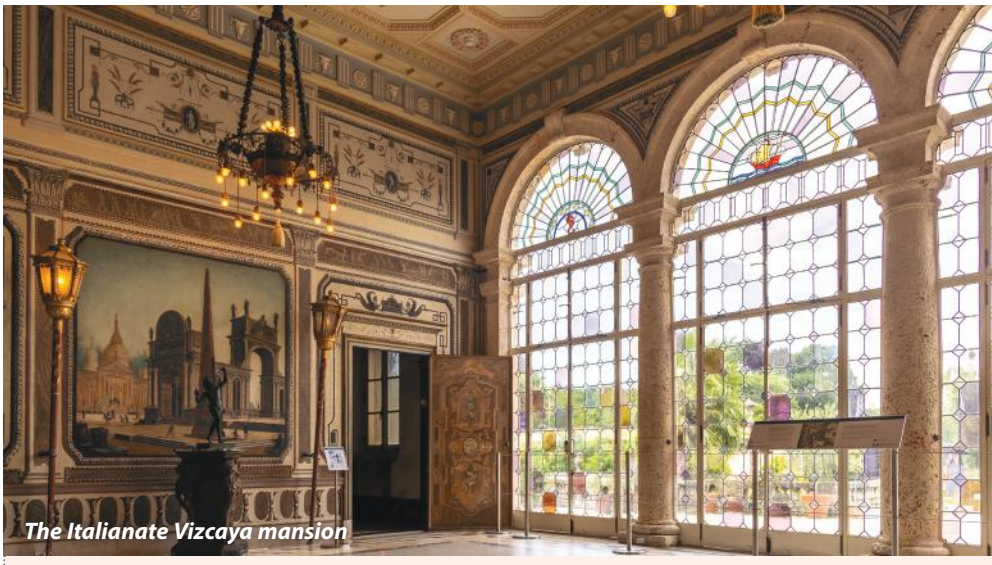
Retrospective *The Jewish museum showcases more than 250 years of Jewish life in Florida.*

SHUTTERSTOCK (TOP); JON ARNOLD IMAGES LTD/ALAMY

drew my great-grandparents, Austrian-born New Yorkers, to settle here in the 1950s, the first of four generations to do so.

"There were ambulances outside the nightclubs, waiting to cart off the retirees who collapsed on the dance floor," recalled my mom in what may well be an apocryphal memory of my great-grandfather's passing. "My grandfather always said he wanted to die dancing. And in Miami Beach, he did." H

Hilary Danailova writes about travel, culture, politics and lifestyle.



The Italianate Vizcaya mansion

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Many Miami visitors never make it north of **South Beach**, the fabled neighborhood of Art Deco and nightlife at the southern tip of Miami Beach, which is itself bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and Biscayne Bay to the west and crisscrossed by major arteries. But neighborhoods like **North Miami Beach**, with its picturesque canals and peaceful beaches, and **Surfside**, a vibrant hub of Jewish life at the isle's northern tip, are well worth the effort.

South Beach is among Miami's most urbane districts, and likely its most historic. On **Washington Boulevard,** the Byzantine-Moorish facade of **Temple Emanu-El**, a circa-1940s landmark housing a 90-year-old congregation, stands catty-corner to the arresting **Soundscape Park and New World Center**, a sculpture garden and arts complex designed by the Jewish architect Frank Gehry.

Washington Boulevard is also home to two prominent museums with Jewish pedigrees, both operated by Florida International University. The **Wolfsonian-FIU,** a modern art venue, was founded by the late Mitchell Wolfson Jr., a Miami-born businessman and art collector whose father was Miami Beach's first Jewish mayor.

A block inland from Ocean Avenue's lively restaurant strip is the **Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU**, showcasing more than 250 years of Jewish life in the Sunshine State. The museum is housed in two bright yellow Art Deco buildings built for the now-defunct Congregation Beth Jacob, a relic of the era when Jews were legally restricted to this southern stretch of South Beach.

Lincoln Road is the neighborhood's pedestrian heart. It is an eight-block strip of outdoor cafes and chain stores whose enchantment owes largely to Morris Lapidus's midcentury sculptural flourishes, lavish fountains and shady botanical plantings. Lapidus, the Odessa-born designer, was the Jewish visionary behind such enduring Miami Beach landmarks as the **Eden Roc and Fontainebleau hotels** and **Temple Menorah** on 75th Street.

It's impossible to miss **Miami Beach's Holocaust Memorial**, which was dedicated by Elie Wiesel in 1990 on a busy corner of Dade Boulevard. Kenneth Treister's unnerving sculpture features a 40-foot-tall hand reaching toward the sky from its base in a lily pond; tiny human figures clamber upward from the base of the tattooed forearm.

For my money, an indelible sight is the expanse of sea and sky visible from the causeways across Biscayne Bay. And while the sprawl of Miami proper can be disorienting, several distinctive neighborhoods are worth crossing the bay for those with a car. These include **Coconut Grove,** the upscale, waterside district with a vibrant cafe and bookstore scene. A major attraction here is the circa-1916 **Vizcaya**, an Italianate mansion with formal gardens that was built as the winter home of corporate titan James Deering.

Further north is **Wynwood**, a former industrial district transformed by murals, art galleries and destination eateries, including **Zak the Baker,** a kosher-certified bread and dessert emporium owned by Zak Stern. Lovers of Cuban culture head west to **Little Havana,** a fabled neighborhood that can feel disconcertingly sleepy from the sidewalk, but inside Castro-era haunts like **Versailles**, the café con leche and dominoes scene are both legendary.

Greater Miami has such an abundance of **kosher options** that it is impossible to list them all. Consult a website such as **YeahThatsKosher.com** before your trip.



Legendary Little Havana

SHUTTERSTOCK


Lital Ovadia

Women With Vintage Appeal

Israel's burgeoning network of female winemakers

By Adeena Sussman

Soon after founding Tel Winery on Moshav Sha'al in the Golan Heights in 2018, Lital Ovadia realized that she had inadvertently hired an all-female staff to help her plant, prune, pick and crush grapes and transfer their wine to barrels for aging.

"I didn't think of it too much at the time, but now I realize it's what both I and the winery needed," Ovadia said by phone at the end of a long day of tending to the fruit that would, in just a few months, become her 2025 harvest. "Women are neat, precise, flexible and thoughtful, and now I wouldn't have it any other way."

Ovadia, 37, was granted her 60-acre plot of land as part of a government initiative to foster agricultural careers among younger Israelis. Earlier, she spent a decade working at the well-regarded Pelter Winery, also in the Golan Heights, and earned a master's in winemaking before founding Tel, which this year is slated to release 20,000 bottles of viognier, sauvignon blanc, rosé and cabernet franc. Her business avoided much of the damage to its vineyards and facilities that many wineries in the Galilee experienced after October 7, 2023 (see related story, page 20).

"Over the course of the war," Ovadia said, "we worked literally under fire, with rockets flying overhead. It was extremely stressful, but also incredible that we managed to maintain our winemaking routine in the vineyards and winery."

Ovadia's career in winemaking is indicative of a larger groundswell in Israel that finds more women working in every aspect of the industry.

According to Tal Tauber, founder of Hashizra, a 4-year-old, 900-strong network of women working in wine and food in Israel, there are now almost 50 female winemakers spread across Israel's approximately 300 wineries. That's a far cry from 15 years ago, she said, when you could practically count them on one hand.

One of those early winemakers was Roni Saslove. Her father, Barry Saslove, founded his namesake winery in 1998 on Kibbutz Eyal in the center of the country. After she joined as assistant winemaker at 25, she said, "someone asked me how dare I call myself a winemaker since I had no formal training." That comment motivated her to further her career. She earned a master's in winemaking and then became head winemaker before her father sold the business in 2013. Now 47, she works as a consultant for private collectors and restaurants and on book projects.

"There is something in women that allows them to guide winemaking while being more sensitive to what the grapes themselves need and want to do," Saslove said. "Women do it with a humble, collaborative confidence."

It's that sense of collaboration that inspired Tauber, 37, to found Hashizra, which is Hebrew for the central vine in a cluster of grapes. Looking for a career change, she transitioned from corporate marketing to work for the Israeli branch of WSET, an international wine-education organization, before founding Hashizra. "I was the exact person who needed Hashizra, so I created it," she said. "But there still remains a significant male majority, especially in key positions" in the Israeli wine industry.

Hashizra began by hosting wine tastings, dinners, seminars and social


Roni Saslove

COURTESY OF LITAL OVADIA (TOP); ELLA BARAK

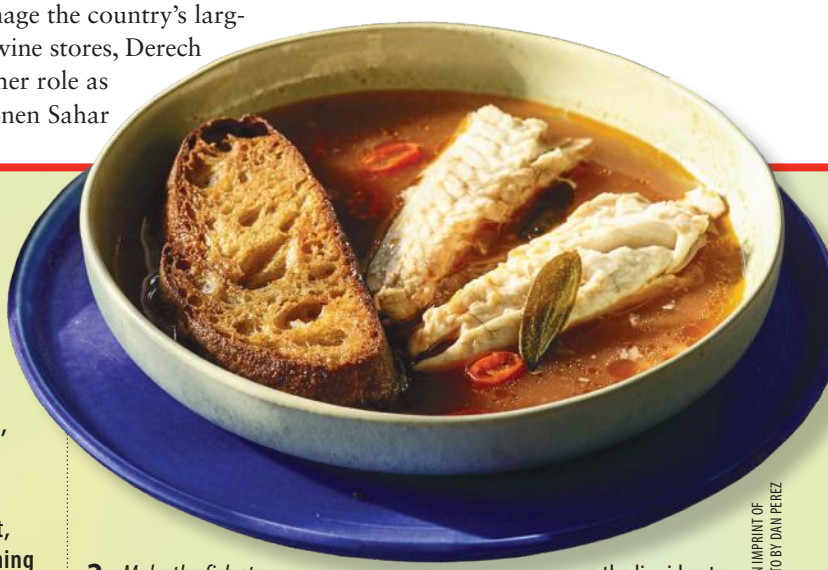
gatherings to help women form friendships and professional connections. Then came the Hamas attacks on October 7. Tauber's husband was called up to military reserve duty, leaving her to care for their young children. "The war derailed many of Hashizra's plans," she said. "But in a way, the network has proven itself to be even more valuable since then."

Tauber is especially proud of Hashizra's active online job board and member directory. Those resources have helped connect dozens of women with employment opportunities as well as with mentoring programs.

Hilah Ronen Sahar, a wine consultant and restaurateur who co-founded the award-winning restaurant Rutenberg, just south of the Kinneret, with her late husband, Yizhar Sahar, is a Hashizra mentor. Growing up on Kibbutz Tzora in the Judean Hills, she worked at the kibbutz's eponymous—and internationally renowned—winery. She then entered the retail wine industry in the United States before returning to Israel to manage the country's largest chain of wine stores, Derech Hayayin. In her role as a mentor, Ronen Sahar recently guided a woman with a new cooking studio through the process of building a wine list.

"I've worked with women in wine all over the world," said Ronen Sahr. "It's nice to see Israel catching up." H

Adeena Sussman lives in Tel Aviv. She is the author of *Shabbat: Recipes and Rituals from My Kitchen to Yours* and *Sababa: Fresh, Sunny Flavors from My Israeli Kitchen.*



Cacciucco Livornese

Serves 6

Select a light red such as pinot noir to pair with and use in this Italian fish stew. It would make an ideal summer supper during the Nine Days—when Jews traditionally eschew eating meat—that precede Tisha B'Av, the fast day that begins this year on August 2.

FOR THE FISH BROTH

- **2 tablespoons olive oil**
- **1 medium onion, coarsely chopped**
- **1 medium carrot, chopped**
- **1 large celery stalk, chopped**
- **1 bay leaf**
- **5 whole black peppercorns**
- **3/4 pounds fish bones (ask your fishmonger for these)**
- **6 1/2 cups water**

FOR THE STEW

- **10 tablespoons olive oil**
- **9 fresh sage leaves**
- **7 garlic cloves, halved**
- **1 hot chili pepper**
- **1/4 cup tomato paste**
- **1 cup red wine**
- **2.5-3 pounds whole red snapper (4 small, 3 medium or 1 large snapper), cleaned**
- **1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for seasoning**
- **1 cup water, as needed to cover the fish**
- **8 thick slices crusty bread**

1. *Make the fish broth:* In a 3- or 4-quart saucepan, heat the oil over medium-low heat. Add the onion, carrot and celery and cook, stirring, until the vegetables begin to soften, 6 to 7 minutes. Add the bay leaf, peppercorns, fish bones and water, increase the heat to high, bring to a boil, and boil for 5 minutes, skimming and discarding any scum that gathers on top. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for 25 minutes. Strain, discarding the solids; you should have about 6 cups of broth

2. *Make the fish stew:* In a large pot, heat 4 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium-low heat. Add the sage leaves, 6 of the garlic cloves and the chili and cook until fragrant, 2 minutes. Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the wine, scrape the pot to bring everything together, bring to a boil, then turn off the heat and scrape the mixture into a bowl.

Pat the fish dry and season it generously with salt on both sides. Add another 3 tablespoons of the oil to the pot, increase the heat to high, add the fish and sear until golden, 2 to 4 minutes per side. Add the red wine-tomato liquid, the fish broth and the salt; use a spatula to shift the fish to make sure the liquid gets in between the pieces, adding the water, if necessary, to cover the fish, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the liquid thickens slightly and the fish cooks through, 15 to 17 minutes.

3. While the fish is cooking, make the toasts: Arrange a rack in the top third of the oven and preheat the broiler. Rub one side of the bread with the cut sides of the remaining garlic clove, arrange the slices on a baking sheet, brush one side generously with the remaining 3 tablespoons of oil and broil until golden and toasty, 2 to 3 minutes. Season with salt and serve with the fish stew.

RECIPE FROM 'SHABBAT: RECIPES AND RITUALS FROM MY KITCHEN TO YOURS' BY ADEENA SUSSMAN, PUBLISHED BY AVERY, AN IMPRINT OF PENGUIN PUBLISHING GROUP, A DIVISION OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE, LLC COPYRIGHT @ 2023 BY ADEENA SUSSMAN. PHOTO BY DAN PEREZ





Shoah Stills *Hundreds of shows have been created about the Holocaust, including (clockwise from top left) 'The Brutalist'; 'A Small Light'; Schindler's List'; 'We Were the Lucky Ones'; 'The Survivor'; '999: The Forgotten Girls '; and the animated 'Letter to a Pig.'*

Never Forgetting, on Film

A steady stream of Holocaust content

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

By age 10, my yeshiva day school classmates and I were surrounded by stories and visuals of the Holocaust. In classes and programs, we saw pictures of hollow-eyed concentration camp inmates, learned Yiddish songs from the ghettos and the partisans and heard in-person accounts from survivors.

This early, repeated experience reflected my community's commitment to those twin phrases of warning and remembrance: "Never Again" and "Never Forget."

That exposure in the late 1980s was part of my Jewish upbringing in Bergen County, N.J. But for many children and adults in the United States, that kind of direct immersion is less common.

For the wider world, television and film may be the most ubiquitous conduits of narrative about the Holocaust. Nearly 500 Holocaust-related feature films have been produced across 40 countries since 1945, according to Holocaust educator and film historian Rich Brownstein, who is the author of *Holocaust Cinema Complete*. Add to that hundreds of documentaries and shorts, and it becomes clear that the screen has become one of the Holocaust's most enduring storytellers.

That steady stream continues today. Jewish pain took center stage at this year's Academy Awards: Kieran Culkin won Best Supporting Actor for playing one of two cousins on a heritage trip to Poland in *A Real Pain,* directed by co-star Jesse Eisenberg, while Adrien Brody took Best Actor for his role as an architect finding his way in America after surviving the Holocaust in *The Brutalist.*

And in what the *Forward* called a "boom in Holocaust TV," 2024 and 2023 brought a wave of World War II stories to the small screen, including the series *A Small Light,* about Miep Gies, the Dutch woman who helped hide Anne Frank and her family, and *We Were the Lucky Ones*, based on Georgia Hunter's novel of the same name about how her Polish family evaded the Nazis.

According to film and television insiders, the pipeline for Holocaust documentaries, dramas and television series has widened in format and narrative scope. Holocaust films "keep evolving with the times and technology," said Jeremy Goldscheider, documentary filmmaker and host and producer of the Jewish Life Television (JLTV) network's documentary film series *J Docs*.

Yet as new content continues to surface along with a surge of antisemitism, creatives and academics disagree about what fuels the ongoing interest as well as the degree to which—and even whether—these films are meant to impact the way audiences see and understand anti-Jewish bias.

While it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of Holocaust films currently in production worldwide, Hilary Helstein, co-founder and executive director of the Los Angeles Jewish Film Festival, one of the largest such festivals in the country, said she is encouraged by the interest from filmmakers.

"This is the last generation to hear from Holocaust survivors firsthand. It's important we continue to tell these stories," said Helstein, who also directed the 2008 documentary *As Seen Through These Eyes,* about artists who fought the Nazi regime.

Roberta Grossman, an award-winning filmmaker and executive

COURTESY OF (ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) A24; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FOR DISNEY/DUSAN MARTINCEK; UNIVERSAL PICTURES; HULU; HBO MAX; GOZFILMS; MIYU PRODUCTIONS/THE HIVE STUDIO

director of Jewish Story Partners, echoes those sentiments. "We will continue to grapple," she said, "with this rupture in civilization and catastrophe for the Jewish people for as long as people are making films."

Supported by Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation, Jewish Story Partners is dedicated to Jewish-themed filmmaking. Since its launch in April 2021, it has funded 101 documentaries—about 30 percent focused on the Holocaust or antisemitism, Grossman said. Among them is *999: The Forgotten Girls,* an award-winning 2024 film based on a book of the same title by Heather Dune Macadam, about the young women on the first Jewish transport to Auschwitz.

Yet for some viewers around the country, the sheer volume of films can be overwhelming.

"We find that our audience gets Holocaust fatigue," said Beth Toni Kruvant, artistic director of the Berkshire Jewish Film Festival. "Especially in the summer, they look for comedies and nostalgia."

The bulk of festival submissions are Holocaust movies, she said. Nevertheless, the final slate usually limits such films to about 25 percent of those shown to make space for other offerings.

Among the Shoah-connected films at this year's festival, which will take place in July in Lenox, Mass., is *Soda*, which shows the aftermath of the Holocaust and the struggles to rebuild a life in Israel, and the biopic *Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire*.

Holocaust features and documentaries make up about 20 percent of the programming at the Holocaust Museum LA, located in the Fairfax District of Los Angeles. According to Jordanna Gessler, the museum's chief impact officer, its programs have reached some 100,000 students this year alone.

The museum is investing considerably in cinema. When the museum's new $65 million Jona Goldrich Campus opens next spring, so will its long-awaited auditorium for film and stage works, said Jen Maxcy, the museum's chief program officer.

Both Maxcy and Gessler observed that many of the films made today have a broader focus than those in previous decades, exploring stories about perpetrators and the descendants of survivors with "a deepening of psychological aspects," Maxcy said. She pointed to newer themes such as intergenerational trauma, depicted in the personal struggles of the cousins in *A Real Pain*, and the complicity of bystanders, seen in the 2024 Academy Award-winner *The Zone of Interest*, about German SS officer Rudolf Höss and his family.

Another focus is survivors' postwar challenges, such as in *The Brutalist* and in the 2022 HBO Max movie *The Survivor,* about boxer Harry Haft's attempt to create a life in America after surviving Auschwitz.

"There is a common misconception that after the Holocaust…life was great. People came to America, they had jobs, they were successful, they got married, they had lots of kids," Gessler said. "A section of people do fit that narrative, but for the vast majority of Holocaust survivors, liberation was not just a day of celebration. It was a day of torture and hardship, and realization that life was truly destroyed."

It is not just the topics that are different, but also how they are told. One example is the use of animation. Some 20 animated films related to the Holocaust have been released since 2020, according to the International Animated Film Association of San Francisco.

Goldscheider, *J Docs* host, called the 2022 Academy Award-nominated animated short *Letter to a Pig* "hauntingly beautiful." The Israeli and French co-production explores intergenerational trauma as a teenage girl slips into an animated reverie about identity and memory as a Holocaust survivor reads a letter he wrote to her class.

"Visually, the film is wildly unique, and it resonates because it forces viewers to confront how we see the other," he said.



Kieran Culkin (left) and Jesse Eisenberg in 'A Real Pain'

SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

For more on recent Holocaust films, go to **hadassahmagazine.org/arts**.

For all the new storytelling, "it is of the utmost importance to be accurate," Gessler said—especially with Holocaust denial on the rise. Some films, she noted, emphasize period details but obscure who the victims of the Holocaust actually were.

She pointed to *The Zone of Interest,* which describes the lives of Höss and his family in their home right next to Auschwitz, while over their garden wall the sounds of gunshots and the camp furnaces can be heard.

"The film is visually meticulous—the setting of Auschwitz's commandant's home, the costumes and props are all compelling," she said. "But the film focuses so tightly on the peripheral banality of evil, without directly showing or acknowledging the scale and mechanisms of mass murder just beyond the wall, that some viewers could walk away without a clear understanding of the actual historical atrocities."

"I struggle when films take other perspectives and don't give true and honest and accurate space to the horrific inhumanity of a massive genocidal campaign against Jewish people," Gessler added.

She also criticized films that blur fiction and fact, creating "fictional Holocaust stories based on real events."

In contrast, her colleague Maxcy believes that these films can have value. If the fictional *A Real Pain* "interests people because they like Jesse Eisenberg, and it tells you a little bit about Majdanek, so curiosity is provoked, it's a good thing," Maxcy noted.

That said, most Holocaust film projects are not intended as educational tools or in service of Jewish memory, explained Holocaust and film educator Brownstein. Rather, they are pieces of art, something to see.

He also asserted that some of them are made simply to win awards. "People who are making the films"—Brownstein mentioned A24, the studio behind *The Brutalist* and *The Zone of Interest*—"are manipulative and know what they're doing specifically for the Academy," he said, suggesting that they prioritize award potential, which brings prestige to studios and directors, over authentic Jewish experience or education.

Meanwhile, the constant stream of Holocaust content is not impacting the way people view Jews or the Holocaust itself, said Nathan Abrams, a professor of film at Bangor University in Wales. "What we've learned since October 7 is that these films don't make people less antisemitic," Abrams said. "Whoever thinks they're going to make a difference is naïve and misguided."

But perhaps that was never the role of such films to begin with. "It is a mistake to rely upon media and culture to remedy bigotry," Brownstein said, noting that despite their critical and commercial successes, director Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), about racial tensions between Black and Italian residents in Brooklyn, and Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) didn't eliminate racism or antisemitism.

"Responsibility for tolerance is in the home, schools and theology, not films, necessarily, unless used specifically for that purpose," he added. "Asking art to fix society is unfair and unrealistic."

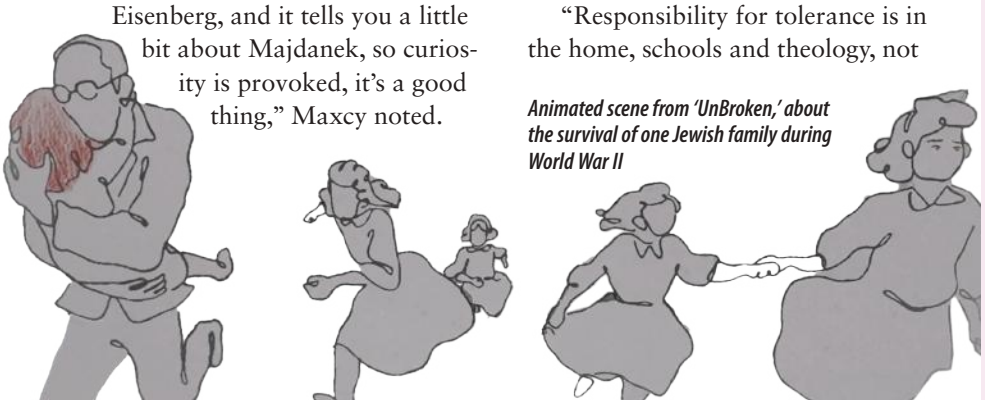
Still, others contend that Holocaust films provide a way to address antisemitism, both historical and current, especially for young people.

Helstein, director of the Los Angeles Jewish Film Festival, also sees educational value in the abundance of Holocaust content. As part of her annual event, she introduces local teens from diverse backgrounds to the history of Nazi Germany. In January, she was honored by the city for her decades-long work preserving Holocaust stories through film and education.

Just reaching one person who wants to spread the message is worthwhile, she said. Despite the challenges, "I'm going to do what I do: Keep the history of the Holocaust in the forefront." H

Esther D. Kustanowitz is a Los Angeles-based writer, editor and consultant. She also co-hosts *The Bagel Report* podcast.

COURTESY OF NETFLIX



Animated scene from 'UnBroken,' about the survival of one Jewish family during World War II

HADASSAH MAGAZINE PRESENTS

Join us on Thursday, July 17 at 12:30 PM ET when Lisa Hostein interviews Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur, author of the recent best seller *How Isn't It Going? Conversations After October 7* and the inspiration behind the hit streaming series *Reformed*. One of only a handful of female French rabbis, Horvilleur has become a leading public intellectual in her native country and a powerful proponent for plurality and interfaith dialogue. Free and open to all. Register using this QR code or go to **hadassahmagazine.org**.



Elsa Guedj (right) in 'Reformed'

PLAYING A RABBI ON TELEVISION

'REFORMED' PAIRS LAUGHTER WITH DEEPLY JEWISH PHILOSOPHICAL MOMENTS | By Susan Hornik

Elsa Guedj was thrilled when she won best actress for *Le Sens des Choses*—French for "the sense of meaning"—at this year's Series Mania, an acclaimed international television festival in France. "I am very happy!" she said in an interview several weeks after receiving the award. "It's my very first award. I never won any medals doing sport . . . or anything, so it's like I won a cup for a professional sports game or something."

Her starring role in the quirky dramedy about a French female rabbi, streaming as *Reformed* on HBO Max, also has nothing to do with sports, but it is scoring big among audiences. "People seem very moved and attached to the series, even non-Jewish people," she said.

Guedj plays Léa Schmoll, a newly ordained liberal rabbi valiantly serving a small Jewish community in the picturesque city of Strasbourg in eastern France. Each episode follows the young rabbi as she officiates at major life-cycle events—weddings, funerals, bar mitzvahs and circumcision ceremonies—that correspond with thought-provoking moments in her personal life and her relationship with her father, a committed atheist.

The charming series has gained accolades and audiences for its witty dialogue, its insider look at French Jewish culture and its ability to pair sitcom hijinks with philosophical moments and rich depictions of Jewish tradition and practice. Guedj, who is Jewish but does not speak Hebrew, worked with a coach—Jewish educator Faustine Sigal—who guided her in performing Jewish rituals and pronouncing prayers. The two even studied Jewish texts together in what Guedj described as "accelerated rabbinical training."

The series draws inspiration from the life of French Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur and her best-selling book *Living With Our Dead: On Loss and Consolation,* published in English in 2024. The book's 11 poignant essays are mostly framed around the eulogies and funeral ceremonies she has officiated—from friends and congregants to well-known figures such as politician and Holocaust survivor Simone Weil—and blend personal anecdotes with biblical and rabbinic texts.

While women in the United States have increasingly assumed leadership roles within liberal Jewish movements, in France, she remains one of only a small number of female rabbis. The country's nearly 500,000 Jews are predominantly affiliated with traditional or Orthodox congregations.

Horvilleur co-leads the Liberal Jewish Movement of France, which is a cultural and religious association affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism. She has been an outspoken advocate for dialogue not only within the broader Jewish community but particularly between French Jewry and the country's sizable Muslim population of around six million. In an interview with the *Times of Israel*, Horvilleur noted the importance of building bridges between Jews and the rest of the world and her hope that the new series also serve as a "bridge and gate" into Jewish life.

In *Reformed*, Léa faces challenges to her Jewish knowledge and authority—much like Horvilleur has said she did at the start of her career—and Guedj skillfully conveys Léa's inner doubts and determination as she rises to those challenges.

In her conversation with *Hadassah Magazine*, Guedj discussed what it is like to portray a young rabbi on television and how she connected with her character's real-life inspiration. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Female rabbis are unusual in France. What was the reaction to your role in your native country?

I noticed while preparing the series that a lot of people would tell me, "A woman rabbi, does that exist in real life?" So, it's still not that well known. But there are a lot more young female rabbis now in the path of Delphine who have a very intellectual, philosophical approach to Judaism and very interesting views.

How similar is *Reformed* to Horvilleur's book?

It is a very loose adaptation. Most of the stories in the book disappeared in the series. In the end, it's more the spirit and relationship to the texts of Delphine that remain. Also, how she relates to doubt and how doubting was her key to finding solutions.

Reformed writers Noé Debré and Benjamin Charbit talked with her a lot while writing the series, but most of the stories told in the series are invented or come from other people's experiences. It's not aimed to be a biopic, and Léa evolves in a world where Delphine already exists as her own character.

Tell us about Léa's relationship with her father (played by Éric Elmosnino), an atheist who doesn't understand her desire to become a rabbi.

I love this relationship! It's full of conflicts and at the same time functional. They are so similar and close that deep inside, it's unbearable for them not to agree about something, or that their life path could take them away from each other. And I love how Eric plays this grumpy, insupportable character, and we still love him!

How did your own parents react to the series?

They were very happy. My dad is really an anti-religious person, and he still loved it, so I was very proud of that. H

Susan L. Hornik is a veteran entertainment and lifestyle journalist living in California.

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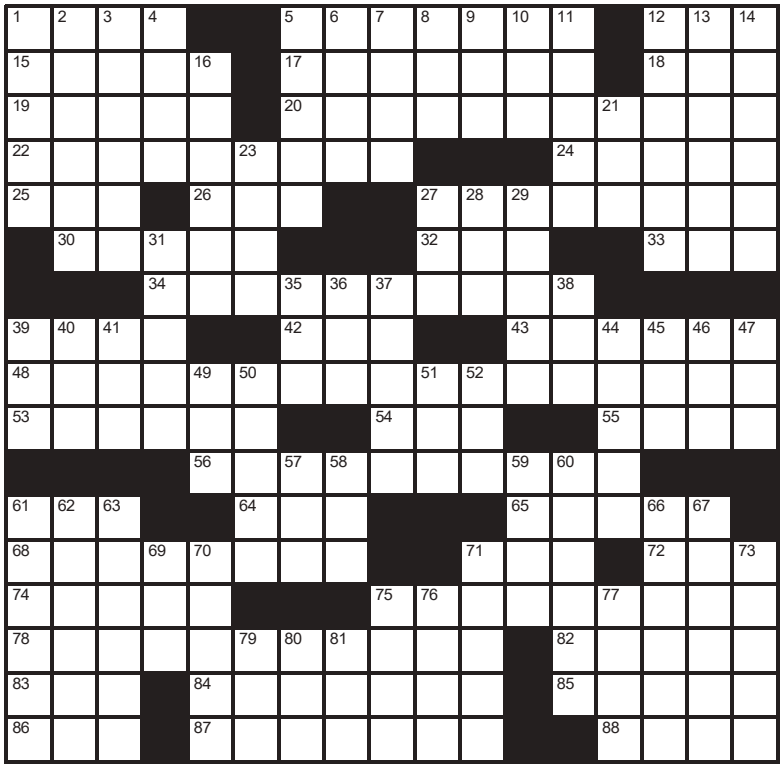
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South to the Sunshine State

By Jonathan Schmalzbach



Answers on page 50

ACROSS

1. With 56-across, Florida city known as the Venice of America
5. Dolphin that was "faster than lightning"
12. It may be boring
15. Keep ___ to the ground
17. Artist Gorky
18. ___, amas, amat
19. Neon ___ (aquarium fish)
20. Blanche, Dorothy, Rose and Sophia, after "The"
22. University of Miami athlete
24. "I'm ___ home right now..."
25. Blind ___ bat
26. Jeb Bush, to George H.W.
27. Circus Hall of Fame site
30. Architect Saarinen
32. Time, in Torino
33. Longboat, for one
34. Miami-___ is home to close to 5,000 Hadassah members and associates
39. Insurance co. for military families
42. Startled cry, triggered by a mouse
43. Florida fruit
48. "SoFlo Taste" host and chef
53. Speaker Emerita Nancy
54. Vote of support
55. Work the bar
56. See 1-across
61. ___ tai
64. Dumfries denial
65. Manfred ___ Earth Band
68. Yiddish Nobelist who lived and died in Surfside, briefly
71. "All systems go"
72. Antipoverty agcy.
74. One of the Haim sisters
75. Florida Rep. Jared
78. Legendary gangster who retired to Miami
82. Body of art?
83. "___ about time!"
84. The worst kind can be empty
85. "___ called into the ascending night" (Lounsbrough)
86. Jack of "Barney Miller"
87. Brief excerpt
88. Outdated suffix of comedian or equestrian

DOWN

1. Jazz pianist Hines
2. Disposable
3. Posterior
4. Basher ___ (Don Cheadle's "Ocean's Twelve" role)
5. "Drabble" cartoonist
6. Scientology's ___ Hubbard
7. Ibis ___ (Florida locale known for its birdlife)
8. High degree
9. Key lime, e.g.
10. Debt instrument issued by a financial inst.
11. Sportswear brand for bicyclists
12. Composer Bela
13. Cry from the White Rabbit
14. "Our Love Is Here ___"
16. ___ ruckus (cause a commotion)
21. iPhone platform
23. What snowbirds go to Florida to escape
27. Former low-value coin
28. Prince Valiant's son
29. Boca ___
31. Spud state
35. Moray, e.g.
36. Average grade
37. Terse farewell
38. Mos. and mos.
39. Person in a mask
40. "Sprechen ___ Deutsch?"
41. Often-torn knee part: abbr.
44. Where many volume knobs max out
45. Born, in bios
46. Bathtub liquid?
47. Conclude
49. Immigrant's class: abbr.
50. Sixth century Chinese dynasty
51. Always, in verse
52. "Awesome!"
57. Federation in OPEC
58. Architect Mies van ___ Rohe
59. Crazily
60. Sitting Bull's people
61. Tribe men and women not native to the Sunshine State
62. "___leap tall buildings..."
63. Parent's favorite phrase?
66. Wrinkle-resistant, as a shirt
67. Sics
69. Like Vivaldi's "Spring"
70. Pushers' chasers
71. Up to now
73. ___ layer
75. New car sticker abbr.
76. "___ From Muskogee"
77. Literature Nobelist Soyinka
79. PC linkup
80. ___Baba
81. Alphabet trio



A Home in Richmond and Galveston

First-person accounts look at Jewish stories in the South

The Civil War Diary of Emma Mordecai
Edited and with an introduction by Dianne Ashton with Melissa R. Klapper (NYU Press)

More than 160 years ago, Emma Mordecai, an educated Jewish woman from a prosperous, slave-holding family in Richmond, Va., took quill to paper and described her daily life during the final year of the Civil War.

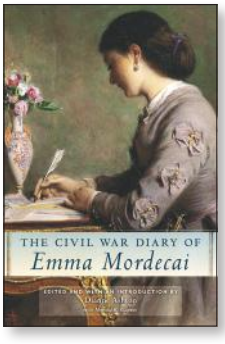
Following the death of her mother, Mordecai and her family rented out their Richmond home to the Confederate army. In her 50s and unmarried, she moved to a small farm owned by her Christian sister-in-law, Rosina, in Rosewood, just outside the city.

Her diary spans from April 1864 to May 1865 and is a rare and revealing personal testimony of an observant Jewish woman who lived in the heart of the Confederacy.

Indeed, Mordecai was a minority among a minority. Jews made up less than 1 percent of the South then, a total of some 25,000 Jews. But even among that community, she was a rarity—a religious single woman in a Jewish population where most intermarried or assimilated.

Dianne Ashton, professor emeritus of philosophy and world religion at Rowan University, had spent years researching and writing about Mordecai. However, she had not completed the manuscript before her death in 2022.

Enter Melissa Klapper, a history professor at Rowan and director of the school's women and gender studies program. Klapper and Ashton met when Klapper was in graduate school. Ashton became first her mentor and later her friend and colleague. After Ashton's death, Klapper felt compelled to complete and publish Ashton's vital and fascinating work.



And it is a fascinating read. The diary, with its extensive, 80-page introduction detailing Southern Jewish life, will engage lay readers as well as scholars.

Mordecai wrote about her everyday comings and goings, from strolls through the countryside to updates on family and vivid descriptions of the broader context of wartime life. She visited wounded Confederate soldiers, endured food rationing and looked after others during fierce battles nearby. In one entry, she wrote about placing flowers she found on a walk in the woods in pots, then hearing "heavy firing in the direction of the city. The servants say they have heard it when at work in the field. The enemy seem to be making an attack on all sides. I still feel undismayed & pray God to enable us to endure...with fortitude."

In her first entry, on Thursday, April 18, 1864, Mordecai wrote that she returned to Richmond, where she, accompanied by Rosina's grown daughter, spent Passover with the family of another cousin. They were observant Jews and lived in walking distance of Beth Shalome synagogue.

Her relatives spanned both sides of the Civil War, but Mordecai, like almost all her siblings, supported slavery. While Jews today will find her defense of slavery in the diary distressing and inconsistent with core Jewish values and beliefs, Klapper cautioned that we must understand Mordecai's views in the context of her times. "She's a good example of the messiness of history," Klapper said in an interview. "She is both a staunch defender of Judaism and also

SHUTTERSTOCK

a slave owner who really believed in the Confederacy."

After the war, Mordecai continued to live at Rosewood with family. She remained active in Richmond's Jewish life, founding Beth Shalome's Sunday school, where she served as its superintendent.

Her diary was preserved by her relatives, who donated the surviving pages to the University of North Carolina.

The Civil War is extensively documented, with scores of diaries written by women, men and soldiers. Yet Mordecai's diary stands out, Klapper said, for its remarkable balance of daily life and broader reflections on the war. And notably, her vivid, honest writing reveals a deep commitment to her Jewish faith.

—Penny Schwartz

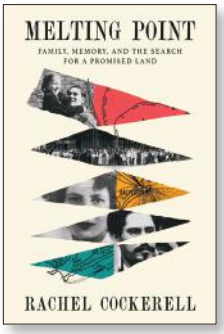
Penny Schwartz is a journalist who writes about Jewish subjects and the arts for a variety of publications.

Melting Point: Family, Memory, and the Search for a Promised Land
By Rachel Cockerell (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Exiled from country after country due to antisemitism, Jews wandered all over the globe for centuries. That is, until the State of Israel was declared the homeland of the Jewish people in 1948.

But before there was Israel, there were other ideas for a Jewish homeland. In her unique debut book, *Melting Point*, British journalist Rachel Cockerell digs through newspaper accounts, letters, memoirs, speeches, documents and interviews to describe the development of the Zionist movement and the seeds that led to today's Jewish state. And among the items she unearths are the plans that began in 1907 to create a homeland for the Jews in Galveston, Tex.

Cockerell is the great-granddaughter of David Jochelman, one of the Zionist leaders behind the Galveston Plan and a close friend of Israel Zangwill, a British author and associate of Theodor Herzl. She had originally planned to write a book about her family. Before starting her research, Cockerell had known little about her great-grandfather and had not realized his significance to the history of modern Zionism. She did not even know "who" Galveston was.



"Eventually I discovered that Galveston was not a person but a place, and the destination for 10,000 Jews in the years leading up to the First World War—sent there from Russia by my great-grandfather," she writes. "None of my family knew about this: At some point the story of the Galveston Plan, and my great-grandfather's role in it, was lost down the generations."

With that research, Cockerell has written a distinctive form of nonfiction narrative. Other than the author's introduction and afterword, the book is composed of primary sources. Using direct quotes from Jewish historical figures, newspaper articles, books of the time and more, Cockerell presents the history of modern Zionism in the making, interwoven with fascinating insights on the personalities who struggled to find a safe haven for the Jews.

Cockerell's spot-on juxtaposition and editing of direct quotes makes *Melting Point* an easy-to-read coda of significant personalities and events in Zionist history. Long-dead voices are retrieved to present a story with novel-like vividness and detail.

Cockerell opens the book with rapturous descriptions of Herzl, including one from the *London Star,* which described him as "a tall, lithe man, with coal black hair, beard and mustaches, restless visionary eyes and a nervous mouth, twitching with half sad humour." *The American Hebrew* called him "not only handsome, but regal."

Yet when Herzl, then a successful Viennese journalist and playwright, published his Zionist manifesto, *The Jewish State*, in 1896, the effusive accolades were tempered. Herzl himself wrote that friends thought "I had gone out of my mind."

Melting Point recounts the various practical steps Herzl—often with Zangwill's help—took in establishing

HADASSAH MAGAZINE PRESENTS

FROM SHIELD TO SCAPEGOAT: JEWISH LITERATURE'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Lisa Hostein, *Hadassah Magazine's* executive editor, will moderate a special in-person episode of the *Hadassah Magazine* Presents podcast at Hadassah's National Conference in Miami on Monday, August 11. A panel of literary insiders will discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Jewish authors amid the current climate of rising antisemitism and explore how Jewish literature has evolved—from serving as a gateway to Jewish acceptance in American society to becoming a target of boycotts and cancel culture. Come to the whole conference (register at **www.hadassah.org/underthesun**) or look for the new podcast episode in late August at **hadassah.org/podcasts.** Until then, explore past episodes, subscribe to stay updated and share your feedback—we'd love to hear from you!

a Zionist movement. These included convening the First Zionist Congress in 1897 and founding the Herzl Zionist Organization (a precursor to the World Zionist Organization), which he led until his death in 1904 at the age of 44, with chapters throughout Europe and the United States.

Herzl conducted a broad diplomatic effort with the leadership of Britain, Germany, Russia and the Ottoman Empire to issue a formal charter for a Jewish government in Palestine. But Palestine, then a dusty province of the Ottoman Empire, was not the only option under consideration. Herzl also pondered Argentina and East Africa.

In 1903, in the wake of a devastating pogrom in Kishinev, Herzl stunned delegates at the sixth Zionist Congress with the news that Britain had offered the Jews 5,000 square miles in East Africa. ("England Offers Jews a Country" was the headline in one 1903 *Chicago Tribune* article.) The "Uganda Plan," actually set in modern-day Kenya, was conceived for Britain's self-interest: to find customers for the new Uganda Railway, curb the flow of refugees to London and attract Jewish support for British colonial policy in South Africa.

The scheme collapsed because of lack of interest. But thanks to an energetic Texas rabbi, Henry Cohen, and the backing of Jacob Schiff, a wealthy financier, a new idea emerged: the Galveston Plan.

Zangwill, Herzl's enthusiastic supporter, had by the time of Herzl's death abandoned the search for a Jewish homeland in Palestine and instead founded his own group, the Jewish Territorialist Organization, with the help of Cockerell's great-grandfather, David Jochelman. They advocated for a Jewish homeland in whatever land might be available.





Theodor Herzl (left) and his close associate, Israel Zangwill

ISRAEL GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE (LEFT); BAIN COLLECTION/U.S. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

"If we cannot get the Holy Land," Zangwill wrote, "we can make another land Holy."

Nevertheless, Texas seemed an unlikely destination, and Galveston, a little-known port city, had been devastated by a storm in 1900. But the state was large, and Galveston could be a gateway to the rest of the country.

"Galveston greeted me with open arms," said Morris Waldman, who was sent there in 1906 to scout out the port city. He loved its long white beaches, bright sunshine, lush flowers and verdant plants. Ships carrying 10,000 Russian Jews, only a small drop of the 200,000 seeking to flee Russia and its pogroms, made the journey.

The Galveston Plan lasted from 1907 to 1914, aiming to help Jewish immigrants settle across "the Great American West." However, many newcomers were quickly disillusioned. One account described the city's streets as "overgrown with thorny bushes" and the homes as "miserable little Mexican shacks, constructed of boards, covered with rusted tin."

Ultimately, the outbreak of World War I brought transatlantic travel to a halt, effectively ending the plan. Still, many American Jews today trace their roots to those who arrived through Galveston.

The last two sections of the book turn to Cockerell's family, who immigrated from Russia to New York City, London and Israel. The switch to a personal account is somewhat jarring but ultimately serves to underline the themes of the first part of the book: the Jewish need for safe haven, the scattering of Jews worldwide, Jewish identity and political divisions.

Melting Point poignantly reflects on the failed attempts that ultimately became the stepping stones toward the creation of Israel. Looking back at a time when Israel was still just a dream deepens our appreciation for the reality that exists today.

—Stewart Kampel

Stewart Kampel was a longtime editor at *The New York Times.*

Ghosts of a Holy War: The 1929 Massacre in Palestine that Ignited the Arab-Israeli Conflict *By Yardena Schwartz* (Union Square & Co.)

Politicians, historians, activists and others have spent decades trying to pinpoint the big-bang moment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Was it the 1970s settlement movement or the Six-Day War in 1967? Was it earlier, with Israel's establishment in 1948 and its corollary, what Palestinians call the Nakba, or the 1947 United Nations vote on partition? Or maybe the British 1939 White Paper, the 1936 Arab uprising, the League of Nations Mandate in the 1920s or the Balfour Declaration in 1917?

Add in the Roman expulsion of the Jews from Judea in the first century C.E. and you have an unending stream of starting points.

One event left out here of the ever-expanding list is the brief, explosive and blood-curdling 1929 massacre of Jews in Hebron, the divided and contested city 25 miles south of Jerusalem. That is the focus of journalist Yardena Schwartz's recent book, *Ghosts of a Holy War.*

Schwartz opens her historical narrative with the lively but ultimately tragic tale of David Shainberg, an idealistic, 22-year-old American Jew from a secular family who leaves a comfortable existence in his hometown of Memphis in 1928 to study in a yeshiva in impoverished Hebron. Access to an extensive set of letters Shainberg had sent home, letters that sat untouched in a family attic for decades, enables Schwartz's writing to sparkle with crisp descriptions of life in Mandatory Palestine. She details Shainberg's unlikely journey, his passion for Jewish learning and his magical time in Hebron—until it crashed down on him in August 1929.

ON YOUR SHELF: SERIOUS SUMMER READS

By Sandee Brawarsky

Typewriter Beach
By Meg Waite Clayton (Harper)
An inventive tale of family love across generations, Meg Waite Clayton's new mystery novel is a portrait of Hollywood in the 1950s and a story of buried secrets. Set mostly in a California cottage near cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the novel's two narratives shift mostly between 1957 and 2018. The titular typewriter belongs to an Oscar-nominated—and blacklisted—Jewish screenwriter who escaped the Nazis as a child.

Fools for Love: Stories
By Helen Schulman (Knopf)
The 10 stories in best-selling novelist and screenwriter Helen Schulman's new collection are not only linked thematically but some characters also make their way across the borders into different tales. The author is skilled at observing, often with humor, the mysteries and messiness of attachment, connection and love. Set in Paris, "The Shabbos Goy," for example, follows a single American mother visiting the city to help a friend shutter her bookstore; she encounters—through a shared love of poetry—a married Orthodox rabbi.

Together in Manzanar: The True Story of a Japanese Jewish Family in an American Concentration Camp
By Tracy Slater (Chicago Review Press)
In the town of Manzanar, Calif., people of Japanese descent, young and old, American citizens and non-citizens, were imprisoned behind barbed wire during World War II. A Jewish woman, Elaine Buchman Yoneda; her Japanese American husband, Karl Yoneda; and their 3-year-old son were among the prisoners. They remained outspoken about their incarceration after their release. Slater's account of the family's experience is distressing and timely.

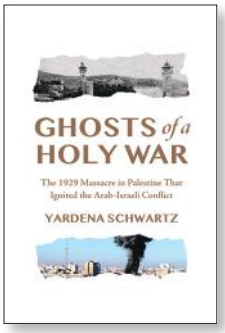
A Flower Traveled in My Blood: The Incredible True Story of the Grandmothers Who Fought to Find a Stolen Generation of Children
By Haley Cohen Gilliland (Avid Reader Press)
In this impressive debut, journalist Haley Cohen Gilliland digs through the heartbreaking history of corruption and brutality in Argentina in the 1970s to reveal the story of Las Abuelas Plaza de Mayo—the grandmothers of May Square. These women worked fearlessly to locate their children and grandchildren who were "disappeared" under the country's military dictatorship and given to allies of the regime. One woman Cohen Gilliland focuses on is the Jewish Rosa Roisinblit, whose pregnant daughter and son-in-law were violently kidnapped; the couple's son was born in prison. Roisinblit and the other *abuelas* protested, confronted the military and worked with a scientist pioneering genetic testing to find their families.

Milena and Margarete: A Love Story in Ravensbrück *By Gwen Strauss* (St. Martin's Press)
"To have found love in a concentration camp is extraordinary," Gwen Strauss writes. Indeed, this is the true story of a "passionate friendship" between two women who met in 1940 in Ravensbrück, the only concentration camp built for women. The Czech Milena Jesenská had been Kafka's first translator. She was also a resistance fighter—recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations—and a bisexual feminist. Margarete Buber-Neumann was German and had been married to the son of Martin Buber; she was a political prisoner who had been exiled to the Soviet Gulag, then traded by Stalin to Hitler. At Ravensbrück, the two daring women were inseparable.

Sandee Brawarsky is a longtime columnist in the Jewish book world as well as an award-winning journalist, editor and author of several books, most recently of *212 Views of Central Park: Experiencing New York City's Jewel From Every Angle.*

She deftly contrasts the brief life and death of the young American with the longer career of the corrupt and murderous mufti of Jerusalem. Amin al-Husseini, barely a decade older than Shainberg, used a toxic brew of unscrupulous tactics and charisma to gain power and whip up Muslim resentment of Palestine's Jews. He later infamously became a pet propagandist for Adolf Hitler during World War II.

Schwartz spares no details in her account of the grisly Arab attacks on Hebron's Jewish community and of the belated and poor response of British Mandate officials. She writes, "3,000 Muslim men armed with swords, axes, and daggers marched through the Jewish quarter of Hebron," killing around 70 Jews, traumatizing hundreds and causing the 800-strong Jewish community to flee to Jerusalem.



Most of the Hebron victims were pious Sephardim, Schwartz notes, and politically and culturally far from the secular Zionists building Tel Aviv and other new Jewish communities in Mandatory Palestine. She also highlights some of the Arab residents of Hebron who protected Jews from harm, and her journalistic doggedness enables her to track down and speak to descendants of those righteous individuals.

The book's second half profiles today's tiny but passionate Jewish community in Hebron—and the barbed wire, Israeli soldiers and 100,000 Palestinians that surround it. Schwartz injects herself into the story in vivid prose as she reports on the ground what life is like for the Jews and Arabs who would speak to her.

Schwartz began writing *Ghosts of a Holy War* in 2019, yet the parallels between the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, and the events of 1929 are disturbing. The final chapters spare no details in describing Hamas's savagery. But Schwartz is a journalist, not an historian, and her attempts to connect the dots between 1929 and 2023 are not especially convincing, despite surface similarities.

Ultimately, pinpointing any ground zero for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an impossible task. Whichever moment one picks, someone else will say, "Then? No. Jews and Arabs lived peaceably side-by-side back then." There is plenty to pick and choose in the history of the much-promised Holy Land. Indeed, the shocked survivors of the Hebron attacks, as Schwartz ably recounts, said all was well in the days before the 1929 massacre.

Ghosts of a Holy War offers engaging profiles of protagonists and antagonists, poignant tales of loss and struggle, and inspiring sketches of rare bright spots of heroism and idealism. It might have been a better choice to limit the book's focus to those people and events in Hebron yesterday and today.

—Alan D. Abbey

Alan D. Abbey is a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. He is writing a novel set in the Roman Judaea of the first century C.E., much of which transpires at locations within walking distance of his home in Jerusalem.

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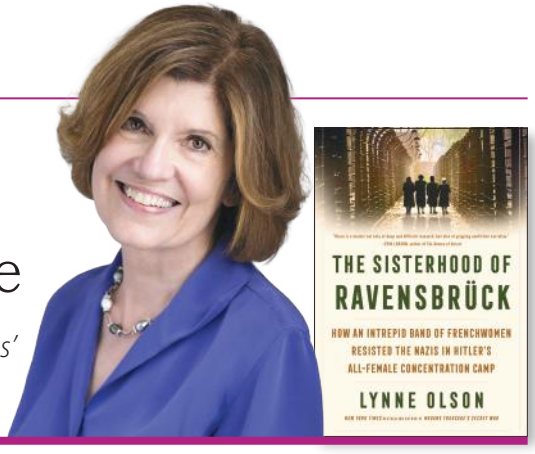
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The solicitation disclosure on page 54 is incorporated in this advertisement.

Women of the French Resistance

'In the middle of this horror, many refused to behave like victims'

By Cathryn J. Prince



TAMZIN B. SMITH

IN *THE SISTERHOOD OF RAVENSBRÜCK: How an Intrepid Band of Frenchwomen Resisted the Nazis in Hitler's All-Female Concentration Camp* (Random House), best-selling author Lynne Olson shines a light on a remarkable group of women who were punished by the Nazis for their role in the French Resistance and for helping save Jews.

Olson's new book is largely structured around the stories of four non-Jewish women: anthropologist Germaine Tillion; Anise Girard, then a college student; Geneviève de Gaulle, niece of resistance fighter and future French president Charles de Gaulle; and Jacqueline d'Alincourt, a young war widow and member of the French nobility. All were imprisoned at Ravensbrück for their involvement in the resistance, and all found ways to defy their captors from within the camp—caring for one another and for their fellow prisoners.

Using memoirs, past accounts and interviews with friends and relatives of survivors, the author also describes how women in the camp formed close friendships and helped each other survive. Whenever one of them acquired a lemon, a bit of sugar or perhaps extra bread, Olson writes, they painstakingly divided it among their friends. While discovery meant death, success meant the chance to live one more day.

"We absolutely needed to care for one another. Alone, you were finished," Girard recounted in the book.

Ravensbrück was unusual among the camps set up by the Third Reich. Not only did it house only women, but it also included a significant number of non-Jews, including political prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses and resistance fighters.

Olson, 75, a former consulting historian for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, has spent most of her writing career uncovering unsung heroes, focusing in particular on World War II. She talked to *Hadassah Magazine* about her latest inspiration, why her last three books focused on women and the importance of bringing stories about women to light. This interview was edited for brevity and clarity.

What inspired you to write the book?

The idea came from research I had done for my previous two books, which were about extraordinary women who had played key roles in the French Resistance. Although both the women I wrote about had been arrested by the Gestapo, neither had

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been sent to Ravensbrück, unlike thousands of their colleagues. I realized that almost none of the many recent books written about women resisters in France focused on the women who ended up there. Even less attention has been paid to the fact that many of them continued to resist the Germans while at Ravensbrück.

How might your book change the perception of concentration camps?

I hope it will call attention to the fact that there was indeed an all-women's camp. The courage of so many of the women sent there has been forgotten. It's also forgotten that in the middle of this horror, many refused to behave like victims, instead forming a sisterhood to stand up to the Nazis. Resistance was uncommon in all the camps, but women were just as likely as the men—and, in my opinion, more likely—to defy the Germans.

Why do you think women from the camp—Jews and non-Jews—created a support network after the war?

The women survivors realized early on that they could only rely on themselves to put their lives back together. All camp survivors, regardless of gender, had an extremely difficult time readjusting to postwar life, but the women made sure they could rely on each other for emotional, physical and financial aid. That wasn't true of the men, who had not built up the kind of close relationships that the women had formed within the camp.

A number of the Ravensbrück survivors in the book acknowledged the populism, antisemitism and xenophobia in World War II-era France and Germany. Do you consider your book a warning?

Absolutely. The women's admonition couldn't be timelier, in light of the appearance today of all those threats in the United States and elsewhere. As one of the women put it, "If such a thing had been possible in Germany, a neighboring, civilized country, how could we think that it could not happen again?"

Cathryn J. Prince is an adjunct professor in journalism at Fordham University and the author of the forthcoming book *For the Love of Labor: The Life of Pauline Newman.*

WE WON'T GO BACK

The latest novel by award-winning author Charlene Wexler

We Won't Go Back, the second book of Charlene Wexler's *Farewell to South Shore* series, is the story of Babs, a suburban wife and mom. When the Supreme Court signals that it is going to overturn Roe v. Wade, however, Babs' life changes as she reunites with her late mother's fellow activists to take up the fight for women's rights once again. But family matters intervene—including a nostalgic great aunt who wants her 100th birthday party to be a pilgrimage to the now-downtrodden South Shore community of Chicago. Through it all comes a determination that *We Won't Go Back* to a time when women lacked basic rights.

Available for purchase on the Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, and Speaking Volumes websites.



ANSWERS

Crossword Puzzle on page 43

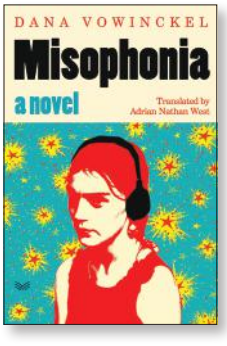
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FICTION

Misophonia *By Dana Vowinckel. Translated by Adrian Nathan West* (HarperVia)

Misophonia is a disorder characterized by a strong emotional response to certain sounds, such as a clap of thunder, a gunshot or the shrill and incessant ringing of an alarm. In this new novel that shares a name with the disorder, the strong reaction is to the noise made by an elderly Jewish couple eating their food.

The revulsion is experienced by Margarita Fuchs, the 15-year-old granddaughter of Dan and Selma Markovitz. Margarita lives in Germany with her father, Avi, a cantor at a Berlin synagogue, and is visiting her maternal grandparents in Chicago during her summer break. Their chewing isn't the only thing that disgusts her.



Margarita is disgusted by her father, who she believes dumped her at her grandparents' home near the University of Chicago, where her grandfather once had a distinguished career as a linguist. She is also repulsed by her estranged mother, Marsha, also a linguist, who now lives in Israel. Marsha abandoned Avi and their daughter when Margarita was just an infant and now insists on developing a relationship with the teen, forcing Margarita to visit her in Israel.

Most of all, Margarita is disgusted at herself. Precocious in some ways, immature in others, Margarita is at the cusp of adulthood, and she is, at once, repelled, fascinated and confounded by her budding sexuality.

The coming-of-age story is a debut from 20-something Vowinckel, who hails from a self-described American-Jewish-German family in Berlin and who first published the book in Germany in 2023.

The book toggles between the perspectives of Margarita and Avi, both of whom travel between Berlin, Chicago and different locales in Israel as they struggle with questions about their identities.

Among them, what does it mean to be a Jew in Germany several generations after the Shoah? Why would Avi, who was born in Israel to a Turkish Jewish father and a German Jewish mother, decide to make his home in a country that his own mother had fled?

Avi is compelled to face this question when he visits Yad Vashem in Jerusalem:

"The Polish and German memorials always expressed their outrage that even the assimilated Jews had been killed, but here, in Yad Vashem, all that mattered was that they had been people," he thinks to himself about those in the country he now calls home. "The Germans used to think that the Jews who had eaten *Leberkäse* with cream sauce on Yom Kippur deserved less to die than the pious ones, probably they still thought so. The Germans thought the truly awful thing was that *some of them* had been murdered, just totally normal Germans who happened to have had a Jewish grandmother…."

Through the separate travels of this father and daughter, the author suggests, cogently, that misophonia is not just about the noises outside our head that make us anxious or unwell. It is also very much about the endless clanging and churning of thoughts inside our head—about family history, identity, loss and belonging—that keep us up at night.

—Robert Nagler Miller

Robert Nagler Miller writes frequently about the arts, literature and Jewish themes from his home near New York City.

Sisters of Fortune *By Esther Chehebar* (Random House)

Fortune Cohen, named after her living grandmother in keeping with Syrian Jewish tradition, is the middle of three sisters. She and her siblings grow up deeply rooted in their Brooklyn neighborhood, with the clear expectation that they will marry, raise children and live their lives within the community—just as their parents and grandparents did before them.

In this debut, Esther Chehebar captures the Syrian Jewish way of life with nuance, affection and humor, illuminating a community grounded in history and culture even as the scaffolding that holds that life in place begins to shift.

With its multiple interwoven love stories among sisters, the book has drawn comparisons to the work of Jane Austen. Fittingly, *Pride and Prejudice* appears at the top of a college syllabus that Fortune stumbles upon—a poignant discovery, given that she's been working at her father's discount shop since high school instead of pursuing college. She feels an almost magnetic pull toward the book.

Like the Bennet sisters in Austen's classic, Fortune and her sisters—Nina, the eldest, and Lucy—as well as their friends talk, dream and obsess about marriage prospects as they find themselves caught between tradition and their own hearts.

Told in the alternating voices of

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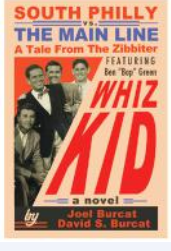


Clara's Secret

Stephan R. Frenkel

This critically acclaimed bestseller presents the captivating story of Clara Prinz, a remarkable woman forced to leave her native Berlin in 1939. As Clara traveled alone on a voyage into the unknown, she turned to memories of her adolescence during *La Belle Époque*–the Beautiful Era filled with optimism and cultural transformation at the dawn of the twentieth century. Through Clara's chance encounters with notable personalities of the period, *Clara's Secret* weaves an unforgettable tapestry of personal and historic events. *Clara's Secret* is ultimately a compelling story of the advancement of humankind and the survival of its decline.

Available on Amazon and www.laevnotes.com.

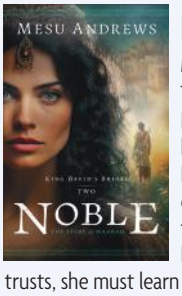


Whiz Kid: A Novel

Joel Burcat and David S. Burcat

In *Whiz Kid,* Joel Burcat weaves his writing with a manuscript discovered after his father David's death, creating a poignant father-son collaboration. Set in Jewish South Philadelphia in 1950, the novel follows Ben Green, a Jewish war hero, as he chases the American dream while facing antisemitism and pressure to assimilate. Against the backdrop of the Phillies' historical World Series run, Ben must choose between success and staying true to his identity. Rich with the culture and spirit of postwar Jewish Philadelphia, *Whiz Kid* is a moving story of resilience, legacy, and pride.

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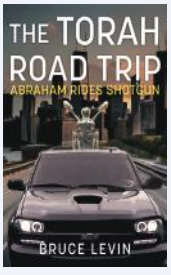


Noble

Mesu Andrews

The only child of a king, Princess Maakah is sent by her father to marry the rebel, David ben Jesse, whom she considers a lowly shepherd from an unremarkable family. Disappointed by those she trusts, she must learn to place her faith in the God who protects David, and allow Him to make this rebel shepherd the king of her heart.

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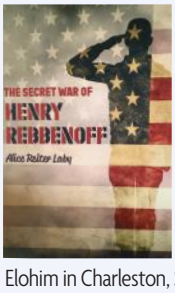


The Torah Road Trip

Bruce Levin

Based on a true story of transporting a Torah my father had donated to our former temple in Connecticut back in the 1960's, to my current temple outside of Chicago. This adventure brings to life the story of my father Abraham, whose character strikingly resembles his biblical namesake. It's an uplifting, funny, heartfelt memoir, combining the beauty of the Torah, the Jewish faith, and father-and-son relationships. So if you like taking road trips, stopping for Chinese food of course, connecting with Torah passages, and experiencing a few twists and turns, come along on my journey...you're in for quite a ride!

Available on Amazon.

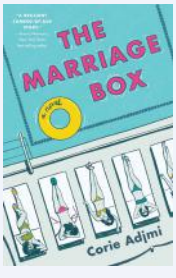


The Secret War of Henry Rebbenoff

Alice Reiter Laby

The year is 1937 in the first pages of this intriguing World War II novel, an important year for Henry Rebbenoff. He hopes to be hired as the new Cantor of Temple Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, and he meets the lovely southern Jewish belle Ada Tobias. As war comes to America's shores, Cantor Henry must make decisions that will affect him and his family. Does he make the right choices? Journey over the years with Henry through this beautifully written novel.

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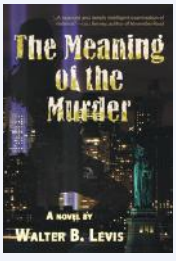


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Corie Adjmi

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Available on Amazon and Bookshop.org, www.corieadjmi.com.

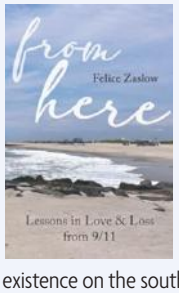


The Meaning of the Murder

Walter B. Levis

Years after her father vanishes while exposing terrorist financing, Eliana Golden—an NYPD detective and proud Jewish daughter—sets out to uncover the truth. As she seeks justice, she must confront buried family trauma, questions of faith, and the profound cost of standing up for what's right. *"The Meaning of the Murder* combines the urgency of crime fiction with the depth of literary fiction. It's a smart, morally serious novel—unafraid to ask hard questions."—Edward Conlon, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Police Woman's Bureau, Red on Red, and Blue Blood.*

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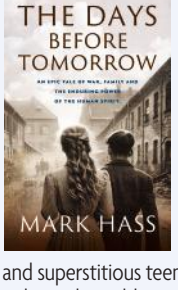


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Felice Zaslow

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Available on Amazon and Bookshop.org.



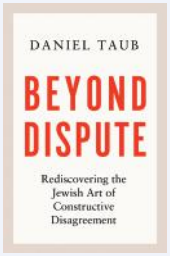
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Mark Hass

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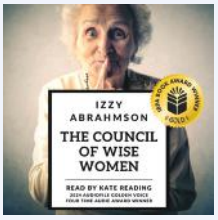


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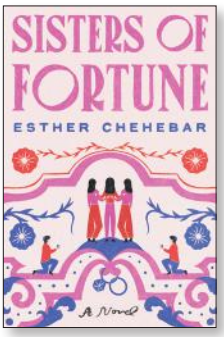
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the three sisters, the novel explores their divergent paths: Fortune, recently engaged, is wrestling with quiet doubts about her fiancé and the life ahead; Nina, unmarried at 26, stands at the edge of what the community views as spinsterhood; and Lucy, still in high school, draws the attention of a much older bachelor from one of the neighborhood's most prominent families.

Food also runs through the novel. It is solace for the lovelorn and the centerpiece of family life yet seen as the enemy by women working hard to lose any extra ounces. The sisters' grandmother, known as Setto, teaches them to form perfect grape leaves as she doles out advice. Sally, the sisters' mother, has her own catering business and is known to make kibbe so good that it entices guests off the dance floor at simchas.

In this community, Chehebar writes, "the only thing worse than having to cook for 30 people is not having 30 people to cook for."

The author, who grew up in Brooklyn's notoriously insular Syrian Jewish community, bring an insider's knowledge to her novel. She takes readers behind many closed doors—of the mikveh, of ornate living rooms and of kitchens made spotless after marathons of cooking.

Reflecting on her neighborhood and its unique rhythms tied to the Jewish calendar, Fortune notes, "There's forgiveness and bloodlines and a way of life that may seem inexplicable to others but makes perfect sense to those who live it."

—Sandee Brawarsky

Fervor *By Toby Lloyd* (Avid Reader Press)

A recent National Jewish Book Award finalist for fiction and debut fiction as well as a finalist for the Sami Rohr prize for Jewish Literature, *Fervor* is nevertheless challenging to categorize.

The novel from Toby Lloyd is part coming-of-age story set on a college campus, part mystery and part horror novel. At its heart, the complex, dense book is a devastating saga of a family slowly falling apart.

The Rosenthals are observant Jews living in London in 1999. There are the parents: Hannah, a brash journalist, and Eric, a gentle lawyer; their three children, Gideon, Elsie and the youngest, Tovyah; and Eric's father, Yosef, a Holocaust survivor. The intellectual and argumentative family, writes Lloyd, "mingle Orthodox tradition with a bourgeois appreciation of les beaux arts."

Hannah publishes a controversial best-selling book about her father-in-law, including in it a secret from his time in Treblinka, upsetting her children. Shortly after Yosef passes away, Elsie disappears without a trace.

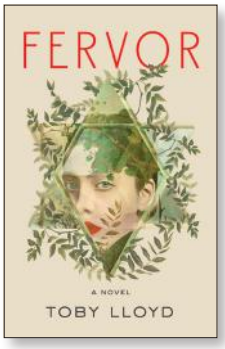
When the teenager abruptly returns several days later, Elsie refuses to say what had happened or where she had been, but she is markedly and disturbingly changed.

Among those changes is a new interest in Kabbalah and books of Jewish mysticism. She also stops eating and begins hurting herself. While praying one day, Hannah believes that God has told her that Elsie is communing with the dead.

About a decade later, when Tovyah is a student at Oxford University, Hannah completes another tell-all book, this time about Elsie, writing that she practices dark magic and is "a girl waylaid by demonic influences." For Tovyah, however,

Elsie's behaviors are mental health issues brought on by a dysfunctional family obsessed with both fame and Jewish ritual.

The story alternates between the voice of a (supposedly) omniscient narrator, who recounts the Rosenthal family history, and that of Kate, Tovyah's college friend, who is newly exploring her own Jewishness. A sense of unease or strain permeates almost every page. Several characters see ghosts, yet these spectral occurrences are mentioned offhandedly and never fully explained.



Then there is the inclusion of campus tensions and Israeli politics.

It is 2008, and Israel has launched Operation Cast Lead in Gaza after Hamas launched rockets at the Jewish state. Tovyah experiences campus antisemitism, and when Kate goes to lunch with him and his mother, students on the street shout at them about Israel and apartheid.

In an interlude not integral to the story, Hannah and Kate get into a verbal tussle about Jewish history and the distinctions between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. Like several other sections in the novel, it seems disjointed—at significant odds with the deeply Jewish Rosenthals and especially Hannah's Zionism.

One could say that debates about Jewishness and anti-Zionism serve to paint the background of Tovyah's isolation and experiences as a Jew at college, but this has already been done well in earlier parts of the book. The reader needs no additional convincing.

Fervor is a complex, fragmented and overwhelmingly sad story. The characters orbit each other with no real connection, save perhaps Tovyah and Kate, but even their connection is tentative and tenuous. In the end, there is no resolution that connects religion and mysticism, no untangling of Elsie's demons, just a jarring and tragic dissolution of a family.

—Jaime Herndon

Jaime Herndon is a writer and avid reader. Her work can be found at Book Riot, Kveller and other places.

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ABOUT HEBREW

In the Write Places

A root for Torah scholars, brides and grooms and journalists

By Joseph Lowin

What do journalist Ernie Pyle, a quirky peace treaty and the phrase "the writing on the wall" have in common? Placed into a Hebrew and Jewish textual context, they are all connected through the root כ-ת-ב (*khaf, tav, bet*), to write, inscribe, engrave and compile.

Jewish Scripture consists of three parts: Torah, Prophets and, from our root, כְּתוּבִים (*ketuvim*), Writings. Among Ketuvim's homilies and narratives are two vivid Diaspora stories about the written word. In one, Daniel, hero of the Book of Daniel, is summoned to the Babylonian palace to decipher an Aramaic כְּתָבָא (*kitva*), writing—a mysterious inscription on a wall that prophesied doom for the king and the source of the idiom "the writing on the wall." Writing is a prominent motif of the Book of Esther, including 127 announcements sent to the different communities that made up the Persian Empire, each written כִּכְתָבָם (*kikhtavam*), in the script and spirit of that group's language.

Graphology, the study of handwriting, is found in the Five Books of Moses. Exodus 24:4 states that at Sinai, וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה (*va-yikhtov moshe*), "Moses wrote down," God's הַכְּתָבָה (*hakhtavah*), dictation, of the Torah. Deuteronomy, however, says that the Tablets of the Law were כְּתֻבִים בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹוקִים (*ketuvim be-etsba elokim*), "inscribed by God's finger." At the riotous scene of the Golden Calf, also in Exodus, Moses offers his own life in exchange for the lives of his people. He demands that his name be erased מִסִּפְרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתָבְתָּ (*mi-sifrekha asher katavta*), "from the book You have compiled," if God destroys the idol-worshipping Israelites. According to Bible scholar Jeffrey Tigay, this book is a reference to the mystical Book of Life alluded to in the Yom Kippur liturgy, in which God inscribes the names of the righteous.

In Ezekiel, the prophet uses the root to design an ingenious peace treaty. God tells him to take two wooden sticks and תִּכְתֹּב עֲלֵיהֶם (*tikhtov aleihem*), "engrave them," with the names of the two warring Israelite kingdoms. One stick should have Judah and its associated tribes and the other, Joseph and the tribes of northern Israel. The sticks should then be bound together so that in the future there will be a reunited kingdom.

Today, a כַּתָּבָנִית (*katvanit*), correspondent, or a כַּתָּב (*katav*), reporter, will submit their כַּתָּבָה (*katavah*), story, to a כְּתַב-עֵת (*ketav-et*), periodical.

Summertime brings both blockbuster movies and weddings. For many a novice Hebrew speaker, watching an Israeli movie requires squinting at the כְּתוּבִיוֹת (*ketuviyot*), subtitles. No less challenging, perhaps, is listening to the reading of an Aramaic כְּתֻבָּה (*ketuba*), marriage contract, when at a Jewish wedding ceremony. To share any of these experiences בִּכְתָב (*bikhtav*), in writing, just go to your מַכְתֵּבָה (*makhteva*), writing desk, and write a מִכְתָּב (*mikhtav*), letter, to your favorite מִתְכַּתֶּבֶת (*mitkatevet*), pen pal. Or perhaps, nowadays, send a text. H

Joseph Lowin's columns for *Hadassah Magazine* are collected in *HebrewSpeak*, *Hebrew Talk* and his most recent book, *Hebrew Matters*, available at **gcrr.org/gcrr-press/hebrew-matters**.

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Deborah Harris

A prescription to 'break the Israeli book curse'

By Amy Klein

A year after October 7, 2023, Jerusalem-based literary agent Deborah Harris penned an op-ed in *The New York Times* with the headline "Stop the Boycott of Israeli Culture." In it, she argued against the call by some prominent authors for a boycott of Israeli writers. "It cannot be that the solution to the conflict is to read less, not more," she wrote, noting that the gates against Israeli authors were closing "well before" the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Harris, 69, is director of The Deborah Harris Agency, which, for the last 45 years, has represented the translation and dramatic rights of 140 Israeli and Jewish writers in more than 50 countries and also acts as a co-agent in Israel for more than 230 international publishers and literary agencies.

In a candid interview, she talks about the state of the Israeli publishing industry and why it's more important than ever for Jews to publish—and buy—Israeli and Jewish-authored books. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

The situation has been particularly bad for the Israeli publishing industry since October 7. Have you seen any recent shifts, for better or worse?

I would have thought a year and a half later, things would be better, and they're not. I just got the current list of international authors who won't be published in Israel, novelists like Isabel Allende and Fredrik Backman. Many of them couch it in terms like, "This is not the right time for her to be published in Israel." Or sometimes it's even, "She'll never want to be published in Israel."

What are the ramifications of the blacklists and calls to boycott Israeli and Jewish authors?

Last year, my agency must have gone down about 70 percent in sales. We've lost many clients and friends. I have not sold an Israeli literary project since October 7, other than someone whose voice has already been out there. There are Israeli writers who have succeeded—Dorit Rabinyan, Ayelet Gundar-Goshen—and have faithful readerships, created when there was support from publishers to do so.

A readership for Israeli writers has been created, but publishers are not buying enough new Israeli voices to meet that audience. There's a fear that the next generation of Israeli writers are going to remain unknown around the world. I am also getting 10 new queries a week from American Jewish writers who can't work with their agents anymore, or their agents won't work with them.

It's heartbreaking for American and European audiences, because I don't think the readership is the problem. It's the gatekeepers of the publishers that are not letting them in.

Are there any positive signs?

I don't think it's going to stay this way. I am not willing to accept that our books are not going to be published. I do think things are starting to change. There are individuals, editors and co-agents in various countries who are working with us and who are as relentless as we are. I think you need one book to break the Israeli book curse.

What can people do?

Jewish and Israeli writers are dependent on the international Jewish community to buy books and create events around those that have been published, to show the strength of our literary market. People should be buying recent books like *Mrs. Lilienblum's Cloud Factory* by Iddo Gefen, *Mazeltov* by Eli Zuzovsky and *Hunting in America* by Tehila Hakimi. There has to be more of a Jewish support system. Buy a Jewish book every month!

Now is also the time for really smart people to come together and create a new publishing venture, a publishing house for Jewish and Israeli books. And that is my biggest hope for what will result from this situation. H

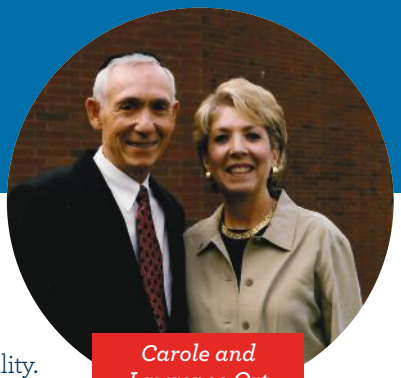
Amy Klein is a freelance writer in New York City and the author of *The Trying Game: Get Through Fertility Treatment and Get Pregnant Without Losing Your Mind.*

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Carole and Lawrence Ort

In the 1980s, Dr. Lawrence Ort traveled to Israel for the first time. "Even on my initial trip," he says, "the hospital stood out." His wife, Carole, also visited Israel in the 1980s. Their shared experiences, including a 2009 visit, solidified their commitment to supporting Israel and Hadassah.

In retirement, they have established numerous charitable gift annuities with Hadassah. Lawrence and Carole appreciate the fixed income stream the charitable gift annuities provide, but most of all, they're glad to be helping people in Israel and around the world, regardless of religion, race or nationality.

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