RCMP coins reflect diversity

LAUREN KRAMER

In 2019, Superintendent Will Ng at the Richmond RCMP came up with the idea of creating a “challenge coin” unique to each of seven of Richmond’s larger communities: Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Chinese. A coin was designed for each with the guidance of the community’s spiritual leaders.

For the Jewish community, the coin was collaboratively designed by Sgt. Kevin Krieger and Congregation Beth Tikkun’s Rabbi Adam Rubin.

“I was genuinely moved and touched when the RCMP approached me to help design the coin,” Rubin told the Independent. “The fact that the RCMP was willing to produce a challenge coin for the Jewish community speaks volumes about its commitment to diversity and inclusion, as well as its commitment to the safety, well-being and flourishing of Jews in the Lower Mainland.”

The Jewish coin features a quote from the Talmud (in English) and an image of the Star of David and a Torah scroll. Rubin and Krieger both felt that these are widely recognized symbols of Judaism and Jewish life.

The Jewish challenge coin was designed by Sgt. Kevin Krieger and Rabbi Adam Rubin.

“The Torah is at the very heart of our religious life, the core of who we are as a people, while the Star of David connects us to our past and to the state of Israel,” Rubin said. “The excerpt from the Talmud, ‘The entire Torah was given for our best to protect our Jewish community to ensure they feel safe to both live and practise their religion free from hate or prejudice.’

Rubin said he is deeply grateful to the RCMP for producing a coin with such an important message. “I hope and pray that, though this challenge coin may be fairly modest in the grand scheme of things, it plays a part both in ensuring the continued flourishing of Jews in Canada, and in helping to reinforce the crucial value of peace.”

Cpl. Adriana Peralta, who works in Richmond RCMP’s media relations, said the coins are commonly used in the RCMP as a token of appreciation for community service, or as a small gift to individuals who have served their community. “We have a large faith-based community in Richmond and our detachment came up with this particular series of coins as a way to connect with our interfaith partners and celebrate the rich diversity of our cultural groups,” she explained.

The RCMP has created a display of the seven coins at the Richmond detachment, where they are positioned below an image of the Richmond skyline.

Lauren Kramer, an award-winning writer and editor, lives in Richmond. To read her work online, visit laurenkramer.net.

Schitt’s Creek in final season

ALICE BURDICK SCHWEIGER

F

ans of Canada’s mega-hit TV show Schitt’s Creek were eagerly eyeing the stage at the 92nd Street Y in New York City on Jan. 17. They had just viewed the first two episodes of the sixth and final season on a big screen and the main cast was about to appear. When the curtain lifted, the audience loudly cheered, as Eugene Levy (Johnny), Daniel Levy (David), Catherine O’Hara (Moira) and Annie Murphy (Alexis) sat smiling.

The moderator, Vanity Fair’s Richard Lawson, didn’t waste any time asking why they decided to call it quits.

“We had discussed it and thought six seasons would give us enough time to tell our story,” said Daniel Levy, the show’s co-creator, co-executive producer, writer and Eugene Levy’s real-life son. “Working so closely with the show, it almost spoke to me. I felt we built enough to land the show.”

The clever, funny, quirky Schitt’s Creek is a fish-out-of-water sitcom in which the ultra-wealthy Rose family – Johnny and Moira and their two adult children, David and Alexis – goes into bankruptcy and loses everything. With no money and nowhere to live, they have little choice but to relocate to Schitt’s Creek, a Podunk town that Johnny once bought David as a joke. Their new home is the town’s no-frills one-storey motel, and the foursome, who had previously been preoccupied with their own extravagant lives, learn to become a real family. “When you get down to it, the stories are about who people are, not what they are,” said Eugene Levy.

Once settled into their new life, the Rose family has to contend with the town’s scruffy mayor, Roland Schitt (Chris Elliott), his wife, high school teacher Jocelyn (Jennifer Robertson), the sarcastic motel receptionist Stuie Budd (Emily Hampshire), and cafe waitress Twyla (Eugene Levy’s real-life daughter, Sarah Levy).

Schitt’s Creek, filmed in Ontario, premiered in 2015 on CBC in Canada and Pop TV in America. It’s produced by Not a Real Company Productions Inc. In 2017, the show started airing on Netflix as well, and viewership soared. The series has won numerous awards, including Canadian Screen Awards, and an MTV Movie and TV Award for Daniel Levy.

Initially, Daniel Levy came to his dad with the show’s premise and a script. “In the beginning, it was a way to do something with your son,” recalled Eugene Levy. “We started it as a great project and wanted to make it as far as we could. We ended up getting it on the air in Canada on a real network – and I thought that was great. Cut to five years later and, thanks in a ma-
CREEK from page 1

The show’s writing has revealed the characters’ different layers. Take Alexis, for example. While she is self-involved, mostly oblivious and enjoys referring to past relationships with Hollywood celebrities, she is still charming. “When we met Alexis on paper, she was not that likeable – she was quite shallow and selfish,” said Murphy about the character she plays. “But, when I got the breakdown for the audition, at the end it said, ‘a young Goldie Hawn, who is bubbly and effervescent, but grounded. I wanted to play her as a fully fleshed out human being. The writers did a good job letting her grow as a human. I have so much fun playing her,” (Alexis often exaggerates her hand gestures and is fond of saying, “Ew, David!” to her brother.)

Moira, the family matriarch, has become an iconic figure over the years. Before moving to Schitt’s Creek, she was a socialite, actress and inattentive mother – she didn’t even recall her daughter’s middle name! While she remains eccentric, self-absorbed and theatrical, she, too, is likeable. “Originally, I wanted to come up with a character I would have fun playing and people would love watching,” said O’Hara, who wears a variety of wigs in every episode. “I didn’t know anyone would care. But the writers kept giving me great opportunities.”

Moira accentuates inappropriate syllables when she speaks. How does she choose which syllables to accentuate? “In the moment, it just makes sense,” O’Hara said, laughing, and raising her voice at the word “sense.”

The character of David has a few obsessive-compulsive tendencies, is occasionally hypochondriacal, is into pop culture, has a keen eye for fashion and is often sweetly sarcastic. He opened the store Rose Apothecary and started to date Patrick (played by Noah Reid), his business partner. As the series progressed, the two fell in love and, in the last season, they plan their wedding. When asked if the sexuality addressed in the series caused advertisers to push back, Daniel Levy said he wasn’t aware of any advertiser having done so. “The networks have given us a lot of freedom,” he said, “and, for that, I am so grateful.”

From the beginning, Schitt’s Creek was a low-budget show. “We were just a little Canadian television show,” Daniel Levy admitted, adding that they didn’t exactly have the budget of The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. “But not having money helped. We had to maximize our budget and were forced to be creative and put the little money we had on the screen. As the expression goes, diamonds are formed under extreme pressure. Great work happens where you are pushed to the limits.”

The final episode will air April 7. “It’s a beautiful conclusion to the series,” said Eugene Levy.

Daniel Levy wrote the last episode of the show in half a day. “Because we had exceptional writers who helped me make this show what it was, the last episode essentially wrote itself,” he said. “We didn’t want to backtrack a ton of stories, which can happen in some series finales. I didn’t want to be burdened with expectations of making it any bigger than it is, because it’s a small show. I didn’t want it to feel any bigger than any other episode we had done. I wanted our last episode to be just a great episode of TV.”

Alice Burdick Schweiger is a New York City-based freelance writer who has written for many national magazines, including Good Housekeeping, Family Circle, Woman’s Day and The Grand Magazine. She specializes in writing about Broadway, entertainment, travel and health, and covers Broadway for the Jewish News. She is co-author of the 2004 book Secrets of the Sexually Satisfied Woman, with Jennifer Berman and Laura Berman.

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Monday, March 2nd at 2:00pm
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LEONA (Mexico) Monday, March 2 at 1:00pm - Fifth Avenue Cinemas

BACK TO MARACANA (Israel) Tuesday, March 3 at 3:30pm - Fifth Avenue Cinemas

SHALOM TAIWAN (Argentina) Wednesday, March 4 at 3:30 - Fifth Avenue Cinemas

THE RABBI GOES WEST (USA) Thursday, March 5 at 1:00pm - Fifth Avenue Cinemas

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Health

5 Asthma is the most common chronic disease in children and it’s the earliest to start.

Weddings

12 No matter the style or religiosity of a Jewish wedding, the ketubah is a common denominator.

Opinion

18 With antisemitism on the rise, we must remember there are things we can do to change the world.

Know someone in this photo?

Two unidentified people on the left with Gail and Michael James on the right holding a certificate at a Jewish National Fund event.

In a regular series, the Jewish Independent features a “mystery photo” from the Jewish Western Bulletin Collection at the Jewish Museum and Archives of British Columbia. The JI is partnering with the museum because we need your help to fill in the gaps that exist in the newspaper’s collection and we want to highlight the importance of documenting community history. So, if you know any of the people in this image or anything about the event depicted, contact the museum at 604-257-5199 or archives@jewishmuseum.ca. To find out who has been identified in the photo, visit jewishmuseum.ca/blog.

Want to see your story published?

If you have news to report or a fresh story idea... email editor@jewishindependent.ca.
From baseball player to spy

Doc on Moe Berg’s life is part of Vancouver Jewish Film Festival.

MICHAEL FOX

Near the end of John Ford’s essential 1962 western, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, a newspaper editor coins the credo, “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.”

The fact, as we all know, is that Americans are all-star myth-makers about another Jewish ballplayer, probable immigrant saga of Moe Berg, and myth-lovers. Many American Jewish boys caught the bug via the im-

“...and see his son play.

From an athletics standpoint, his dad wasn’t missing much. A knee injury early in Moe’s career, compounded by primitive diagnosis and treatment, severely slowed him. Over 15 years as a backup catcher, Berg notched exactly 441 hits in 663 games.

What set Moe apart was his charm, charisma and erudition. He studied Sanskrit at the Sorbonne one off-season, and read multiple newspapers every day. When he went to Japan on a barnstorming tour with Babe Ruth and other Major League stars, he learned Japanese.

Berg carried a camera everywhere on that trip, and made a point of checking out the roof of a tall Tokyo hotel in order to shoot a 360-degree panorama of the city. It’s not altogether clear if he was already working officially (albeit surreptitiously) for the U.S. govern-

ment, but his film was of significant help when the United States went to war with Japan after Pearl Harbor.

In fact, in early 1942, Berg recorded a radio segment in Japanese that was broadcast in Japan and drew on the goodwill he’d accumulated over two prewar visits.

Berg had been sent on research missions to South America, but that was too far from the real action. It appears he found a home in 1943 in the newly created Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the intelligence branch that evolved into the Central Intelligence Agency after the war.

His primary and crucial assignment was to ascertain how close the Germans were to having a nuclear weapon, and to sway Italian scientists from the Axis to the Allies. To successfully carry off his cover sto-

ry, Berg was briefed on the science and strategy of the Manhattan Project.

One biographer recounts, “The OSS had given the Manhattan Project its own spy, in effect, its own field agent to pursue questions of interest wherever he could in Europe. And that was Moe Berg.”

Please see SPY on page 14

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Using apps and robots

Before the coronavirus arrived in Israel—there were two reported cases at press time—Sheba Medical Centre was preparing for it with different high-tech means: a telemedicine app that enables patients to receive care in the isolation, but comfort, of their own home; and robots that can treat in-hospital patients in order to minimize contact with staff.

Sheba’s Datos Health-In is a telemedicine app that enables patients to remain at home. In the event of an epidemic, with more patients than isolation rooms available, the app can be a viable tool for patients who are not severely ill. With the app, patients can enter vital signs and other information, which is directly sent to their physicians at any time of day or night.

The program was launched on Feb. 9 and tested on Israelis who had been in China and who, according to Health Ministry instructions, had to be in quarantine for 14 days, the incubation period of the virus. Doctors initialized contact with the patients twice a day.

“This is one instance where telemedicine protects staff as well as other patients, by minimizing direct contact with those infected with the coronavirus,” explained Dr. Galia Barkai, head of telemedicine services at Sheba.

Another high-tech solution for patients possibly infected with the coronavirus is a robot that can enter the patient’s room and be controlled by medical staff from the outside.

Above: One high-tech solution for patients possibly infected with the coronavirus is a robot that can enter the patient’s room and be controlled by medical staff from the outside.

Left: Sheba Medical Centre’s Dr. Galia Barkai

Treating children’s asthma

A Jewish community member Dr. Allan Becker was starting his career as a general practitioner, his daughter was diagnosed with asthma. As a result, he has devoted much of his life’s work to the study of the condition.

“My interest really started when my oldest daughter began having a wheezing episode at about two years of age,” Becker told the Independent. “It was pretty obvious that this was an infection—something we call bronchiolitis, which is fairly common in young children.”

Becker was working in Dauphin, Man., at the time of his daughter’s diagnosis, in the 1970s, and was beginning to see more and more kids with asthma coming into the emergency room.

“Since 1980, when I returned to academics, I’ve been trying to understand why the epidemic started—and what the developmental origins of asthma and allergies are,” said Becker, who is now based in Winnipeg. “And, really, they’re the canary in the coal mine when you think about the increase in chronic diseases. “Asthma is by far the most common chronic disease in children and it’s the earliest to start,” he said,

“but we’re seeing parallel increases of other chronic diseases, like diabetes, inflammatory bowel diseases, various forms of arthritis, and others.”

Over the course of a five-decade career, so far, Becker has seen chronic diseases become more prominent. And, while the reasons for this change remain elusive, it seems clear that it involves genes and the environment.

In the early 1990s, Becker and Vancouver-based Dr. Moira Chan-Yeung embarked on a study of ways to potentially prevent the development of asthma.

“Think about the environment in terms of things we breathe and eat—and things like pets in the home, like tobacco smoke exposure, like pollution, like bad nutrition, Western-style diets, etc.,” said Becker. “We started a multifaceted prevention of asthma program in 1994.”

While that study did not reap substantial results, it did eventually lead to a current study examining the environmental impact on expectant mothers in

Please see ASTHMA on page 9
Teaching kids reading skills

REBECA KUROPATWA

Hoot Reading allows kids to get in their desired screen time, while also improving their reading skills. Jewish community member Carly Shuler, co-founder and chief executive director of the online tutoring company, came up with the educational concept while working on Sesame Street.

"While I was there, I was working on a research project aimed at understanding how to help kids learn through video chat," Shuler explained. "Fast forward a couple of years and my co-founder, Maya Kotecha, and I decided the idea was too good to stay in the lab. So, we got the rights, formed Hoot Reading, and here we are.

"Something a lot of parents don’t know is that there is a deadline for reading," she said. "We talk a lot about the fourth-grade reading slump, which is this phenomenon that happens in Grade 4, when children need to make the leap from learning how to read to Grade 4 reading to learn."

"Hoot Reading, in particular, is good for all kids from kindergarten through to Grade 4 and, then, also any kids who are struggling after that point," she said. "So, we have kids up to Grade 10 reading with us. They are in that 60 percentile of kids who are reading below grade level."

"The tutoring is done online with classroom teachers, one-on-one, in 20-minute lessons, two to three times a week. The app is basically Facetime with your sibling’s piano lesson, or wherever they are. It can really happen anywhere at any time, so parents find it very convenient."

While enjoying some games that do not involve reading is OK, she recommended finding games that do provide a different medium for kids to further their love of reading.

Just like any other skill, the more you practise, the better you get at it and Shuler maintains that kids should read aloud with a grown-up at least 10 minutes a day, five days a week.

"In the same way that, when learning to play basketball, some kids might be a little better at it than others, but the best way to improve anything is through practise," she said. "We have to practise and we have to practise out loud, with a grown-up there. Whether parents to think about it that way."

"Parents can borrow from us. They lose confidence and they disengage from school. And so, while we don’t believe at Hoot Reading that it is a deadline for becoming a fluent reader – and that deadline is Grade 4. That is a deadline for becoming a fluent reader. We believe that there is a deadline for becoming a fluent reader – and that deadline is Grade 4."

"It's really important that our children know that we are reading, so that they can see that it can be a really fun part of their media world," she said. "Whether we are reading on a Kindle or reading a hard copy book, we want to show them and do it in front of them ... and talk about the books and stories at the dinner table, because it’s really important that kids see reading can be fun."

Shuler feels strongly that parents should help their kids choose apps and games that encourage reading. The ability to comprehend what you are reading and to be able to follow instructions is an important skill.

With Hoot Reading, kids and teachers can see and hear each other via video chat.

Please see HOOT on page 11
Desert not a wasteland

REBECA KURATOWA

Having always lived in and around rainforest, CBC Vancouver’s Matthew Lazin-Ryder said the desert is a place he still struggles to fully understand.

“The desert has always seemed to be an imaginary place,” said Lazin-Ryder, contributing producer of the radio-documentary What Happens in the Desert. “My only contact with the desert has been in movies, storybooks, religious metaphors and things like that. The closest I have ever gotten to the real desert is having spent a little time in New Mexico, but, even then, I don’t think I was in true, scientific desert. My impression of what the desert was in my imagination was different than reality.

“One thing I wasn’t prepared for in my time in New Mexico was how cold it got at night, because it can get really cold. The imaginary desert in my mind was always hot – nights are sweltering, empty spaces, desolation.”

In the radio documentary, which is an episode of the CBC Radio show Ideas, Lazin-Ryder explores various perceptions of the desert, stemming from culture, such as movies, novels and poetry, which often only portray one aspect of the landscape.

“An example we use in the documentary is Monument Valley in Utah, which, if you’ve seen a western film, it’s in so many movies,” Lazin-Ryder, who is a member of the Jewish community, told the Independent. “So, Monument Valley is that part of Utah, with red sand and rock, with these big towers of rock jutting out of the middle of the desert. John Ford, legendary western director, shot over 10 movies there at Monument Valley and lots of other classic western movies have used the backdrop of this valley as the setting.”

However, while it may seem that many films are shot in Monument Valley, most are actually shot in less-known locations in states like Texas, California and Arizona.

“It’s never specifically that this movie or story is taking place in Monument Valley,” said Lazin-Ryder. “It just becomes a symbol of the desert, which is a stand-in for an alien place, an exotic place, a place that you’ve never been to.”

From a religious perspective, the experts Lazin-Ryder interviews often speak of duality, where the desert is both a place where God is absent and where God is felt the strongest.

“The desert, in the Old Testament, is a place of deep spirituality and is also, for the Israelites, the place where they encounter God, where God travels with them,” he explained. “In the Christian New Testament and Christian culture later on, the desert becomes a place, not of exile and separation from God, but a place you go to escape civilization and to connect with God. Simultaneously, it’s a place where there are dangers ... and pushing it further, and then there are poisonous creatures, and it’s a place of death, wasteland and absence of God. But, at the same time, the desert is the place, both for the Israelite and early Christians, a place to go to connect with God.”

“In a sense,” he said, “the desert, through its absence, represents God, because you can’t fully describe God – you can’t fully describe absence. The desert represents this strange relationship that we have with God, in a religious metaphor – at the same time that God is everything, God is nothing, and indescribable.”

In the documentary, Lazin-Ryder talks about the way the desert is portrayed in science-related and apocalyptic movies – movies that portray the future world as a desert; that climate change, if it continues atpace, will leave the whole earth a desert.

“The seas will dry up, the forests will die and everything will be desert waste ... which is not particularly an ecologically valid prediction ... but, it’s a helpful metaphor for people to think about the dangers of climate change,” he said.

“The other thing is that, when talking about climate change and things like switching to less carbon-intensive energy, the desert becomes a very easy thing for people to say ... ‘Hey! You know what would be great? Let’s just put a whole bunch of solar panels and windmills and stuff in the desert, because that’s empty land and it gets a lot of sun.’ You can Google it – there are all kinds of plans that people have pushed, to put acres and acres of solar panels in the Mojave Desert, the Sonoran Desert or the Sahara Desert.”

“It’s this kind of a science-fiction idea that, hey, we have these empty spaces on the earth – let’s absolutely fill them with solar panels and windmills. But, the problem with that is – it comes from this thinking about
Predicting diabetes risk

A new computer algorithm can predict in the early stages of pregnancy, or even before pregnancy has occurred, which women are at a high risk of gestational diabetes.

The study, reported recently in *Nature Medicine*, analyzed data on nearly 600,000 pregnancies available from Israel’s largest health organization, Clalit Health Services.

“Our ultimate goal has been to help the health system take measures so as to prevent diabetes from occurring in pregnancy,” said senior author Prof. Eran Segal of the institute’s computer science and applied mathematics, and molecular cell biology departments.

Gestational diabetes is characterized by high blood sugar levels that develop during pregnancy in women who did not previously have diabetes. It occurs in three to nine percent of all pregnancies and is fraught with risks for both mother and baby. Typically, gestational diabetes is diagnosed between the 24th and 28th weeks of pregnancy, with the help of a glucose tolerance test in which the woman drinks a glucose solution and then undergoes a blood test to see how quickly the glucose is cleared from her blood.

In the new study, Segal and colleagues started out by applying a machine learning method to Clalit’s health records on some 450,000 pregnancies in women who gave birth between 2010 and 2017. Gestational diabetes had been diagnosed by glucose tolerance testing in about four percent of these pregnancies. After processing the dataset — made up of more than 2,000 parameters for each pregnancy, including the woman’s blood test results and her and her family’s medical histories — the scientists’ algorithm revealed that nine of the parameters were sufficient to accurately identify the women who were at a high risk of developing gestational diabetes. The nine parameters included the woman’s age, body mass index, family history of diabetes and results of her glucose tests during previous pregnancies (if any).

Next, to make sure that the nine parameters could indeed accurately predict the risk of gestational diabetes, the researchers applied them to Clalit’s health records on about 140,000 additional pregnancies that had not been part of the initial analysis. The results validated the study’s findings: the nine parameters helped accurately identify the women who ultimately developed gestational diabetes.

These findings suggest that, by having a woman answer just nine questions, it would be possible to tell in advance whether she is at a high risk of developing gestational diabetes. If this information is available early on — in the early stages of pregnancy or even before the woman has gotten pregnant — it might be possible to reduce her risk of diabetes through lifestyle measures such as exercise and diet. On the other hand, women identified by the questionnaire as being at a low risk of gestational diabetes may be spared the cost and inconvenience of the glucose testing. (Visit weizmann.ac.il/sites/gdl-predictor to access the self-assessment questionnaire.)

In more general terms, this study has demonstrated the usefulness of large human-based datasets, specifically electronic health records, for deriving personalized disease predictions that can lead to preventive and therapeutic measures. The work was led by graduate students Nitzan Shalom Artzi, Dr. Smadar Shilo and Hagai Rosenman from Segal’s lab at the Weizmann Institute of Science, who collaborated with Prof. Eran Hadar, Dr. Shiri barsbath-Hazan, Prof. Avi Ben-Harush and Prof. Arnon Wiznitzer of the Rabin Medical Centre in Petach Tikvah; and Prof. Ran D. Balicer and Dr. Becca Feldman of Clalit Health Services.

A new computer algorithm can predict in the early stages of pregnancy, or even before pregnancy has occurred, which women are at a high risk of gestational diabetes.
all areas, including the benefits of de-creating stress, which Becker feels may be the most important factor.

Information about the study, called Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD), can be found at childstudy.ca.

“CHILD started in 2008 and is an observation study, because we don’t believe we know enough to prevent the disease as yet,” said Becker. “We’re now seeing the children at 8 and 9 years of age, and we’re looking way more broadly at the environment. We’re looking at stress very specifically, both for parents and children.

“We’re looking much more in terms of diet, but also at the microbiota, the bacteria and other organisms that live in us, with us and on us, and which are critical – in helping to shape children’s immune responses in early life.”

According to Becker, there are more bacteria in our gut than there are cells in our body, and microbiota are now being considered as the cause of and potential cure for all sorts of illnesses.

One of the biggest hurdles is trying to determine if a young child who is wheezing has asthma and should be treated as such, or if the child has a respiratory infection that causes wheezing, Becker said part of the problem is how to more accurately define wheezing, which is described as a whistling noise coming from the chest.

“The key thing is that it’s not just the whistling noise in the chest,” said Becker. “It’s also that gagging in, particularly gagging in under the ribs, with the rusty pulling in when breathing. That’s a very good indication that those airways are narrowed and that the child has to work hard at moving air, particularly moving air both in and out. That’s what we teach our trainees to work on with the families they see.

“And, obviously, any time a child is distressed – if they’re looking dis-
tressed, particularly if there’s a change in colour of the lips – those are urgent issues. And, some children have such severe narrowing of the airways that you don’t hear wheezing, because they’re not moving enough air, but they will be struggling to breathe. You’ll see them pulling in their tummy and you’ll see their shoulders heaving,” he said. “And you’ll often see toddlers and older kids with their hands braced on their knees, hunched forward, trying to get air in. That type of tripoding is really a worrisome sign, as is a change in lip colour – that’s an emergency.

Those children need to be brought to emergency quickly.”

If it gets to the point that the child is given inhalers, Becker pointed out that blue puffers are for particularly bad episodes, while orange or red puffers are for management.

For a bad episode, he said, two inhalations from the blue puffer should be taken. “An inhalation and a bit of a pause, and then a second puff and inhalation – in many cases, that will be enough to help control things,” said Becker. “If it doesn’t help make things better, then, in five to10 minutes, it should be repeated. If the child is still distressed, that’s an indication they need to be brought to a hospital.”

The blue puffer should not be used as a controller medication. “The blue puffer should not be used as the body will develop resistance to it. So, if the controller medications are not providing enough control, he said parents should talk to the doctor who prescribed the puffer to determine a solution.

“If people are needing to use the blue puffer on an ongoing basis, even once or twice a week, week after week, that’s really telling you that you don’t have control of what’s going on and is very worrisome,” said Becker. “There should never be a death from asthma. But, sadly, every year there are some. And, these deaths are – rather surprisingly – not necessarily in kids with the most severe, persistent asthma; they’re in kids who are thought to have mild asthma. But, in fact, when you look at it, if you are using the blue puffer and need to get a new one every month or two, that’s a big red flag... needing to use the blue puffer in the middle of the night, that’s a big red flag. Nighttime symptoms are really a worry – those are kids who need to be seen and properly assessed and, in most cases, they need to be using controller medication.”

Becker is proud of having led the development of a national certification for asthma educators in Canada – Canada was the first country to provide this type of certification.

“We have a children’s allergy and asthma education centre in Winnipeg attached to our children’s hospital,” he said. “It’s one of the only real free-standing ones in North America. The website is asthma-ed-
education.com.”

Rebeca Kurupatwa is a Winnipeg freelance writer.
The seventh annual Rose’s Angels took place at Richmond Jewish Day School on Feb. 16. Held under the umbrella of the Kehila Society of Richmond, the event was founded by Courtney Cohen and Lynne Fader in 2013, in memory of Cohen’s grandmothers, Rose Lewin, who was a Holocaust survivor, and Babs Cohen. This year’s gathering saw the largest turnout for volunteers, with approximately 80 family, friends and community members coming together to assemble more than 1,000 care packages and several hundred warmth bundles, which were delivered to partner agencies.

A total of 24 not-for-profit agencies receive the care packages for their clients. Participating agencies included, but were not limited to, Richmond Family Place, Chimo Community Services, Jewish Family Services, Richmond Food Bank, Richmond Centre for Disability, Heart of Richmond AIDS Society, RainCity Housing, Richmond Multicultural Community Services and Gilmore Park United Church.

The packages consisted of toiletries, such as shampoo, soap and toothbrush; feminine hygiene products, including tampons, hair accessories, nail file and makeup; books, note pads, and arts and craft supplies; non-perishable food items, such as juice, oatmeal, granola bars, soup, coffee packets, trail mix and chocolate; and socks, gloves and scarves.

The items included in the packages were tailored to meet the needs of the recipients, as Fader and Cohen asked the agencies involved to survey their clients as to what items they would like to receive. The feminine hygiene and makeup products are donated via the Beauty for Babs component of Rose’s Angels, said Cohen.

“This event would not be possible,” she said, “if it wasn’t for our incredible donors and volunteers, who allow this event to be successful year after year. Individuals and businesses donate to Rose’s Angels through the Kehila Society of Richmond.”

She added, “People want to volunteer in their community and, sometimes, they don’t have the resources or connections that allow them to carry out their desire to give back. Rose’s Angels has grown into a strong pillar event in our community and it’s wonderful to see volunteers of all ages coming together to assemble care packages for those who they will never meet. It’s inspirational.”

Rose’s Angels takes place in February because, said Cohen, February is a special month – it’s Heart Month, Valentine’s Day and the month of her grandmother Rose Lewin’s birthday. Since its inception in 2013, the annual event has created and donated more than 5,000 care packages Richmond-wide, she said.

For more information about Rose’s Angels or to make a donation, contact Cohen or Fader at the Kehila Society of Richmond, 604-241-9270, or rosesangelsevent@gmail.com. For more information about the Kehila Society, visit kehilasociety.org.

Above: Volunteers at this year’s Rose’s Angels, which took place on Feb. 16 at Richmond Jewish Day School.

Right: Courtney Cohen holds a photo of her grandmothers, Rose Lewin, left, and Babs Cohen.

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that grown-up is a parent, a Hoot Reading teacher, or someone else, kids need to be practicing – and that’s not what’s happening in so many households. We’re so busy nowadays, between after-school activities and all the amazing things our kids get to do. But, reading cannot fall onto the backburner, because, if kids don’t practise, they’ll probably end up in that 60% by Grade 4.

Shuler said kids need to have what they learn in school reinforced at home and, therefore, increasing public awareness is critical.

“A lot of parents don’t know – they just think about reading in terms of literacy or illiteracy so, once their child can read, they think, ‘Great! My child can read. We’ve got that! But, the truth is, again, reading is a skill, and you get better at it the more you read. That’s where most parents don’t know how important it is to continue the reading out loud, even if their child is reading.”

She added that “the key is in knowing how important it is and in making sure we prioritize reading practice in the same way we prioritize brushing our teeth.”

Finding books and other material that interest kids and make them excited about reading is paramount.

“Just try to keep it a positive experience as much as possible,” said Shuler, “and do what you need to do as a parent to make that happen.”

Shuler and Kotecha recently launched a new initiative, called Hoot for All, sponsored by Spin Master, that will allow them to provide reading tutoring for kids at Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada at no cost to the kids’ families.

For more information, visit hootreading.com.

Rebeca Kuropatwa is a Winnipeg freelance writer.

Deserts as though they are empty, ownerless places, absent of life. And, the problem is that that’s not true. Deserts are full of life, of plants and of animals that have adapted in interesting ways. And, we also don’t quite understand the place that deserts have in the broader ecosystem, in terms of the carbon cycle.”

While we hear in the news about desertification, in actuality only some deserts may get bigger and others drier, he said. Very few reports talk about the fact that some deserts may get wetter and, in a sense, shrink.

Desert systems are intricate and delicate and we, as humans, often only notice a change when it is already too late. Lazin-Ryder gave the example of the Joshua trees in the Mojave Desert that are dying, and the efforts to preserve them.

“These kinds of problems are expected to increase as climate change goes on,” he said. But, talking about the desert as merely land available to fix the problems that we have created, “neglects the fact that they are not absent, marginal places. They actually have a place in the world. Deserts are a natural thing that should exist on the earth,” he said. “And there will be increasing pressures to put things in the desert, to put people in the desert, to grow food in the desert – despite the fact that they are as important and as under threat as places like the rainforests and wetlands that we’re trying to preserve. So, on one hand, we’re afraid the future might become desert, but, on the other hand, we may want to think about how to preserve the deserts we already have, as there are many threats to the desert.”

Lazin-Ryder hopes listeners of the documentary will gain a better grasp of the nuances of the desert. For most people in the West, he said, “interaction with the desert is in an imaginary sense ... either in religious texts, fiction or movies.” The show tries to get people to consider “what those metaphors and symbols do to our thinking – not just about the desert, but all of the natural world: in what places are worth preserving, celebrating, and what places we think of as marginal, empty, dead or inherently bad.”

“We get lots of stories told to us all the time, about what parts of the earth are good or bad,” he said. “I think, ultimately, beyond whether we’re talking about deserts, dry land or wet land, my ultimate hope is that it helps people think about the stories that we tell ourselves about the natural world, versus trying to gain an understanding about how the natural world actually works.”

To listen to What Happens in the Desert, visit cbc.ca/radio/podcasts/documentaries/the-best-of-ideas.

Rebeca Kuropatwa is a Winnipeg freelance writer.
Ketubot have a long history

DEBORAH RUBIN FIELDS

Marriage, divorce and the ketubah

The ketubah, or Jewish marriage contract, is a traditional document that safeguards the position of the woman after she is deemed ready to marry. It contains marital agreements and stipulations. The ketubah was written in Aramaic, a language used by Jewish communities for many centuries. It is a legal document that outlines the responsibilities of the husband and wife and serves as a basis for marriage. The ketubah is a short but ancient document, with distinct sections – the opening formula o G-d, followed by blessings and good wishes to the newlyweds and the wife's responsibilities to the Jewish people and the entire world. One example of this is the ketubah devised by Rabbi Prof. Rachel Adler. Her ketubah is a Loved's Covenant. It contains biblical verses about covenant, calling marriage a covenant of distinction.

In traditional ketubot, the groom obligates himself to pay a base amount, and perhaps additional sums that are then written into the contract. He promises to work, honour and support the bride. In modern phrasing, he specifically agrees to provide clothing, food, and other needs. Probably the most blatant difference in ketubot is that some have been illustrated while some have not. According to Davidovitch, the artistic tradition died during the Babylonian exile. The ketubah testifies to the obligations undertaken by the husband towards his wife in their joint life together. The principal function of the ketuba is to serve as a document that safeguards the position of the woman after she has entered the marital state.

Above: The ketubah of the writer's maternal grandparents, from Warsaw, Poland, 1913.

Right: An illustrated ketubah from Mala, India, 1938.

In a traditional ketubah, the groom promises certain things to his bride, such as providing the bride with clothing, food, etc. The ketubah requires witnessing by two individuals. Jewish couples have used ketubot since ancient times. They have been illustrated while some have not. According to Davidovitch, the artistic tradition died during the Babylonian exile. The ketubah testifies to the obligations undertaken by the husband towards his wife in their joint life together. The principal function of the ketuba is to serve as a document that safeguards the position of the woman after she has entered the marital state.

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Couple cartoons about love

ABIGAIL KLEIN LEICHTMAN ISRAEL 21C

Fans always do a double take when they see Yehuda and Maya Devir at a comics convention or in a New York City subway, or wherever. The young Israeli couple looks like they jumped right out of their Webcomic "One of Those Days."

“I suppose it’s like meeting a real Bart Simpson in the street,” mused Yehuda. “We act exactly the same as our characters.”

Indeed, about seven million social media followers know that Maya loves super-hot showers and hates folding laundry. They know Yehuda’s a big baby when he’s sick and is willing to say “I’m sorry” after an argument. They sympathized with the couple’s struggle to get pregnant.

“We didn’t know how to take a good selfie, but we can draw really well, so we did a cartoon of ourselves and posted that,” explained Yehuda.

Not only did that illustration help them find an affordable flat in a very expensive city, but it also formed the kernel of “One of Those Days.”

While working as a freelance illustrator in the fashion, music and startup industries, Yehuda posted funny snippets on social media about being a new husband.

“Very quickly I joined him because I was amazed by the way every day scenes in a marriage, from dishes to laundry. They know Yehuda’s a big picture maker. Because we can make such a difference for people, that our work can connect Muslim, Jewish, black, white, rich, poor … it doesn’t matter.”

One of Those Days won the Most Creative Content Maker Award at the Inflow Global Summit 2019 Awards for social media influencers. “We dedicated our award to our followers and supporters around the world. We have fans in Brazil, Japan, Trinidad, Iran, Iraq – basically, every country,” Yehuda said. “People thank us for making them happy once a week and making them feel they are not alone. It’s an amazing journey we’ve been on.”

The Devirs’ journey began in September 2016, when they packed up their family and moved to Tel Aviv.

The newlyweds hoped to find an affordable apartment in a nice neighborhood. And they hoped to make a living in illustration and design. Neither aspiration was terribly realistic.

“A friend suggested we post a selfie on Facebook asking friends to help us find an apartment,” said Maya. “We didn’t know how to take a good selfie, but we can draw really well, so we did a cartoon of ourselves and posted that.”

Not only did that illustration help them find an affordable flat in a very expensive city, but it also formed the kernel of “One of Those Days.”

When we decided to move into the stage of being parents and saw it wouldn’t be that easy for us, this was a turning point,” Yehuda confided. “Would we really talk about the unpleasant experience of trying to get pregnant? It’s a super-personal subject.”

Maya felt that Yehuda’s humorous and colourful style would put the right spin on the topic and could be supportive for other couples in a similar situation. And so they introduced comics about ovulation, periods and lovemaking on demand. Messages offering support and advice came pouring in. It was like a worldwide group therapy session, Yehuda said.

The cartoon announcing Maya’s pregnancy got 16 million likes and shares. The first illustration of baby Ariel got 13 million. As of Dec. 1, she had 219,000 Instagram followers at just six months old.

“It was unbelievable to see the amount of love we got from people we didn’t know,” said Yehuda. “As Israeli and Jewish people, it was especially unbelievable to get supportive reactions from our huge fan base in the Arab world. The Israeli part is not important. We’re just the cartoon couple about love.”

Now living on Maya’s childhood kibbutz, the couple plans to travel to shows and lectures. The difficulty of parenting with their baby became another comic that went viral because it was so relatable.

“It’s hard for Maya and me to leave her,” said Yehuda, “but when she’s older, she’ll join us.”

Israel21c is a nonprofit educational foundation with a mission to fuse media and public attention on the 21st-century Israel that exists beyond the conflict. For more, or to donate, visit israel21c.org.
Milestones

Lev Hillel Gibbons

Kara Mintzberg and Josh Gibbons are thrilled to announce the birth of Lev Hillel, brother to Nomi and Yael, daughter of David and Bonna Sera, and Hilary Sera, on the occasion of their b’nai mitzvah, March 14, 2020, at Temple Sholom Synagogue.

On Feb. 20, Vancouver-based artist Dina Goldstein’s Snapshots from the Garden of Eden opened at the Museum of Jewish Montreal (mjnm.ca). The exhibit will be on display until May 17. A collection of 11 large-scale black-and-white photographs, Snapshots reimagines modernized versions of characters and passages from Jewish fables, folk stories and legends collected in the book Leaves from the Garden of Eden by award-winning folklorist Howard Schwartz. Drawn from Jewish oral and written traditions across the centuries, the stories span the Jewish world – from Italy to Afghanistan – bringing to life the diversity and vibrancy of this overlooked area of Jewish storytelling and heritage.

Renowned for her reinterpretations of cultural symbols, Goldstein’s Snapshots reframes Jewish lore both famed and forgotten through the eyes of the 21st century. “The resonance of Goldstein’s work stems from her ability to weave intricate visual narratives,” said curator Alyssa Stockvis-Hauer, “where the history of Jewish folklore is catapulted into the modern era with a cast of characters and film noir-esque scenes that are provocative, imaginative and layered with meaning.”

Playing with visual and narrative archetypes, Goldstein creates new connections and relevance by merging the traditional and whimsical with contemporary themes of technology, desire, justice and identity, exploring and reinvigorating the history and role of Jewish folk narratives in broader cultural memory.

Commissioned in 2017 by the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco for an exhibition on Schwartz’s Leaves from the Garden of Eden, Goldstein’s photographic series has already been exhibited across Europe and North America. (For more on Goldstein, see jewishindependent.ca/modern-ancient-jewish-tales and jewishindependent.ca/challenging-viewers-beliefs. Her website is dinagoldstein.com.)

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More: Moe Berg in a military jeep in California with his brothers Sam during the war. July 1942.

Michael Fox is a writer and film critic living in San Francisco.
Life with inherited trauma

SAM MARGOLIS

D

g. Arian Baack, author of The Inheritors: Moving Forward from Generational Trauma, was in town last month to speak at the Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival and hold a three-day experiential workshop with the Second Generation Group in Vancouver.

The Ottawa-based counselor began her festival presentation with a quote from the late Israeli novelist Amos Oz, who wrote, “Our past belongs to us, but we do not belong to it.” For Baack, the quote underscores her message to inheritors of the Shoah — that “we were given life and an obligation to bear witness and honour the martyrs and heroes of the Holocaust. And that also have the right to live full and joyful lives.”

“Generational trauma stems from devastating events which transpired before we were born,” Baack told the Independent. “In the case of the Holocaust, we have experienced it from birth; it is as if we were there. We carry an unrelenting sadness, sense of absence and betrayal.”

The ultimate question her book explores is: “How can we live a full life despite the difficult trauma inherited?”

Prior to writing The Inheritors, Baack conducted doctoral research into the subject of intergenerational trauma and resilience, yet what she uncovered did not fit or go deeply enough into either. Often, resilience is described as bouncing back with support from others. But, she said, “You don’t bounce back from the Holocaust.”

She was resolved to untravel answers to these and other questions, such as why are resilient and happy humans born despite our inherited trauma? Do we carry memory from one generation to another? How do we move forward, when the usual therapies for trauma have proven not to work for us?

“We are also faced with the difficulty of piecing together our family stories,” said Baack. “They are full of holes, unknowns and even secrets, our roots destroyed. Understandably, we have strong emotions but don’t know how to deal with them; for example, excessive sadness, fear of authority, worry, lack of trust, lack of safety, etc.”

Further, inherited trauma is often frozen, embedded in the brain stem, also known as the primitive brain — accessing it is difficult, but it can be done, she said.

Baack noted that ancient wisdom, the Bible and new epigenetic scientific research explain that trauma is passed onto generations in the DNA, and even the cells, for as many as seven generations. She strongly believes that this is the case and that it is now processed; if it is not, then it can take longer than seven generations.

Though Baack’s own experience is being a child of Holocaust survivors, The Inheritors encompasses others who have been victimized: Canada’s indigenous population, survivors of the Rwandan genocide and of even other hereditary roots of recent history. The book also looks at trauma on a personal level, from those who have suffered as a result of natural disaster, an accident, economic hardship, the justice or education systems, illness or loss of a loved one.

The intent of The Inheritors is to serve as a tool for moving forward, said Baack. The book is filled with dialogues, poetry and stories from people of different backgrounds. Readers are invited to explore their story, and there are questions at the end of each chapter to help them process that story and, in so doing, transform their pain. At the least, in the end, they will have a written story as a legacy to their descendants.

The Inheritors has had other, unexpected, impacts. For example, the conductor of the North Carolina State University orchestra commissioned composer and flutist Allison Loggins-Hull to write a piece for an upcoming performance and she has chosen to write a work inspired by the book — Inheritors Overture will premiere on April 5 in Raleigh, N.C.

The group dialogues that Baack conducts offer a means of validation through other people with similar experiences and various experiential tools that can help further a deeper exploration of their trauma stories, the “undiscussables” and the unknowns. Group participants, she said, are often surprised by the creativity, laughter and camaraderie that arise. “The Inheritors” is dedicated to (and inspired by) Baack’s two half-siblings. “From my earliest beginnings, I remember carrying a great sadness for my siblings, Henush and Halina Arian, who were only 4 and 3 years old, respectively, when they were killed,” she writes. “There was no information about the circumstances of their death or burial, ‘But their existence was real and has mattered to me in an extraordinary way. And so I don’t fight the sadness; I embrace it. It has a special place. I know that they are many of us, and that the child is the most cherished of all my burdens.’”

At the age of 4 or 5, Baack had what she describes as a “knowing” or “inherited memory.” “In an ‘inside out’ sense,” told her, even at that young age, that her siblings, two of 1.5 million children killed by the Nazis, had both been shot in the back. When she asked her parents about their deaths, he said he didn’t know. Nonetheless, the memory (and feeling) she had inherited persisted, and could be placed on a spot in the middle of her back, with a knowing that her half-siblings had been shot in that place.

Her research revealed that the timing of their deaths was before gas chambers had been built, and children under 5 were regularly shot. In 2019, a tour guide in Krakow pointed to the very street where the children and their mother were shot. To Baack, it was a stunning confirmation of her lifelong memory.

Baack has been consulting and coaching individuals and organizations for more than 30 years. She recently founded the Centre for Transformational Dialogue to help individuals and communities that have inherited devastating legacies. She also has written a book, The Inheritors: The History of Our Souls, published in 2017.

For more information, visit gbaack.com. Baack continues to research inherited legacies and has an upcoming workshop in Vancouver on the subject. She can be reached at gbaack@rogers.com.

Sam Margolis has written for the Globe and Mail, the National Post, UPI and MSNBC.

Belief in God gives strength

CYNTHIA RAMASY

Happines is a choice,” writes Cheri Tannenbaum in her book Woman of Few Words: My Creative Journey with Dystonia (Gefen Publishing House, 2019).

No one would blame Tannenbaum for not being happy, for staying in bed, for giving up. But that’s not who she is. “From the first day of my illness to this very day, she writes, “I wake up each morning, say Modeh Ani (the prayer said upon waking in the morning), push myself out of bed, and consciously and deliberately choose life.”

Born in Edmonton, Tannenbaum is the oldest child of Samuel (‘S’) and Frances Belzberg, the family moved to Vancouver when she was 16. With refreshing honesty, Tannenbaum shares her struggles with anorexia, but also some of the ways in which she was a “happy, fun-loving, gregarious, outgoing flower child” when she was in her teens. She writes about how she became religious, and it is her strong belief in God that has buoyed her since she became ill with dystonia at the age of 20, the first sign of which was that her handwriting suddenly became totally illegible.” As well, her voice became monotonic, and other symptoms appeared, including severe difficulties in walking and, eventually, speaking, a symptom that, very much later in life, was remedied, as the unexpected result of medication intended for another purpose.

Woman of Few Words details Tannenbaum’s life with dystonia, which, according to the Dystonia Medical Research Foundation, which was founded by her parents, “is characterized by involuntary muscle contractions and spasms.” She openly talks about the time she attempted suicide and the difficulties she had in having children. She offers thoughts on living with the illness and lessons she has learned, as well as several pages on dystonia and many important messages to other people with similar experiences and ones who are crucially and emotionally involved – started our own scientific board and managed their own illness no other research board that we know of allows lay people to actually participate, verbally, in the discussions as they ponder their findings.

“Thank you, you can call it a gift – a gift of government is always a concern because dystonia “is not a well-known disease or a recognizable name, though we fall in the category of MS [multiple sclerosis] and Parkinson’s.”

She said, “If I didn’t have the belief that there is an all-powerful G-d who runs the world and has a master plan, then all challenges are just random; things that happen are just occurrences coming from nowhere… Most probably, those challenges would feel meaningless and purposeless,” she told the Independent.

Tannenbaum responds to every reader who sends her a note. “The notes I have gotten have been extremely positive, telling me how I have helped them or given them a different perspective, etc.”

She said, “If I were to have gotten only one touch, I would have had someone send me a note even when it was negative. I have written back to two children, and they have said they were not a child. I do not, however, present many challenges.

“If I didn’t have the belief that there is an all-powerful, loving-powerful G-d who runs the world and has a master plan, then all challenges are just random; things that happen are just occurrences coming from nowhere… Most probably, those challenges would feel meaningless and purposeless,” she told the Independent.

Tannenbaum’s mother shared some of the ways in which her daughter’s illness affected the family.

“Cheri’s illness was slow in showing itself, at first, her limbs would go limp, and she would have a tear in her eye or a look in her eye, which would go away, so she could say, ‘It’s okay, it’s okay.’” But when her condition became worse, I began shopping for different kinds of medical advice locally and even to Scripps Clinic in California, and still no answers.

“In the meantime,” said Belzberg, “Cheri met Harvey, married and moved to Los Angeles … and her condition worsened.”

Then, almost five months after Harvey’s death, Tannenbaum was diagnosed. “There were, at that time, three known patients,” said Belzberg. “Today, we have several hundred on this continent alone.”

With no known patients and no known treatment or cure, Belzberg said, “My husband mobilized with the help of two doctors from UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], Dr. John Menkes and Dr. Charles Markham; we gathered about five or six known neurologists from across the U.S. and began to do research. Meetings were set up for every two weeks and both my husband and I monitored the meetings between the experts … with the whole purpose of finding everything there was to know about the disease and how to treat it.”

“Word got out that this was being addressed and there was more interest from within the research community,” she said. “We got a grant from the NIH [National Institutes of Health], plus our own … financial support, to establish ourselves, and began a series of research conferences with different doctors with different specialties. That was almost 40 years ago and, this June, there will be the Samuel Belzberg 6th International Dysstonia Symposium in Dublin, Ireland, the latest in our international annual meetings.

“Through our persistence, as parents, we have created an international research body with a large patient list and researchers waiting to have their grants financed,” said Belzberg. “We also … as parents and ones who are crucially and emotionally involved – started our own scientific board and managed their own illness in no other research board that we know of allows lay people to actually participate, verbally, in the discussions as they ponder their findings.

“Beyond, you can call it a gift – a gift of government is always a concern because dystonia “is not a well-known disease or a recognizable name, though we fall in the category of MS [multiple sclerosis] and Parkinson’s.”

She said, “I would first give them a big hug and sit with them, hold their hands and just listen to them vent – how they feel about the diagnosis, their anger, their fear, their hopelessness, their ‘why me?’

“When they were ready to hear me, I would tell them that there is a G-d, master of the universe. He believes more than anyone else loves you in the whole wide world. Everything G-d does is for the good, even though I know it doesn’t feel that way right now. This is a test that G-d knows you are capable of handling. That’s what’s going on with you… This is an opportunity for you to grow and to bring out your hidden potential and strengths that you never knew existed within you. Through this illness, you can grow and Russell … and I know you can bring good and G-d into the world. Depending on your attitude and perspective, you will be able to help and change other people’s lives. This test is bringing you farther along to fulfilling the potential that only you can do.”

JEWISH INDEPENDENT • FEBRUARY 28, 2020
Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir, all singers welcome. Learn and sing traditional and contemporary songs of the Jewish people in Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino and English, Tues. 7:30 p.m., at Peretz Centre.

JCC Choir, led by Noa Gonen. Open to everyone over 18 years old; no experience required. Thurs., 7:30 p.m., at JCCGV. $450 ($405 for centre members). jccgv.org/adult-evening-programs. (Until June 25)

Shabbat Soul with Rabbi Dresner and Jewish Keffler, supported by band and vocalists. Feb. 28, 7 p.m., service with Keffler’s teaching for Parashat Terumah. The Gift of the Queens; and 8 p.m. veget- able potluck dinner at Or Shalom. An Or Shalom, Limmud Vancouver and JQTV Vancouver event. Register at orshalom.ca/shabbat-soul.

Casino Night, with live DJ, food stations, entertainment and more. Fundraiser for Beth Israel. $180/person. March 5, 5:30 p.m., at Parni Vancouver Hotel. Register via bethisrael.ca.

Come On! fundraiser for Or Shalom. March 6-8 at members’ homes. $75/adult, $50 for student; children under 14 by donation (tax receipt for portion over $25). orshalom.ca/comon. Continue partying, Or Shalom. March 9, 7:35 p.m. maariv/Megillah, 9 p.m. sec- ond Megillah reading, followed by Theatre Sports, at Schare Tzedek.

Putim show for teens and adults, March 9, 7:35 p.m. mazum/i Megillah, 9 p.m. sec- ond Megillah reading, followed by Theatre Sports, at Schare Tzedek.

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Community Shabbaton, hosted by VHA and Schara Tzedek, with guests from Chai Lifeline Canada. Feb. 28, scharatzedeck.com.

Toddler Tuesdays story, art and music program for 2- and 3-year-olds. March 3, 10:30-11:15 a.m., at Vancouver Talmud Torah. RSVP to vtschool.jumbula.com or 604-736-7307.

Baby Loves Shabbat, monthly class for babies (1 month to 2 years) and their caregivers. March 6, 9:30 a.m., at Schara Tzedek. Register at scharatzedeck.com or 604-736-7607.

Spring into Shabbat with PJ Library and B’nai neighbours. March 6, 5 p.m., at Beth Israel. Register by March 2 to 604-731-4161 or via bethisrael.ca.

Purim Family Shabbat with dinner, crafts (making groggers) and services. March 6, 5:45 p.m., at Temple Sholom. $12/adult, $8/child, $4/child of 5. RSVP by March 4, 604-736-7607.

Purim party, with bounce castle, ball pit, costume parade, photo booth, arts and crafts, tattoos, scavenger hunt and carnival treats, plus VJFF presents Young Abraham kids movie. PQFF presents Dr. Seuss this year. March 8, 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m., at JCCG.

Back to the Purim Future: March 9 at Beth Israel, 3-8 p.m. dance party with Jonathon Zwickel 3K-Gr. 3 video and table games 4-8 p.m. ($10) followed by 5:15 p.m. fantabulous shpiel, Megillah reading, costume parade and carnival ($5/person for optional pizza dinner). Register via bethisrael.ca or 604-731-4161.

Superhero Purim: Come dressed as your favorite superhero! March 9, 5-45 p.m. Purim party dinner ($15/person) 6:15 p.m. Megillah reading, game and costume parade, featuring the Amazing Scuffles! 7 p.m. Super Hero Supper supervised by refreshments, at Temple Sholom. Register via templesholom.ca.

The Purim Experience, with Families That Give, for families with kids ages 0-8 (older siblings welcome). Listen to the Megillah reading, bring mustard mash for a friend, enjoy pizza and snacks, plus bouncy castle, face-painting and more, donate a toaster for charity. March 11, 11:30 a.m., at Schara Tzedek. RSVP to chaya@scharatzedeck.com, 604-736-7607 or via scharatzedeck.com.

Purim seudah with Beth Hamudrads and Schara Tzedek. $30/adult, $15/child 6-12, $5/child 3-5, free for ages 0-2. March 12, 5 p.m., at Schara Tzedek. Register at scharatzedeck.com.

Ongoing:

Making Informed Decisions: Medical Advice from Our Members, with Drs. Jonathan Lipscit (cardiac risk) and Brian Bresler (colon cancer screening). March 1, 1 p.m., at Schara Tzedek. RSVP at scharatzedeck.com.

Sweat for Tzedek, for women only, with Yad Segal, March 3, 1 or 2 p.m., at Kordi Studio. Limited space. Arrive 15 minutes before class starts. Donations support Schara Tzedek’s tikun olam efforts: $25 for One Tree, $36. Sweet for the Community, $72. Sweet for Am Yisrael, $180. 604-736-7607.

JACS Recovery Group: an anonymous support group for adults with living with addiction to connect with those who share the experiences of addiction and Jewish life. Tues. 7 p.m. Contact: Shelley Karrer, shelley@jacsyc.org.

Ongoing:

Jewish mediation led by Matthew Gindin two Sun a month, 7-8:15 p.m. Information: Deborah, devora@telus.net.

Support group for persons with a mood disorder, 2nd and 4th Tues of month, 6 p.m, at Karen Song Centre. Information: davidmc@gmail.com.

JCCS Recovery Group: an anonymous support group for adults with living with addiction to connect with those who share the experiences of addiction and Jewish life. Tues. 7 p.m. Contact: Shelley Karrer, shelley@jacsyc.org.

Ongoing:

National Council of Jewish Women of Canada AGM, includes guest speaker Anna-Mari Wenclawski, a teacher at King David High School and a PhD candidate in Holocaust and genocide studies, on the “othering” of Jews during the Holocaust and First Nations during the settler colonial period. March 3, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. registration, 2 p.m., at JCC. Snider Senior Lounge. Confirm attendance at form-ca.keela.co/national-coun-cil-of-jewish-women-vancouver/NCJWC-Vancouver/AGM.

Ongoing:

Men’s Walking Group. Sun, 9:30 a.m. sharp start at Granville Island Hotel; stay for coffee after an hour walk. Contact menswalking@templesholom.ca.

The Bagel Club - Weekly Bagels and programs. Wed, 10:30 a.m., at Waldman Library.

Community Kitchen Club lunch and classes, Tues, 10:30 a.m., at Burquest. jccgyc.com.

Art club: arts and crafts. Wed, 1 p.m., at Chabad Richmond. 604-277-6427.

Games Afternoon: bring your own or play one of the shul's. Thurs 12:30-4 p.m., at Burquest. bunqest.org.

Shirley Stein's News and Views: discussion of current affair, $2 donation dropped in, Wed, 10:30 a.m., at Waldman Library.

Community Kitchen Club lunch and classes, Free programs at Wed, 11:30 a.m., at Burquest.

Ongoing:

Sholem Aleichem Speaker Series: Fri, 11:30 a.m., at Peretz Centre.

Youth:

NCSY Whistler Shabbaton for grades 8-12, March 6-8. Includes skiing, snowboarding and more; Maple Grill catering. Limited spots. Register at ncsywhistler.org.

Spring break art camps: day, drawing, painting for ages 6-19 with Suzy Bernstein at her Katrinna Garden Studio. March 16-20 and March 23-27. 9:30 a.m.-noon, 11 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., or 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. $185 for half-days, $370 for full-day. Includes instruction, materials, fittings. Register: suzybernstein.com or 778-877-7945.

Spring Break Camp: Monday, March 2, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Fairview Park. $150 per week. Register at carbysgirlscoutfairview.com or email: carbysgirlscoutfairview@gmail.com.

Seniors:

Music of the Heart - series, as part of the JSSN Founder’s Endowment Series, co-sponsored by JCCJ adults 55+. Light brunch follows. $5 suggested donation. March 11, 11 a.m., at JCC. Wolf Auditorium. RSVP by March 9 to Lisa Cohen Qay, 604-257-5111, ext. 208, or lisaqay@jccgyc.ca. Drop-ins welcome. (This event was postponed from January.)

Ongoing:

Israel Connect: looking for local retiree volunteers to connect online with Israeli teens weekly, to help them improve their English-language skills. Computer with camera and basic computer skills required, but no previous tutoring experience necessary. To volunteer, call Shelley at Chabad Richmond, 604-789-5806.

Yoga with Chairs with Annette Wertman. Sat and Sun, 11:15 a.m., at Legacy Senior Living, 611 West 41st Ave. $5 drop-in.

Kehila Seniors programs and lunch Mon, 9:30 a.m.-2 p.m., includes a wellness clinic (some services cost extra). Having the Wheels Society. Transportation available for Richmond residents (call Toby, 604-241-9270).

Torah class. Tues, 11 a.m., at Chabad Richmond, 604-277-6427.

JFS Seniors (Kosher) Lunch. Tues, noon, alternating between Temple Sholom and Beth Israel. 513. Reservations and information: Queenie Hanovitch at JFS, 604-558-5709.

Discussion group: Worldwide Politics, Listen, add your views. Tues, 1:30 p.m., at Beth Israel.

Shirley Stein’s News and Views: discussion of current affair, $2 donation dropped in, Wed, 10:30 a.m., at Waldman Library.

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Antisemitism, Part 2 of 2

Last week in this space, we addressed some of the challenges facing the Jewish people globally, which were put into stark relief by the latest edition of the Anti-Defamation League report titled Global 100. The most recent annual review of antisemitic attitudes worldwide paints a disheartening picture. But what here are (at least) two tales we draw from the report: that what we’ve been doing to confront antisemitism isn’t working or, perhaps more disturbing, they are working and, without them, the situation would be much worse.

First, a point that deserves repeating. Antisemitic ideas are most rampant in places where, few or no Jews, because antisemitism is far less about Jews than about the antisemites and their need for scapegoating or other psychosocial outlets. But that doesn’t mean that Jews aren’t working or dark situations and the cones in bright light.)

These create variable electrical charges sent along the optic nerve to the brain. Our brains interpret these stimuli as the visions that we see before our eyes. Did we see, what are we going to do about it? It is never too late to make an effort, I can tell you that!

Of course, I always knew I had to hustle my butt if I wanted to achieve the things I desired for my family and me. Yet, I never achieved the clarity of insight that this has become so clear to me. Of course, I always knew I had to hustle my butt if I wanted to achieve the things I desired for my family and me. Yet, I never achieved the clarity of insight that this has become so clear to me.

When all is said and done, there is no substitute for having a positive attitude. There are so many good things in our lives that we have to appreciate, that we have to be grateful for. There are so many people we pass every day who are less fortunate than we are. But that does not absolve us from the need to actively present our own best case to the world, to be up and at ‘em every day, meeting the challenges we face all day and face without. That’s what I’m doing before we start.

Helping to meet the challenge, antisemitism is not the expedient thing to do, but because it is the right thing to do. Our brains translate the images making their way into our brain.

It is often noted, especially on social media and in conversations among friends – you’ve certainly heard it – that some of the most concerning voices today are not coming from far-right radicals (though these are troubling) but from ostensibly reasonable people on the left. Ameliorating this challenge is not going to come from declaring them the enemy and polarizing our voices with their opposition, quite frequently in a pernicious form of the enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend construct (see Trump/Bolsonaro/ Orban/ et al.). The B.C. government will be addressed by rebuilding or strengthening the bridges between our communities and causes – not because it is the right thing to do, but because it is the right thing to do.

Last week on the front page, we featured two (of many) individuals in our community who are leading local voices in the movement against climate change, each using different strategies toward the same goal. They are not doing this as ambassadors of Jewish people, of course, but they are doing so as Jews, motivated by their values and urgent commitment to saving the planet. They are Jewish allies in the movement against climate change. They are Jewish allies motivated by a vast range of factors, often cultural or religious, that Jews are associated above. And yet, it is only at this late date that I must confess, I have never had this moment of clarity until I was 70 years of age.

That’s a whole lot of living to have gone through without thinking about such things. At the age of 71, unheralded, I flew across half a continent to try and reconnect with a woman I had known when I was teenagers more than 50 years before. I can report that we can look back now at almost 15 years of happily married life. We are keeping each other alive.

So, what am I writing about here is seeing the results of all the objects (subjects?) that make up the elements of our lives. We have to be aware of the reflections streaming into our eyes, and consciously translate the images making their way into our brain. What colours are being reflected? Are we absorbing what those images are telling us? Or are we seeing them without really seeing them, same old, same old? And, if we do see them, and we don’t like what we see, are we going to do about it? It is never too late to make an effort, I can tell you that!

Correction

In the article “Zack Gallery’s new director,” (Jewish Independent, Feb. 21) it was incorrectly stated that Hope Forstenzer was the first Zack Gallery director to be a professional artist – in reality, she is one of a small number of directors in the gallery’s history to be a professional artist.

Add colour to our lives

MAX ROYTENBERG

Life is such an adventure, but its appeal for us depends so much on our attitude. One of the most amazing things about this fact – that our attitude makes all the difference – is that this appears to be a law of nature. How we “reflect” the events in our lives is crucial to our fate. Most of us know a little bit about the nature of sight, the mechanics of seeing. We know less about the role played by light in our world. Light travels in units called photons. We know that these photons travel very fast, even when they have to bounce around in a world full of atoms to get where they are headed, which is everywhere. Photons travel so fast, we don’t notice that random atoms are impeding their progress a bit. In spite of that, they reflect off all the objects in our world and succeed in entering our eyes.

The lenses in our eyes focus this reflected light onto the light-sensitive rods and cones on the retina at the back of our eyeballs. (The rods work in dim or dark situations and the cones in bright light.) These create variable electrical charges sent along the optic nerve to the brain. Our brains interpret these stimuli as the visions that we see before our eyes. Did you know that the curvature of our eyes results in the images we receive being upside down? Our brains turn them right-side up for us.

What we are seeing is the reflected light. Any light absorbed by the objects we are looking at, we will not see. The same is true about colour. We only see the colours that the objects we are looking at reflect. All other colours are the ones that have been absorbed by these objects and we will not see them. Colour is all about light reflecting off the things in the world around us and reflecting the light back to our eyes.

In the same way, it is our reactions to the realities we face in life that determine the kinds of lives we will lead. Different reactions, different lives. What does it mean to say that our reactions can be of overwhelming importance in determining our fate? It means that, to an important extent, our fate is in our own hands. (What does that do to the blame-games we have been nursing all our lives?)

I am getting to be what some people might term “an old guy.” Others, less kind, might say, “an fool.” One would have to be foolish to live a whole life without understanding the principle I have enunciated above. And yet, it is only at this late date that this has become so clear to me.

Of course, I always knew I had to hustle my butt if I wanted to achieve the things I desired for my family and me. Yet, I never achieved the clarity of insight that I now have. I would venture to say that there are others of my fellow travelers who might have been, who might still be, wanting in this matter.

When all is said and done, there is no substitute for having a positive attitude. There are so many good things in our lives that we have to appreciate, that we have to be grateful for. There are so many people we pass every day who are less fortunate than we are. But that does not absolve us from the need to actively present our best case to the world, to be up and at ‘em every day, meeting the challenges we face all day and face without. That’s what I am doing before we start.

Being open to the positive is a necessity if we hope to take advantage of any opportunities that might come our way if we reach out. Like the photons of light in our world, we move forward in our lives toward our goals in spite of impediments we might face; or we find paths to goals we hadn’t considered before.

I am not talking merely about amazing material possessions. I am talking about spending time working out how to ensure we are adding the colour we want to see in our lives. If all of this is dependent wholly on ourselves to determine what the elements of our lives are going to be – our parents or our partners or our bosses or the economy – then what are we going to do about it? If, in spite of our positive attitude, we are not happy, if we are not satisfied, what are we going to do about it? I must confess, I have never had this moment of clarity until I was 70 years of age.

That’s a whole lot of living to have gone through without thinking about such things. At the age of 71, unheralded, I flew across half a continent to try and reconnect with a woman I had known when I was teenagers more than 50 years before. I can report that we can look back now at almost 15 years of happily married life. We are keeping each other alive.

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Max Roytenberg is a Vancouver-based poet, writer and blogger. His book Hero in My Own Eyes: Tripping a Life Fantastic is available from Amazon and other online book sellers.
Camp helps lift spirits

REBECA KUROPATWA

T

he late Stewart Silver was born and raised in Montreal. He had worked as a standup comedian, and moved to Toronto in hopes of furthering his career. Justine Silver grew up in a Houston suburb. In late 1990, she followed her sister, who had moved to Toronto and, there, she joined Jewish online dating site Jdate. So had Stewart.

There was a chance you had to describe your perfect date,” recalled Justine. “Profile after profile included long romantic dinners and were all gusby and gross... but he said, ‘Yeah, after we grab a drink, we step out of the restaurant and trip over a big bag of money.’ I was like, ‘Oh, my gosh... that’s the kind of date I want!’

The couple took their time getting to know each other and, after a year and a half, got married.

To all appearances, Stewart was a healthy 44-year-old. He had biked up hills in Christie Pits Park the day before he had a fatal heart attack in November 2020. Born in Trinidad-Tobago, schooled in Barbados and Trinidad, Bill’s athleticism introduced him to Vancouver, where he competed in the javelin throw at the 1954 Vancouver Commonwealth Games.

Veterinary school in Guelph, Ont., followed his graduate degree in agriculture from the University of British Columbia. Bill and his first wife, Margareta Wendy Love, then moved to Barbados, where Bill, the first black veterinarian in that country, operated his veterinary clinic for 25 years. His creative mind and interest in food led to the development of several restaurants in Barbados, beginning with Brown Sugar and his pride and joy, Pieses.

Then Bill retired, he settled in Victoria, B.C. At the age of 70, he met and married Roslyn Kushner Belle and moved to Vancouver, where, for 18 years, their love and mutual support brought happiness and fulfillment to both.

The essence of Bill — his quiet intelligence, sense of integrity, warmth, strength of character, kind and generous spirit, sense of honour and very sense of humour — will be sorely missed by his sons Christopher and Jacob, grandson Amari, his widow Roslyn and family — Lindsay, Jordan, Connor; Bo Ellen; Rob, Nancy, Danielle, Josh — and by Bill’s friends.

Appreciation and thanks to Bill’s companions over the past few years, for their amazing care — a cut-above. They truly walked the Parkinson’s journey with us.

If you wish to make a donation in memory of Bill, please consider the family council at the Louis Brier Home and Hospital, or the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver’s Parkinson’s wellness program PWB Moves.

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For over 40 years, the JMAC has been dedicated to the careful preservation of our community’s history.

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For more information, call Steve at 604-689-1520

REBECA KUROPATWA is a Winnipeg freelance writer.

Continuity

Obituary

JEWISH INDEPENDENT • FEBRUARY 26, 2020

19
MISSION STATEMENT:
Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of all seniors, by providing Peer Support Services, Advocacy for seniors’ issues, Education and Outreach.

Our website www.jsalliance.org is a unique, comprehensive and easy to navigate resource for seniors. Learn about our Outreach, Advocacy and Peer Support Services; explore the archive of our publication, Senior Line Magazine, published three times a year; find an up-to-date Calendar of Events and more! Don’t forget to follow us on Facebook.

Volunteers are creating a better world, one person and one act of kindness at a time! Our Peer Support Services offers programs including Friendly Phone Calls, Friendly Home Visits, and Peer Support.

For more information on how to become a volunteer, call Grace Hann or Charles Leibovitch at 604-267-1555.

JSA Snider Foundation Empowerment Series 2019-20 #2 - Film: Music of the Heart
NEW DATE! Wednesday, March 11, 2020, 11:00am - JCC Wosk Auditorium - 950 W 41st Ave, Vancouver

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