

CAPE JEWISH CHRONICLE

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FREEDOM OF SPEECH: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD P6



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VIEWSBONNY'S BEAT

An optimistic mindset can reveal unexpected opportunities



BONNY FELDMAN
Editor

I recently had the opportunity to listen to Adrian Gore's keynote address at the annual Friends of the UJC event held in December last year. (You can read more about it on page 7 of this publication.)

The South African business leader spoke about how adopting an optimistic mindset – rather than the pessimistic outlook people often default to – can unlock ideas and possibilities that might otherwise remain unseen. His point was simple but powerful: when we focus only on what is wrong, we fail to recognise what is right and, in doing so, we become blind to the opportunities that the positives can create.

This idea stayed with me and made me reflect on how such thinking could be applied not only in business, but also in everyday life.

Take loneliness, for example – a concern I hear people express frequently. If someone moves beyond the feeling itself and begins to identify what is good in their life – “I am healthy,” “I have a car,” “I enjoy reading” – those positives can point towards practical solutions. A love of reading might lead to joining a book club, which in turn creates opportunities for connection and friendship.

Or consider the person who says, “I’ve turned 60 – old age

is looming.” Through a more optimistic lens, this stage of life may bring greater freedom, good health, or time to pursue long-neglected interests. That shift in perspective can open the door to new possibilities, whether it's investing more energy in a beautiful garden, volunteering, or taking part in a community activity such as an open garden day.

While Gore was speaking primarily about business and government, it seems to me that this mindset is just as valuable on a personal level. Choosing optimism does not mean ignoring difficulties; it means recognising that within most challenges lie opportunities, if only we are willing to look for them.

SHABBAT TIMES

DATE		PORTION	CANDLE LIGHTING		
			earliest	latest	ends
6/7 February	20 Shvat	Yitro	18:23	19:29	20:23
13/14 February	27 Shvat	Mishpatim (Shekalim)	18:18	19:23	20:15
20/21 February	4 Adar	Terumah	18:12	19:15	20:07
27/28 February	11 Adar	Tetzaveh (Zachor)	18:05	19:07	19:58

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VIEWS
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Freedom of speech: A double-edged sword


SIMONE SULCAS

Chairperson, Cape SAJBD

Freedom of speech is a complicated topic. My experience as a lawyer and as Chair of the Cape SAJBD has showed me its importance in speaking truth to power and defending our Jewish heritage; it is meant to empower the vulnerable and safeguard dignity. Yet, in an era of rising tensions, free speech is often weaponised to target the oppressed and unleash hatred. A sharper double-edged sword is hard to find.

Consider the horrific Bondi terrorist attack in Sydney last year. Lone assailants, radicalised by unchecked online rhetoric, targeted innocent Jews. It is a case study into how inflammatory speech on social media, and poorly veiled antisemitism in the guise of political critique, can metastasise into deadly violence. Subsequent investigations, reluctantly undertaken so as not to offend a significant voting bloc, showed how social media posts normalised dehumanising language against Jews, eroding societal safeguards until words become weapons. This tragedy drives home a stark truth: free speech without boundaries can morph into hate speech, which paves the way for atrocities.

Here in Cape Town, amid our diverse communities and historical scars, we must vigilantly monitor rhetoric's compliance with South African law. Our Constitution's Section 16 protects free expression but excludes "propaganda for war" and "incitement of imminent violence". The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair

Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) prohibits hate speech that impairs human dignity, while the Cybercrimes Act targets online harassment and cyberbullying. Social media platforms amplify voices, but they also spread poison – boycotts disguised as justice, conspiracy theories as debate. This demands careful management: report hate, educate on these legal red lines, and nurture dialogue that builds, as opposed to burns, bridges.

However, to blunt this sword's blade entirely would be to betray its most consequential purpose. Free speech is the lifeblood of righteous protest, as seen in Iran. As we speak, brave men and women are risking their lives to defy and topple a murderous and thuggish theocratic regime whose only purpose is to extract and oppress. They chant "Women, Life, Freedom" against the clerical tyranny, knowing that it might lead to their deaths. Thousands of protestors have lost their lives, but so dire are their circumstances and so strong their stand that they march on. Their once-silenced voices now pierce global consciousness, inspiring solidarity from Tehran to Table Mountain. For Jews, who have experienced and protested prejudice, pogroms, and ethnic cleansing, this resonates deeply – our Pesach story is one of crying out from enslavement, and our history is a testament to standing tall when others would have us brought low. Suppressing such speech anywhere invites tyranny everywhere.

FREE SPEECH WITHOUT BOUNDARIES CAN MORPH INTO HATE SPEECH, WHICH PAVES THE WAY FOR ATROCITIES.

The Board's challenge is to wield this sword wisely: condemn hate speech that incites harm, while amplifying righteous and needed protest. Let us monitor our rhetoric with vigilance, educate our youth on the line between critique and vilification, and stand in solidarity with genuine global freedom fighters. Only then will free speech not divide us – only then will it unite us. ●

REPORT ANTISEMITISM & HATRED

The Cape SAJBD closely monitors and investigates all acts of antisemitism in South Africa – but **we stand against all forms of hatred.**

Our 'No Place for Hate' campaign fights hatred directed against anyone to combat a culture of racism, antisemitism and prejudice in our country.

Report incidents of antisemitism and hate by sending a Whatsapp message to the

Antisemitism Hotline on 079 994 5573.

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PLACE
FOR HATE**

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Please report any suspicious activity or potential security threats specifically related to the Jewish Community or Communal facilities as well as medical emergencies to the

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on 086 18 911 18.**


CAPE TOWN




FRIENDS OF THE UJC CAPE TOWN
16 years of friendship | sustaining our community forever



Friends of the UJC Cape Town celebrate community and connection at Spes Bona



The annual Friends of the UJC Cape Town year-end event once again proved to be a highlight on the Cape Town Jewish community calendar, drawing a strong turnout from our many donors, and reinforcing the enduring bond among the community and its supporters, many of whom now live abroad.

Held on 23 December at the newly restored Spes Bona building in Gardens, the evening brought together local leaders, visiting donors and long-standing friends of the community for a meaningful and celebratory gathering.

Guests were welcomed with music and refreshments on arrival, setting a warm and convivial tone for the evening. The choice of venue was particularly significant. The 110-year-old Spes Bona property has recently been purchased, upgraded and fully renovated, and now houses a pioneering Senior Assisted Living programme. Completed in under 20 months, the project stands as a remarkable achievement

Hazel Levin, COO of Care Services, Paul Berman, Chairman of JCS and Henry Blumenthal, Chairman of Investec Wealth & Investment International



Guest Speaker Adrian Gore, founder and Group Chief Executive of the Discovery Group

and reflects the compassion, responsiveness and vision that underpin the Cape Town Jewish community. The facility provides a safe, enriching environment where older members of the community can live with dignity, care and independence.

Proceedings opened with welcoming remarks by Paul Berman, Chair of Jewish Community Services, who greeted guests and reflected on the importance of maintaining strong connections across generations and borders. During the evening, guests enjoyed a deli meal and live music, adding to the sense of celebration and togetherness.

Investec's Henry Blumenthal followed with a brief address, highlighting Investec's ongoing partnership with the community



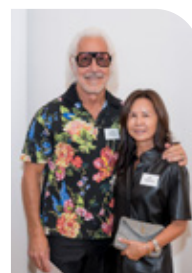
Samuel Seeff and Neal Menashe



Gail and Meyer Joffe

and introducing the evening's guest speaker, Adrian Gore, founder and CEO of Discovery.

Gore's address, titled *A Case for Optimism*, was one of the evening's key moments.



Carnie and Moi Matisonn



Solly Lison and Shelley Trope-Friedman

In his speech, Gore spoke about the tendency towards pessimism, particularly in challenging environments such as South Africa, and argued that optimism is not naïve, but a disciplined and practical mindset. He pointed to encouraging developments that often go unnoticed, including stronger collaboration in South Africa between business and government and signs of institutional improvement. His message resonated strongly with the audience, particularly in the context of community-led initiatives like Spes Bona, which demonstrate what is possible when optimism is paired with action.

The evening concluded with remarks from Marco van Embden, Chair of the Friends of

the UJC Cape Town and the David Susman Community Foundation (DSCF), who thanked Adrian and the guests, and spoke about the vital role played by the Friends.

Well-attended and warmly received, the event was both a celebration of achievement and a reaffirmation of shared purpose – a reminder of the strength of connection, generosity and optimism at the heart of Cape Town's Jewish community.

ARNIE WITKIN Z'L

It is with sadness that we share the news that Arnie Witkin has passed away. Arnie and Roni have been valued and supportive members and Friends of the UJC in Cape Town since its inception. Arnie will be deeply missed by the community. ●

Website: friendsoftheujc.org.za
Email: friends@ctjc.co.za



Ian Jacobson, Pam Jacobson and Antony Karabus



Liza Essers, Wendy Fisher, Dennis Goodman and David Berman





ARTS & CULTURE

Rediscovering rebels: Wolf Kibel and Lippy Lipshitz at the Cape Town Jewish Museum

Nearly a century after they shared a cramped studio and a fierce belief in their distinctive artistic voices, Wolf Kibel and Lippy Lipshitz have been reunited at the Cape Town Jewish Museum.

KAREN MILLER

It is the first time in almost fifty years that works by either artist have been exhibited in Cape Town on this scale, and many of the paintings, prints and sculptures on view have never before been shown in public. Their exhibition is less like a retrospective and more an act of recovery; curated by Jay van den Berg, this is, in his words, a “rediscovery,” and a highly significant one.

Bringing together some 300 artworks across all media, the exhibition includes the Palm Studios period of the mid-1930s, when Kibel and Lipshitz worked side by side. It is also, crucially, a reminder of how radical they were in their time and how



Wolf Kibel (1903–1938), Self-Portrait, oil on canvas laid down on board

resistant South Africa’s art establishment initially was to their work.

Van den Berg, Johannesburg-born and who trained at the University of Pretoria, is currently a Museum Research Curator for the Western Cape government, who maintains that, for him, “There is nothing as fascinating as being art detective.” His credentials include serving as associate curator on the 150-year exhibition of the Iziko South African National Gallery, as well as several previous projects with the Cape Town Jewish Museum.

This exhibition is the result of months of research, negotiation and tracking down works long hidden in private collections.

When Kibel and Lipshitz set up Palm Studios in 1934, South African art was deeply conservative. The National Gallery, the South African Society of Artists and even the Michaelis School of Fine Art favoured realism, conventional subject matter and technical finish. Modernism, especially the expressive, emotionally-charged modernism practised by Kibel and Lipshitz, was viewed with suspicion, even hostility. Early exhibitions by both artists, and particularly by Kibel, were met with disapproval and largely ignored.

Van den Berg believes that Lippy Lipshitz deserves recognition as “the father of South African modern art” – with Irma Stern as its mother. That assertion is deliberately provocative, but the works themselves make a compelling case. Although Lipshitz is best known as a sculptor, the exhibition demonstrates just how multi-dimensional he was: painter, draughtsman, printmaker and fearless experimenter with materials.

Born Israel Isaac Lipshitz in 1903 in Plungė, Lithuania, he showed artistic talent from early childhood, encouraged by his grandfather, who had built the local synagogue. The decorative carving and ornamentation of that building left a lasting impression on him. He came to Cape Town as a young man,

attended school here, and later spent four formative years in Paris and two in England. He spent the last two years of his life in Israel.

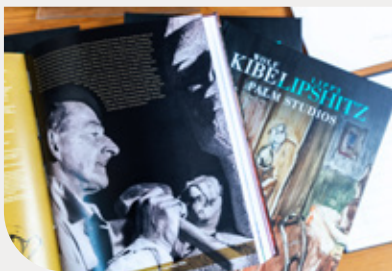
Unlike Kibel, Lipshitz achieved institutional recognition during his lifetime. He was offered a formal post at UCT’s Michaelis School of Fine Art in 1950, exhibited at the Venice Biennale that same year, and was awarded the sculpture medal by the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns in 1964. Yet, even so, his legacy has been strangely uneven. The last full-scale exhibition of his work in South Africa was held in 1999 at the Irma Stern Museum and, while there is a large depository of his work in Israel, it remains little acknowledged or studied. Van den Berg notes with some regret that one object has eluded him: Lipshitz’s pipe, a recurring presence in many of his self-portraits, could not be traced although he has managed to display Lipshitz’s actual chisels.

The story of Wolf Kibel is more tragic. Born into poverty in the Polish shtetl of Grodzisk Mazowiecki, he lived a life marked by instability and hardship. In 1920 he walked to Vienna and remained there for three years, later spending time in Palestine, where he contracted malaria. He was homeless for extended periods. An affidavit from his brother Samuel, the cantor of the Gardens Shul, eventually enabled him to settle in Cape Town, though his wife Freda and their children endured long separations and financial insecurity.

His art career was marked by struggle. He experienced failed exhibitions, persistent poverty and the pressure of supporting a growing family. His personality was intransigent: he avoided explaining his work, engaging in sales talk, or even consistently signing and dating his pieces, an attitude that did little to endear him to critics or buyers. Yet artistically he was groundbreaking. He was the first artist to exhibit monotypes in South Africa in significant numbers, notably at



Lippy (Israel Isaac) Lipshitz (1903–1980), Tree of Life (Umuthi Wentilo) (1950), yellowwood



the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg.

He died tragically young in 1938, aged just 34, after months in a tuberculosis ward at Groote Schuur Hospital. He lived to see almost no recognition of his work. A year after his death, the New Group, pioneers of South African modernism, was formed. It was too late for him, and it fell to Freda to preserve his work and ensure its survival.

That neglect has persisted. Kibel's last major exhibition was held at the South African National Gallery in 1976, and since then his reputation has faded from public view, even though his work is represented in every major South African collection. In 2025, however, a poignant act of recognition took place far from Cape Town. In Grodzisk Mazowiecki, now a commuter town near Warsaw, a major exhibition titled *Wolf Kibel: The Unknown Artist* was mounted. Ironically, only reproductions could be shown.

Seeing Kibel and Lipshitz together highlights striking contrasts. Lipshitz's work radiates energy and outward engagement; Kibel's is marked by melancholy and inwardness. Yet they shared a rebellious spirit and a commitment to expressive modernism. They argued, inspired one another, and supported each other in the face of a hostile cultural climate, until tensions and circumstances led to their eviction from Palm Studios in 1937.

Van den Berg has described this exhibition as a fight for the artists' legacy. He has restored the artists' Jewish identities, which were often downplayed or erased for commercial reasons, for example, 'Three Rabbis' becoming 'Three Figures' in auction catalogues. The exhibition design, by Paul Carstens, allows the works space to breathe while emphasising dialogue rather than hierarchy.

Van den Berg believes both artists would be deeply proud to see their work shown together in this space, the same museum that housed Marc Chagall's stained-glass windows two decades ago. Lipshitz and Kibel are embodiments of the South African Jewish experience: born in Eastern European shtetls, shaped by migration, and contributors of lasting significance to their adopted home. There is something profoundly fitting about their reunion here, beside the synagogue where Kibel's brother once sang, in a museum dedicated to that shared history. ●

The exhibition runs until the end of April, with further walkabouts led by Jay van den Berg on 10, 17 and 24 February.



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VIEWS CONNECT, COLLABORATE, COMMUNITY

AM I DREAMING?



DANIEL BLOCH
 Exec. Director
 Cape SAJBD

Each December holiday season, our offices close between Christmas and the first week of January, usually reopening around the 5th. With public holidays and weekends, the office is, in essence, only closed for a few days. What was different this year, you may ask?

This December, my phone did not ring. WhatsApp messages were not flooding in. Emails were limited to spam and news alerts. No one was calling to report antisemitic or anti-Israel incidents. I also didn't seem to see the usual barrage of anti-Israel articles in the media.

AM I DREAMING?

For the first time in two years, I can honestly say that I was able to switch off, relax, and spend some much-needed quality time with my family. More importantly, I was able to recharge my batteries. My days consisted of

lazing by the pool, swimming, and binge-watching *Stranger Things* – Season 5 was amazing!! I did, of course, check my emails, read the news, and follow the usual sites, just to be sure I wasn't dreaming and that, in fact, all was quiet on the Western Front.

It appears the haters were also on holiday. The one protest that did take place outside Kirstenbosch barely mustered a handful of protesters. (I saw a video of a broken-down car belonging to one of the protesters – perhaps that explains the poor turnout.) Or maybe they've simply lost steam, and no one, including their own supporters, is interested in wasting time anymore. Not even the inclusion of the DRC and Sudan flags on their marketing paraphernalia seems enough to persuade people to miss the beach or the local derby in favour of parading through our streets under the banner of 'human rights activism'.

Let's hope I'm not dreaming and that 2026 brings with it a largely protest-free year. That may be wishful thinking – I don't expect the protests to disappear entirely. However, statistics show that anti-Israel protests in Cape Town have dropped by more than 50% in both frequency and attendance. The turnouts were, quite frankly, dismal.

So, what should we be focused on in 2026? I'm going to repeat what I've been saying for the past two years: we must continue to live our Jewish way of life. We must continue

living as proud Jews and proud Zionists. We do not need to back down because a small group of ragtag professional protesters decides to scream and shout. I also encourage everyone to watch ED Talks, my new Board podcast which focuses on our community, the work of the Board, and who's who in the zoo! Check it out on You Tube and our social media pages.

Having participated in several Chanukah events this December – driving around the peninsula with a menorah on my car and dancing the night away on the final evening of Chanukah, surrounded by hundreds of fellow Jews – I feel invigorated and full of beans. Not the kind that give you gas, and not the kind that grow beanstalks. I'm talking about Yiddishkeit beans: the kind that fill you with song, prayer, and a deep longing to be with your fellow Jew. The kind of beans that get me to shul on Shabbos, inspire me to drive 500km to see our youth movements in action, and continue to motivate me to do more for our community.

2026 is not a year for dreaming. It is a year for doing. Do more Jewish activities. Spend more time working within communal organisations. Engage more with your fellow Jew. On holiday, I slept late and had good dreams. I'm now back at work, wide awake – no need for dreaming.

Although, perhaps, the occasional nap to recharge wouldn't hurt. ●



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Our Executive Director, Daniel Bloch, explores our community – talking to community members, stakeholders and partners.

From Cape SAJBD board members to personalities like Gareth Cliff, to individuals living in George and Oudtshoorn – in our Ed Talks podcast, Daniel highlights the work of the Board, discusses serious issues affecting our community, and showcases positive stories. All while having some fun.

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The MOR Conference, Israel

WIZO South Africa
Women's International Zionist Organization

This year's Meeting of Representatives (MOR) in Israel was a journey into the heart of Zionism, leadership, and resilience, highlighting the impact WIZO makes across Israeli society.

Our first day took us to the Neve WIZO houses, where children receive care, dignity and opportunity. WIZO funds 90% of staff degrees at Lewinsky College, Israel's first teacher-training college, ensuring highly qualified educators across more than 163 daycares. WIZO South Africa sponsors five homes, providing host parents and professional support to help children build independent, hopeful futures.

At Nir HaEmek in the Jezreel Valley, supported by WIZO Argentina and WIZO USA, we saw the power of global partnership.

WIZO President Anat Vidor highlighted that Zionism is a mindset, and that the diaspora plays a vital role in sustaining it.

In Jerusalem, we heard from former IAF Commander Amikam Norkin on Leadership, Hope, and Air Power. A key military figure, he and his wife are both graduates of WIZO Nahalal Youth Village. Former IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari shared powerful insights on leadership during crisis, a vivid reminder that Israel's story is still unfolding.

We met remarkable women from Israel's north, an often-overlooked region, who shared moving stories of survival and rebuilding. WIZO's work with the Druze community highlighted unity, respect, and shared destiny.

A year after the war, many children still struggle with sleep, anxiety, and routine.



Shelley Trope-Friedman with Honorary President Esther Mor

During the 1.5-month daycare closures, WIZO maintained close contact with families, providing emotional support to children. WIZO daycares in hospitals and universities provided for emergency workers' children. Recent months saw 480 educators trained, underscoring WIZO's commitment to quality care and long-term resilience.

The final theme, *She is the Future*, captured WIZO's mission, expressed by Anat Vidor: "Send young women to us, and we will return them to you as leaders."

Ending proceedings, the performance by Daniel Weiss from Kibbutz Be'eri, who lost both parents on October 7th, conveyed both grief and hope, an echo of Israel itself.

We left the MOR inspired and profoundly aware of WIZO's impact. The largest Women's Zionist movement in the world, WIZO strengthens families, empowers women, and supports Israelis at every stage of life. For over 100 years, WIZO has proven that leadership, education, and care can transform a nation.

Now more than ever, WIZO needs women ready to lead, advocate, and act.

Join WIZO. Support WIZO. Stand with WIZO.

Because she is the future, and together, we will ensure that the future shines bright.

Am Yisrael Chai.
Shelley Trope-Friedman
President, WIZO South Africa ●

STORIES

From a simple act of kindness to a small African miracle

Near the tail end of COVID, when the world was slowly emerging from lockdown but still carrying a lot of anxiety, my daughter, India Harris, was 16 and becoming increasingly aware of the growing homeless community in Cape Town.

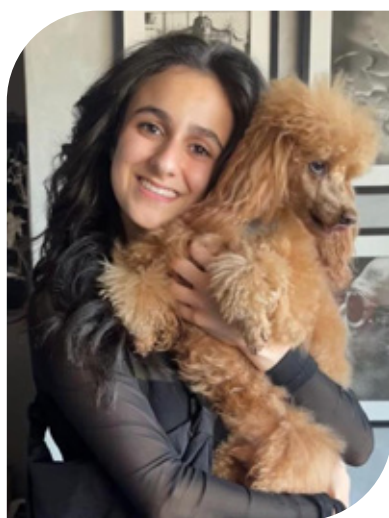
BIANCA RESNEKOV

On our daily school commute, she began making sandwiches each week and handing them out through the car window. It was a small act, but one filled with heart.

Around that time, we spoke about how else we might help. I asked India if she would like to connect with Souper Troopers, a non-profit organisation I already supported. Souper Troopers does extraordinary work with people experiencing homelessness, offering everything from counselling and medical care referrals to training, upskilling and support. India agreed.

Soon after, we met with Caryn Gootkin and Kerry Hoffman from Souper Troopers to explore how we could contribute. We shared our love of crafting and creativity, suggesting skills like bracelet weaving and other handmade projects that could be taught and shared. What followed was something none of us could quite have predicted.

Caryn and Kerry mentioned they had received a suggestion from someone on their mailing list to



India Harris

create an African version of the Guatemalan worry dolls. That sparked an idea – and soon India and I were experimenting at home with recycled cardboard, paper clips, stockings and shweshwe fabric. Out of these humble materials, the very first African Worry Doll was born.

We then went into The Humanity Hub, Souper Troopers base camp, and taught four people how to make the dolls. Something magical happened in that space. The creative process



offered a welcome escape – a chance to imagine, design, and play – while gently setting worries aside for a while. And when the dolls began selling, the sense of pride and validation was profound. Creating something of value that brought comfort to others changed everything.

We continued making the dolls and shared them on Instagram, where they quickly captured attention. Post-COVID anxiety was everywhere, and people were drawn to the idea of gifting a small totem of comfort and support as they re-entered the world. Psychologists and counsellors began buying them for their patients and kept coming back for more. Mothers tucked them into school bags. Travellers carried them overseas as meaningful gifts from South Africa.

Most importantly, the Souper Troopers loved making them.

The dolls seemed to tick every box. Today, African Worry Dolls are stocked in gift stores across Cape Town, including AafrikaA at the V&A Waterfront, the Blink Shop in Sea Point, CraftArt Emporium in Simon's Town, the Oranjezicht City Farm Market, and museum shops around the world – from Paris and Germany to Dubai. They have appeared at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair and the Jewish Literary Festival, quietly spreading their message of care and creativity.

The range has grown too: keyrings, magnets, brooches, Christmas tree angels and elves,



Souper Troopers with the dolls



and even plus-size doorstep dolls. Each one is handmade with care.

There are now around 30 'Troopers' involved in making the dolls, each with their own specialist skills in the process. Odette Oliver, one of the original four Troopers we taught, now supervises this retail arm of Souper Troopers. The project has become a sustainable source of income for Souper Troopers, helping the organisation grow while drawing interest from international buyers and corporate groups. These groups even come to make dolls themselves, guided by the homeless team as part of team-building experiences – a powerful role reversal that builds dignity and connection.

What started as a teenager handing out sandwiches has grown into a small African miracle – one doll, one story, one worry at a time. ●

You can find the dolls on Instagram at @africanworrydolls and learn more about the incredible work behind them at @soupertroopers.

LAYERS OF MEMORY:

A Journey Through the Palimpsest of Jewish History in Eastern Europe

Poland: 27 June – 4 July 2026
Optional Lithuania Extension: 5–7 July 2026

Led by the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre, this immersive study tour explores the layered landscapes of Jewish life, destruction, silence, and renewal in Poland and Lithuania. Guided by leading experts, participants engage directly with historic sites, memorial landscapes, and contemporary efforts of remembrance, education, and cultural revival.

STUDY TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Warsaw: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Jewish Historical Institute, and a guided walk through the former Warsaw Ghetto, including resistance sites such as Mila 18 and the Umschlagplatz

Lublin & Zamość: Brama Grodzka and Zamość's Renaissance Old City, home to a unique Sephardi Jewish community

Sites of Destruction: Belżec death camp, Zbylitowska Góra mass-execution site, and other key memorial landscapes

Jewish Heritage: Visits to beautifully preserved synagogues, including Łańcut and Czarny Dunajec

Kraków: Jewish history in the Old City, Kazimierz, and the former Ghetto

Auschwitz-Birkenau: Guided study visit to the most infamous site of the Holocaust

Reflection & Renewal: Learning session at the Galicia Jewish Museum, Shabbat in Kraków, and the Jewish Culture Festival closing concert

Optional Lithuania Extension

Vilnius (Vilna): The "Jerusalem of the North," Jewish museums, the site of the Great Synagogue, and Ponary

Šeduva: Visit to the Lost Shtetl Museum and exploration of Lithuania's former shtetls

For expressions of interest and more information:
admin@holocaust.org.za



COMMUNITY NEWS

SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATORS VISIT ISRAEL FOR KKL-JNF EDUCATORS SEMINAR

Late December 2025 saw a delegation of educators from South Africa and Australia arrive in Israel for a 10-day Educators Seminar led by Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael–Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF). Of the eight South Africans on the tour, seven were from Cape Town.

The Cape Town teachers, a mix of preschool and high school educators were: Milena Schultheiss, Wendy Faull, Rachel Laughlin, Pharon Konnie, Soelega Petersen, Samantha Jacobson and Ntombi Ndamase.

According to Rachel Laughlin, a Hebrew language teacher at Herzlia High School, "All the participants come from different backgrounds and even religions, but we had the same goal in mind: to see and appreciate what Israel is to us educators in a Jewish school."

Most of the educators teach in Jewish schools and early childhood programmes.



South African participants on the tour

Combining professional development with direct encounters with Israel's social, historical, environmental and security realities, it provides educators with meaningful tools to strengthen Jewish and Zionist identity in their communities.

According to KKL-JNF, the Educators Seminar is an opportunity to strengthen ties between Israel and Jewish communities worldwide, particularly through educational leadership. Participants return to their communities with a richer educational toolbox and a renewed ability to teach about Israel, sustainability, Jewish values, and resilience in a meaningful and informed way.

The seminar also serves as a foundation for long-term partnerships between KKL-JNF and Jewish educational institutions – an initiative made more meaningful at a time when Jewish communities abroad need support more than ever.

The itinerary spanned the length of Israel and combined educational content, site visits, and volunteer activity. Rachel Laughlin comments that, "We were taken from the north to the south, exploring the land, the culture, and learning about the education provided to Israel's children. We had many truly emotional experiences in a number of places, in particular at the memorial sites from October 7th." Visits to various sites brought participants face-to-face with communities impacted by the events in 2023, highlighting stories of resilience and rebuilding, which are especially poignant considering the current challenges faced by Jewish communities abroad.

A strong element of the learning gained was about the work of KKL-JNF. As Herzlia Afrikaans teacher Milena Schultheiss points out, "It was inspiring to witness the breadth of KKL-JNF's work beyond tree planting, particularly the vital role they play in shaping the future of Israel's youth. And, by investing in education and in the educators at Jewish schools, they empower us to become role models for our students, ensuring a stronger future for generations to come." ●





The Western Cape Jewish community welcomes you!

If you or your family have moved to the Western Cape in the past few years, or if you know of anyone who has joined our community, then please connect with us. We would like to assist you as best we can to ensure your transition is as smooth as possible.

Find out more about this incredible community and how we can work together!

We will be hosting a **Welcoming Event** in **March 2026** where we will be showcasing what our community has to offer you. **Watch this Space for more details**

If you have moved to Cape Town and want to find out more, please contact sajbd2@ctjc.co.za

Let's continue to **grow** and **strengthen** our Jewish community!



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OUR
COMMUNITY



**THE DAVID SUSMAN
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Sustaining our Community Forever



YOUTH

Jewish youth camps, December 2025

In December every year, excitement builds among local Jewish youth because it's camp season! Attending a youth camp with one's peers has become almost a rite of passage for young people in our community, and there are plenty of options available for them to choose from.



Bnei Akiva

BNEI AKIVA

December 2025 will be remembered by the Bnei Akiva community for a particularly touching moment at the annual end-of-year camp: the opening of the Beit Daniel Perez Structure, a special building dedicated to the memory of Daniel Perez, a fallen soldier who was kidnapped on October 7th. Cape Town Camp Co-ordinator Dani Cohen comments that, "The opening ceremony was deeply inspiring and emotional, featuring powerful words shared by his father, Rabbi Perez. His message resonated strongly with both madrichim and chanichim, reminding us of resilience, unity, and the importance of Jewish continuity."

Beit Daniel quickly became a popular space at the Bnei Akiva campsite, which is located in Hartenbos, not far from Mossel Bay. For the 1 600 madrichim and chanichim, Beit Daniel offered a safe and inclusive space for relaxation and connection – a place buzzing with energy, where children could engage in life-size chess, play basketball, and have fun in the pool.

According to Dani, "This year was important for Bnei Akiva Cape Town because we reached a record-breaking milestone of having over 200 madrichim and chanichim at the camp. They were joined by campers from Johannesburg and Durban, ranging in age from 9 to 23."

CAMP KESHER

According to Lindi Katzoff of Bikkur Cholim (The Jewish Society for Visiting the Sick), which runs the annual camp at their campsite in Muizenberg, "Camp Keshet is a Jewish youth camp that fosters connection, community, and personal growth in a safe and inclusive environment. Through engaging activities and values-based programming, campers build friendships, strengthen their Jewish identity, and develop confidence. The camp creates meaningful experiences that leave a lasting impact well beyond the camp itself."

The camp is geared to create an environment conducive for children who struggle socially or who experience difficulties at home to build friendships while enjoying fun activities with their peers. "Our focus is neither religion nor Zionism," Lindi continues. "For us, it's more about creating the environment for children to enjoy themselves and to build relationships with others, and so to strengthen their Jewish identity and values. Many of our campers attend to develop confidence, and to be part of a warm, supportive community."

Children attending the camp come from diverse Jewish backgrounds from all over South Africa, including Cape Town.

HABONIM MACHANEH MAKOM LIGDOL

The 2025 annual Habonim Machaneh, held at Habonim's campsite in Onrus, took the theme 'A Place to Grow', creating the opportunities for channies to explore new skills, deepen friendships, and engage meaningfully with Israel, Judaism and the dream of a better future.

The camp caters for a wide age range: from eight to 23, and hundreds of young people came together from across South Africa, as well as from other Southern African countries and beyond, including from Australia, the UK and Israel.

In addition to the many activities of a Jewish and Zionist nature, the channichim enjoyed hiking in the Fernkloof mountains, swimming in the nearby tidal pools, and surfing at some of the Overberg's gorgeous beaches. Major goals of the camp are to



Habonim

develop independence, grow creativity, learn leadership skills, and enhance a sense of community. Habonim also hosted Ikamva Youth as part of an ongoing partnership with the organisation, which is geared to create connections among young South Africans from diverse backgrounds.

According to Sasha Rodenacker, the Rosh Machaneh 2025 (Director of Summer Camp 2025), "The success of Machaneh Makom Ligdol is another step in the continuous building of Habonim within our community. The memories, friendships, and lessons forged at this Machaneh will continue to inspire and strengthen our vibrant movement."

NETZER

In 2025, explains Daniella Beswick, the Director of Netzer South Africa, "We ran day camps, not a traditional machaneh. And, despite not being a conventional year-end camp, it was clear that the channies had a fantastic time and really enjoyed being together."

The programme involved undertaking various activities around Cape Town, such as a visit to the Clay Café, doing a Shabbat Silvermine hike, and taking part in Temple Israel's Chanukkah party. Commenting in particular on the group's visit to Glendale, Daniella says, "The most memorable part of our day camps was at Glendale, where our channies really showed how kind and caring they are. The visit also revealed how important this type of Tikken Olam is."

The day camps brought together between 25 and 30 children aged six to 13. A few teenagers were also involved. ●



Netzer

STORIES

Memories of a childhood in Calvinia

Forever keen to take on a challenge, and certainly not one to slow down because of age, Shirley Kantor has led a life she describes as “blessed”. And this year will see the fulfilment of a big dream: the publication of her book, *Vilna to Calvinia: Words in the Wind*.

“Calvinia was the town where I was born and where I spent the first 10 years of my life,” she explains. “My father’s family, the Kleins, were pioneers in Calvinia, and I have long held a strong affinity to the town, its people and the Hantam”. She left Calvinia following the sudden death of her father when she was just a small child, but ‘rediscovered’ it as an adult, when she visited the town in search of a greater understanding of her father. “My dad, Bennie Klein, was born in Calvinia, and lived there throughout his life. He is buried in the Jewish cemetery in the town, and I have a strong sense of responsibility for the upkeep of the cemetery because of this,” she says.

With her love of Calvinia bolstered by numerous visits during her adult years, Shirley chose to make the Jewish presence in the town the core of her Masters in Fine Art thesis, an achievement completed at a far older age than most graduates. “I started studying at UCT after my sons, Charles and Daniel, graduated,” she recalls. “I’ve always been interested in art. After obtaining my Bachelors and Honours degrees, graduating on the Dean’s Merit List, I went on to do my Masters, and I graduated at UCT’s Michaelis School of Fine Art, with a recommendation for a distinction, when I was well into my 50s.”

The installation, ‘A Klein History maar n Lang Storie: The Jews of Calvinia: dispersed, deceased but not forgotten,’ formed the basis of her Master’s thesis – a visual representation of Jewish life in Calvinia.



The original sign in front of Bennie Klein's shop in Calvinia. Below: Shirley Kantor



Shirley Kantor's permanent exhibit in the Calvinia Museum

The exhibit – which includes a recreation of the Ark, photographs and various items, books, kippot, talleisim, and tefillin from the Calvinia shul and from her parents’ home – is today a permanent feature of the Calvinia Museum (formerly the synagogue), serving as a record of the presence of Jews in the town during its earliest days.

Shirley’s focus on the town’s Jewish past during her studies became the impetus for the theme of her soon-to-be-published book. “After I’d graduated, I continued studying as an occasional student at UCT, and did a wide variety of literary courses, including one on



creative writing. My story ‘Calvinia Stop’ subsequently became the inspiration for my book,” she explains. The book, which Shirley describes as ‘magical realism’ fiction, is the

culmination of her research into the life of her grandmother Anna, her father’s mother. Anna came to Calvinia from Vilna in 1895.

“It was certainly a case of culture shock for Anna to have had to live in this dusty, rural town. Shirley has written of this: “Vilna was the cultural centre of Europe. Theatres and art and music, the Palestine of Lithuania. Calvinia only had a language she couldn’t understand, a windmill squeezing water from dry earth, and a bioscope where the whites were pelted with toilet paper and pissed on by the coloured children who, due to Apartheid, were forced to sit upstairs on broken benches.” And “When Grandpa fetched Granny from Vilna, she didn’t want to leave. ‘I refuse to live in a heathen town without a synagogue,’ she said.”

Shirley credits her lecturers and husband, Professor Brian Kantor, for inspiring her to record her memories of Calvinia in her writing. He has also been a significant force in her academic achievements over the years, capping her at her graduation. ●

The Cape Jewish Chronicle will keep readers informed about the publication of Shirley’s book.



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BOOKS

Deborah Posel's *Darker Shade of Pale* – from Shtetl to Colony

Reading Deborah Posel's *Darker Shade of Pale* – from Shtetl to Colony is a dive into that highly volatile subject of immigration. If that sounds like an opportunity for heated debate – stop right there! Because it is so much more than that.

It is a family story, revolving around Posel's grandfather Maurice; an unremarkable man. It is the story of the many Jewish immigrants from the Pale of Settlement, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and part of Poland, who came to South Africa in the early twentieth century. It is an empathetic uncovering of a history that many share. A personal look at family origins, identities, the challenges faced, the how and where myths emanate, assimilation – or not – into a new life, the agony of settling, the hope and the dread of a new beginning, of fitting in. It debunks the myth that all Jews are exceptional because most of those immigrants were not; exactly like Posel's grandfather. How did these Jews integrate from the shtetl to another version of Empire – 'a British colony preoccupied by its wealth and Whiteness;' As a Jew you were seen as 'a darker shade of pale', even though you were White.

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Scan the QR code to go to www.cjc.org.za to search for this book review and listen.




Reviewed
by BERYL
EICHENBERGER

Posel was not too fond of grandfather Maurice – not an endearing personality, his wife Erna was much warmer and she baked! So what made Posel, renowned sociologist, historian, and academic, pick up these fragments of her family life and pursue a grandfather that she had never warmed to?

It reads like a detective novel, starting with the first discovery amongst her late father's papers. The steamship ticket bringing her great-grandmother Beila and children to Cape Town piqued her curiosity. It seemed to be the only retained piece of family history. Why this?

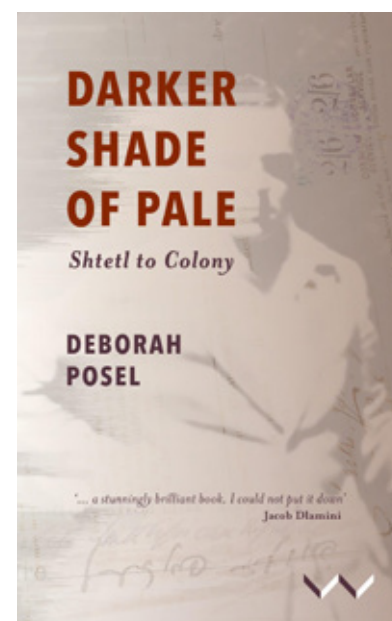
Posel is nothing if not meticulous and her searching has documented an important piece of Jewish history, one that is accessible and relatable to the layman, and has filled in some of her own family puzzle. Because, like most immigrants, the older generation did not speak of their past. Unless there were 'faribels'

which were carried through generations – and there were...

From that first clue, she started looking for others, rewarded at times, frustrated at others, but persistent, she sifted through mountains of material which revealed not only the family picture but is of significance in understanding the plight of the Jewish immigrant, reverberations that echo down the centuries.

Her scope is vast yet never unwieldy, clear, concise, friendly. In Cape Town, the melting pot of District Six embraced her early immigrant family. She tracks the Jewish contribution to Johannesburg, discovering 'Posel's Yard', exposing the settlements, the living conditions: crafting a story from many scraps, the informed speculation is as engaging as the facts.

I am not normally a non-fiction reader but this book drew me in deeply as Posel unpicks the tiny pieces of the fabric of Jewish immigration. Maurice certainly did not fit the picture that all Jews were achievers, but he had adopted a British façade with not a trace of Yiddish to be heard. Always referring to Sir Carruthers



Beattie – who? The discovery of this esteemed gent is a deliciously told story which will have you laughing out loud.

It touched me as I recognised the parallels of my own family. Although I am 2nd generation British-born, my grandparents came from the Ukraine, seeking a better life, escaping pogroms. But about their lives there is little information other than our memories. And so this has been enriching for me on a personal level.

Posel has written an important memoir that will speak not only to the South African Jewish community but those curious about cultural heritage. Easy to read, with many references, short chapters allow you to process the story. A vividly wrought picture, it goes a long way in creating understanding of a very misunderstood population. ●

The book is available at the Gitlin, the Book lounge and all good bookstores.

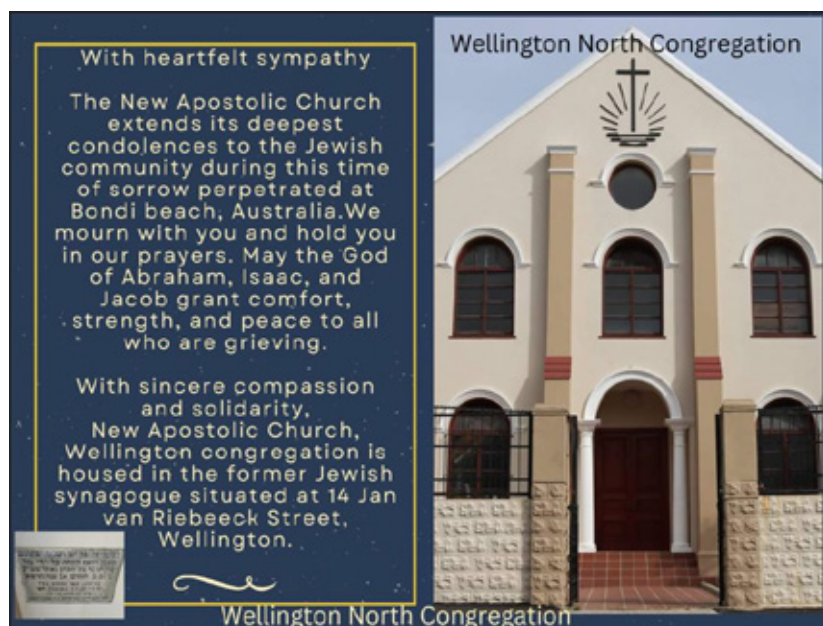


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WINELANDS COMMUNITY

Celebrating support from our Christian brethren

Recently, Rabbi Stuart Serwator received a truly meaningful letter of support for the Jewish community of Cape Town – in fact, for Jews around the world.



It came from the Reverend André Aubrey Louw of the New Apostolic Church, Wellington North.

Rabbi Serwator told the Chronicle, “I first met Reverend Louw about five years ago, when he was part of a group of schoolteachers who attended a seminar about the Holocaust at Yad Vashem, organised by the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre. Following our initial meeting, he later contacted me regarding the restoration of the foundation stone of the original Wellington synagogue, which was subsequently deconsecrated and is now owned by the New Apostolic Church. The occasion was the coming centenary celebration of the building, and the foundation stone was restored. This gesture clearly demonstrated the enormous respect that Reverend Louw has for the Jewish community.”

At year-end last year, Reverend Louw again contacted Rabbi Serwator. He was in Paarl at the shul, hoping to find a representative of the Jewish community because he had an



Sympathy Card to Jewish Community

Left: Rev AA Louw

important message of support for our community: in the wake of the terror attack at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Reverend Louw’s community wanted to express their sympathy and show their support for Jewish people.

Since the shul was closed, the Reverend then contacted Rabbi Serwator, in an effort to get his message to the Cape Town Jewish community. Reverend Louw made the following comments, and sent a card to Rabbi Serwator, which he asked should be shared with a wider Jewish audience:

“Hereby our deepest sympathy and prayers to the Jewish community in South Africa and abroad. We trust that our GOD will comfort and keep you through this bitter hour and tend

THE WELLINGTON JEWISH COMMUNITY: A SHORT HISTORY

Nestled among the mountain ranges of the Cape Winelands, the town of Wellington is noted for both its natural beauty and the quality of its agricultural produce. Established in 1840, it takes its name from the 1st Duke of Wellington, hero of the 1815 Battle of Waterloo.



The last President of the Wellington shul, Mr Eli Schkolne

Rabbi Stuart Serwator, who has an interest in the town, describes the road leading to Wellington via Bain’s Kloof as offering “stupendous views and panoramic landscapes.”

The Jewish presence in Wellington dates back to 1855, when Mr Rothkugel from Germany opened an inn in Bain’s Kloof. More Jews settled in the 1890s and, by the early 20th century, the community was large enough to establish a Hebrew Congregation. From 1902, services were held in rented premises until a synagogue was built in 1921 at 14 Jan van Riebeeck Street. By then, the Congregation had also established a cemetery after receiving land from the Governor of the Cape. During the 1940s, a manse, Hebrew school and communal hall were added.

Rabbi Serwator recalls a sign in the shul, next to the President’s box, which read: “Talking during Services is forbidden!”

As in many smaller towns, the community later diminished, and the synagogue was sold in 1982. The congregation then amalgamated with the Paarl

Jewish congregation, which remains active today.

The Congregation employed ministers from 1903 to 1978, including Rev Friedgood, Rev A Bruk, Rev Kamionsky, Rev Cantor J Herison, Rev M Rabin and Rev E Holtzman.

Well-known Jewish residents included Bennie and Helen Katzman; Philip Sarembock, who served twice as mayor; Eli Schkolne, the Congregation’s last president; Charlie Kling; Ellie and Judy Geffen; ‘Gielie’ Kropman; Mr Nicholls; David and Ettie Korzuch; and Dr Keith Sarembock, who still practises in Wellington.

Ouma-Granny’s House, established some years ago in a Victorian home in Fountain Street, housed a museum collection belonging to journalist Joyce Hoogenhout-Morse, including items of Jewish interest. Sadly, it closed in 2018 due to theft and inadequate maintenance.

Rabbi Serwator acknowledges the contribution of Mrs Tanya Jellin and Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities, Volume 2 – both provided much of the history of the town.

to your needs. Be assured that we think of you and hold you constantly in our prayers.

“Keep as comfort the words of Isaiah, ‘Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your GOD; I will strengthen you, I

will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.’ (Isaiah 41:10).”

Rabbi Serwator concludes, “This gesture really touched me! One wonders which other faith leader would have gone to such trouble.”

WINELANDS COMMUNITY



Ivan, Aunty Evie and Devorah



Seb, Milan, Ryan and Max doing their thing.



The ballabostas Adele and Tanya



The merry bakers

The Great Paarl Challah Bake

Against the background of a declining Jewish population in South Africa, a few areas of the country are experiencing a revitalisation of the Jewish presence, in particular as new people arrive in the area to settle and establish their homes.

One example of this is the town of Paarl, which was once a significant centre of Jewish life but which has seen a major decline in population numbers in recent times. But now, the tide is turning, and a new cohort of Jews



Rebbetzin Chana teaching the secrets of Challah

are settling in the area, taking advantage of the wonderful geographic treasures that make up the Cape Winelands region.

And the growing community showed its unity during a recent event organised by the Paarl Shul, under Rabbi Brian and Rebbetzin Chana Opert. As Rabbi Opert comments, "First time in the history...of the Winelands (some might have thought it could never happen), on 4th December, over 80 people got together to spend an evening baking Challah. To place it in perspective, that number is greater than the number of official members of the community!"

According to Tanya Glazer, "Adele de Almeida and I organised the Challah Bake after thinking of how to integrate the community."

The venue – the Goatshed Restaurant at Fairview – was graciously opened to the community by Charles Back of Fairview

farms. "This was a perfect setting for this auspicious occasion," comments Rabbi Opert, expressing his appreciation to Charles for his generosity.

The event was a gathering of the whole community, people of all ages and cultures, joining in a spirit of unity, gratitude and blessing. It was an evening of connection – bringing about warmth, tradition and togetherness into a space, creating something meaningful. "It is wonderful to know there are people outside of the faith who supported and appreciated this event," says the Rabbi.

That support came in the form of the people who joined in the event, as well as in the many donations and the time spent by a number of people who helped with the logistics.

SUPPORTERS AND DONORS FOR THE EVENT

Tanya Glazer and Adele De Almeida

Errol & Greg Stern of Addis

Bruce Glazer

Sotheby's Paarl

Jared Kahn of Whitehouse

Louis & Dennis Minitzer

David Novis

Belvedere Olive Oil

The spiritual input was ably given by Rebbetzin Chana in her inimitable and charismatic manner. Transforming a bread-baking experience into the spiritual experience of baking Challahs for Shabbos – explaining how each constituent represents a concept, deeper and more meaningful than a mere ingredient.

According to Rabbi Opert, "The Paarl Hebrew Congregation is growing, together with the Winelands Jewish population. We are slowly but methodically transforming our community into a vibrant and welcoming congregation that welcomes all for a Friday night service, a Power Shabbos (held every six weeks or so), or one of our special functions. Chana and I and the entire Paarl Shul committee invite and look forward to sharing many wonderful communal experiences with you...beyond the Boerewors Belt!" ●

STORIES



Stolpersteine in memory of the Schlein family

Genealogical research uncovers family members

Former Capetonian Janice Levy, daughter of Fred Levy z'l, contacted the Cape Jewish Chronicle to share research undertaken by her cousin, Sivan Kaufman, into their family's history in Germany. The *Chronicle* has previously featured Fred's own story of escaping Nazi Germany as a baby.

Although she has never lived in Cape Town, Sivan has strong ties to the city and its Jewish community. Born in Israel and now living in Berlin, Germany, her interest in genealogy has enabled her family to connect with relatives around the world they did not previously know existed.

"My father, Ronny Kaufman, and Janice's father were first cousins," Sivan explains. "Their mothers were sisters, surnamed Bernstein. On the maternal side, the family name was Koeppler. The Bernstein-Koeppler family has been a main focus of my research."

The two sisters and their families lived close to one another in Vredehoek in Cape Town and were extremely close-knit. Ronny recalls, "It felt like we each had four parents." He left Cape Town in 1965 to make



Otto Schlein and his family

Aliyah to Israel, where he has lived since.

Ronny remembers the German émigré community in Cape Town with affection. "It was small and very close," he says. "Everyone was a refugee, sharing the trauma of what they had experienced in Nazi Germany in the 1930s."

Over several years, Sivan gathered extensive information about the Bernstein-Koeppler family and compiled a family

tree of more than a thousand members now living worldwide. "My father knew a great deal of the family history and wrote down many names," she says. "I also used genealogical websites like Ancestry and uncovered many relatives we hadn't known about."

Her research led to connections with cousins in Germany, Israel and the USA. "Two descendants live in Germany – one in Berlin, where I met him after identifying him as family. The resemblance to my grandmother was striking," she says. "I'm still in touch with his son, my third cousin. Another third cousin lives in Israel; her father was the oldest living Bernstein family member until his recent death last year."

Beyond the Bernstein-Koeppler line, Sivan also traced another branch of Fred's family on his father's side. "They changed their surname from Levy to Lee after Fred's uncle Herbert arrived in the United States," she explains. Herbert's son, Peter Lee, lives in the USA and was part of a three-man comedy troupe, *The Pickle Brothers*. Sivan managed to connect Fred with this relative shortly before Fred's death. Janice recalls that a week before her father passed away, a FaceTime call was arranged with family members present.

"Our family suffered many losses to the Nazis," Ronny notes. "Fred and my uncle fled Germany, while siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins were murdered."



Family tree of the Bernstein and Schlein families



TU B'SHVAT, 2 FEBRUARY

May you be blessed with growth, renewal, and abundance this Tu B'Shvat.

Pictures courtesy of: JNFSA



Sivan organised the laying of *Stolpersteine* ("stumbling stones") outside the victims' last-known residences. Sivan and a German cousin helped lay *Stolpersteine* in Magdeburg two years ago in memory of members of the Schlein family, connected through marriage. Further *Stolpersteine* are planned in Germany, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic.

Now settled in Germany for over a decade, Sivan feels a strong connection to the country her family lived in for generations. She notes that her daughter is the first Bernstein family member to be born there since before the Second World War. "Before my baby was born recently, Fred Levy was the last Bernstein born in Germany – in 1935," she says.

Continues on page 23



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JCS@WORK Dignity, Compassion and Care: Supporting those unable to participate in the workforce

Charmaine Nicks
Social Worker

There are many individuals supported by Jewish Community Services who are unable to function within the open labour market. Some have never been able to secure employment, while others have experienced repeated job loss and have eventually withdrawn from seeking work due to ongoing failure to maintain employment.

A range of complex and intersecting factors can contribute to an individual's inability to function in the workforce. The earlier these factors are experienced in a person's lifetime, the more severe the impact often is.

One significant factor is severe or chronic unresolved childhood trauma, including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect. Such experiences can permanently impact the stress-response system, leaving individuals highly vulnerable to stress and overwhelm in workplace environments.

Exposure to violent crime, military service, or prolonged domestic abuse can also result in severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), making typical work settings intolerable or triggering. Mental health conditions such as severe anxiety and depression can lead to high levels of stress, panic, emotional instability, or extreme lethargy, all of which can prevent an individual from maintaining consistent employment. Personality disorders, particularly borderline personality disorder, may further impair emotional regulation, leading to intense emotional reactions that interfere with workplace functioning.

Burnout and emotional exhaustion - especially when experienced over long periods - can result in a complete breakdown in functioning, leaving individuals unable to cope with even basic work demands. Neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD or autism may also affect executive functioning, emotional regulation, and adaptability in traditional work environments.

Physical conditions can be equally limiting. Brain injuries, including repeated concussions, chronic pain, and other long-term illnesses, can significantly affect mood, energy levels, cognition, and behaviour, further reducing employability.

Other contributing factors may be more amenable to change if addressed early. For example, individuals who have never learned how to manage difficult emotions, tolerate failure, or persist through challenges may develop avoidance patterns that limit their ability to engage in employment.

Social isolation and poverty- including homelessness and extreme loneliness - can erode mental resilience over time, compounding existing vulnerabilities and further reducing capacity for work. Counselling may also help address maladaptive cognitive patterns, such as persistent rumination on past experiences, excessive reliance on external reassurance, or the adoption of a 'victim mindset,' all of which can reinforce a sense of helplessness and impair workplace functioning.

Additionally, overprotective or overly critical parents, caregivers, or mentors may inadvertently undermine self-esteem and resilience by limiting opportunities to develop

coping skills, independence, and tolerance for professional pressure.

While many of the factors described above can lead to an inability to work, appropriate diagnosis and treatment - including therapy, medication, and skills-based interventions - can help some individuals build resilience and improve their capacity to manage these challenges. However, others may be so profoundly affected by complex, long-standing trauma, chronic and unmanaged mental health conditions, and underdeveloped coping skills that they are unable to function within a work environment.

These individuals require ongoing support from family members where possible, and where the family needs some support, Jewish Community Services working in collaboration with the family and broader community networks. If you would like further assistance, please contact JCS on **021 462 5520** or email **info@jcs.org.za** if you would like to speak to one of our social workers.

"Mental health conditions such as severe anxiety and depression can lead to high levels of stress, panic, emotional instability, or extreme lethargy, all of which can prevent an individual from maintaining consistent employment."



#JewishCommunity #JCS #CapeTown #SocialWork



Looking ahead to a year of connection

As we begin a new year, many of us are hopeful that it will be one filled with joy, good health and brighter days ahead, especially after the challenges and traumas of recent years. Our heartfelt wish is that 2026 brings happiness and well-being to every one of you.

Our team is refreshed, energised and delighted to be back. There is little that pleases us more than seeing full venues and lively participation, and we are committed to making the year enjoyable, varied and engaging. Our weekly programmes are thoughtfully planned, with the understanding that each centre

SOCIAL AND PERSONAL

We congratulate our members who have had joyous occasions during the last month.

Barmitzvah: Shulamit Rozowsky – Grandson Daniel

Batmitzvah: David and Elaine Sher and Andy and Jacqui Rodgers – Granddaughter

Wedding Anniversary: Morris and Thelma Rozen – 60th, David and Diana Sochen – 50th

Get Well wishes: Bess Lonstein, Paulette Gruber

Welcome to new members: Valerie Epstein, Sharon Geffen, Sandra Zacharowitz

We extend wishes of Mazaltov to all Matriculants who passed their final exams. We know that there are very many proud grandparents who have given us the news of wonderful results.

Wishes of Long Life and strength on the passing of members of CJSA or their family members to: The families of Lillian Sheldon and Yamina Oliver.



West Coast members enjoyed an outing to Chardonnay Restaurant in Constantia



Cecily Kaplan enjoying the art class in Sea Point

are unable to join us in person, our weekly online programme ensures that everyone can still take part and feel connected.

We were especially pleased to welcome Yiddish teacher Rochel Winer, who lives in Umhlanga and was visiting Cape Town, to our weekly Yiddish morning hosted by Dr Veronica Belling. Rochel and Veronica present a biweekly Zoom Yiddish programme, and it was a real treat for many members to enjoy a special morning with both teachers together in the same room.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “The quality, not the longevity, of one’s life is what’s important.” This is very much what we strive to offer. When we reopened



Sea Point members enjoying a morning at Starke Ayers Nursery



Southern Suburbs members enjoying a Chair Yoga Class

after the holiday period, many members told us how much they had missed the interaction and activities, and how eager they were to return. Their response affirmed that our focus on quality, connection, and companionship truly makes a difference.

The holiday season often brings welcome visits from family and friends, followed by the inevitable goodbyes and the realisation that it may be some time before loved ones return. This is also when we receive many calls and emails from concerned family members who, after spending time together, notice that a parent may no longer be coping as well as before. Our caring team is always available to offer guidance, whether the best option is ageing in place with support, or exploring the benefits of residential care.

If you are considering a move to retirement or residential living, here are a few helpful pointers:

- Do your homework before choosing a new home.
- If possible, consider moving as a couple.

- Trust your own impressions rather than relying solely on others’ advice.
- Speak to current residents about their experiences.
- Look at the foyer notice board – a full activities calendar is a good sign.
- Prepare in advance for the possibility of giving up driving.
- Think carefully before taking on committee responsibilities.
- Take note of the social activities offered, such as games and gatherings in communal areas.

It is also important to remember that admission to a residential facility takes time, as several essential forms need to be completed. Starting your search well in advance helps to avoid unnecessary pressure and allows for a smoother transition.

Our annual Goudini Break is planned for mid-March, and there are still a few places available. If you would like to enjoy three relaxing nights away with good company, delicious food and engaging activities, this is a wonderful opportunity not to be missed.

Finally, a gentle reminder to please pay your annual subscription of R360 for 2026. These funds enable us to continue offering our programmes and services to members throughout the year. ●

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STORIES

'Genealogical research uncovers family members' continues from page 20

In addition to discovering family members previously unknown to both Sivan and Janice, Sivan's research has highlighted the tragedy of a relative of Fred and Ronny who had been well-known in pre-War Germany for his empathetic approach to those less fortunate.

DR OTTO SCHLEIN, THE DOCTOR OF THE POOR

Dr Otto Schlein's mother, Lina, was a Bernstein. Lina's brother Max was the father of Sivan and Janice's paternal grandmothers.

Dr. Schlein served in the German army during World War I and was awarded the Iron Cross, Second Class. Having started his medical studies prior to the War, he completed his medical qualification in the 1920s, and settled in the German

city of Magdeburg, where he went into private practice as a dermatologist. Schlein, a Communist, was empathetic towards marginalised people, often treating poor people for free, leading to him being known as 'the Doctor of the Poor'.

In the 1930s, as the Nazi hold on Germany became stronger, Schlein and his family fled to the Netherlands, but they were arrested there by the Nazis in 1943, and sent to the Theresienstadt ghetto. In 1944, he and his wife and daughter were murdered in Auschwitz.



Today, Magdeburg memorialises his contribution to the people of the city through Stolpersteine bearing his name and the names of his immediate family. In addition, there is a vocational school in the city that is named after him, and a promenade running along the Elbe River called Schleinufer.

February 2026 Community Events

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION	EVENT	DATE	FOR MORE INFO
Union of Orthodox Synagogues	Women's Weekly Lunchtime Halachah Shiur	Mondays, 13h00-14h00	RSVP: admin@uoscape.co.za
Union of Orthodox Synagogues	Weekly Business Lunchtime Shiur with Rabbi Matthew Liebenberg	Thursdays, 13h00-14h00	RSVP: admin@uoscape.co.za
Mensch	Network Friends & Family Tu B'shvat lunch	Sun 1 February, 10h00	RSVP admin@mensch.org.za
Constantia Jewish Community Centre	Tu B'shvat 5786 Tree Planting	Mon 2 February, 10h00	RSVP: Call 076 208 0899
Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre	Film: The Shadow of the Day	Tues 3 February, 18h00	admin@holocaust.org.za
Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre	Webinar – Book review: Looted by Peter Eliot	Thurs 5 February, 19h00	admin@holocaust.org.za
SA Jewish Museum	Wolf Kibel Lippy Lipshitz, Palm Studios – Exhibition Walkabouts	Tues 10 Feb at 10h00; Tues 17 Feb at 10h00; Tues 24 Feb at 10h00	natacha@sajewishmuseum.co.za
ORT JET Cape Town	Webinar with Tessa Plen (info to follow)	Weds 11 February, 12h00 – 13h30	jet@ortscape.org.za
SA Jewish Museum	Yiddish Concert	Sun 15 February, 18h30	https://www.sajewishmuseum.co.za/guyschonsyiddishsongs
Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre	Film: Rescuing Memory	Thurs 19 February, 17h00	admin@holocaust.org.za
Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre	Webinar: I Never Said Goodbye – Helene Joffe	Tues 24 February, 19h00	admin@holocaust.org.za
ORT JET Cape Town	Business Breakfast Club with Anton Chait and Gary Gold (details to follow)	Weds 25 February, 09h00 – 11h00	jet@ortscape.org.za

COMMUNITY NEWS

RECOGNITION FOR JEWISH CAPETONIANS

In 2025, members of our community were recognised for the outstanding contributions they have made to the Jewish community and to the wider Cape Town and South African community.

Here we highlight three people who received among the highest honours to be made in recognition of their significant achievements.



Wendy Ackerman: 2025 – a milestone year in a life of purpose, compassion and recognition

In a year when South African Jewry celebrated many achievements, Wendy Ackerman stood out as one of 2025's most honoured figures. Entering her 90th year, Ackerman reached a remarkable milestone with three major awards that recognised a lifetime of leadership and philanthropy.

By **KAREN MILLER**

In November 2025 she received the Mayor's Medal for Community Affairs, honouring her decades of service to social upliftment in Cape Town. That same month, she was awarded the Kirsh Lifetime Achievement Award at the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, celebrating her values-driven leadership and far-reaching impact. In December, she was bestowed the Order of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, recognising her untiring devotion to cultural life in the city and her role as Founding Trustee of the Duet Endowment Trust, which supports both the CPO and Cape Town Opera.

Born in Cape Town, Wendy Ackerman's life has spanned almost a century of social change, business innovation, and deep community service. Together with her late husband, Raymond Ackerman, she helped build Pick n Pay into one of South Africa's great retail success stories. While the business flourished, Wendy's additional and primary mission was always about people,

especially women, the underprivileged... She was deeply involved in employee welfare, education initiatives and workplace transformation, championing both black South Africans and women long before it was fashionable or easy to do so.

Her Jewish communal recognition stretches back decades. She was named Woman of the Year by the Union of Jewish Women in 1982 and later received the B'nai B'rith Humanitarian Award for her philanthropic work. In 2025, the Jewish Achiever Awards honoured her legacy in the spirit of Helen Suzman, an especially apt parallel.



Wendy Ackerman at the 2024 International Women's Forum

Yet Wendy's impact is even further understood through her initiatives outside of her business role. When she discovered that her housekeeper's neurodivergent son had no school to attend, she started one in Khayelitsha. When he graduated, she went further, founding the Noluthando Sheltered Employment Workshop with Rotary. "I had the bright idea in the shower," she recalls with a laugh. "Six months later it was a going concern." Today, it supports 20 beneficiaries and continues to change lives.

Family remains central to Wendy's life: four children, twelve grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. A passionate gardener – a hobby learned from her father – she is also a woman appreciative of her heritage. She recently discovered that her paternal grandfather came from Czechoslovakia, not Lithuania, as she had always believed. And one of her most meaningful recent honours was her honorary doctorate from Stellenbosch University in 2024, the same year that her twin grandsons graduated there, and a century after her father registered there for dentistry.

IN 2025, WENDY ACKERMAN WAS NOT MERELY CELEBRATED FOR WHAT SHE HAS BUILT, BUT FOR HOW SHE HAS LIVED: WITH GENEROSITY, CURIOSITY, HUMILITY, AND AN UNSHAKEABLE BELIEF IN THE DIGNITY AND POTENTIAL OF OTHERS.

In 2025, Wendy Ackerman was not merely celebrated for what she has built, but for how she has lived: with generosity, curiosity, humility, and an unshakeable belief in the dignity and potential of others. ●

Tony Leon, champion of democratic values

Politician, diplomat, author and public intellectual Tony Leon was invited to sign the City's Civic Honours Book in recognition of his contribution to South Africa's democratic life.



Over several decades, he has played a significant role in shaping the country's political culture and public debate.

A law graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand,

Leon built a political career grounded in principled opposition and a firm commitment to constitutional democracy. He entered Parliament in 1994 as leader of the Democratic Party and, five years later, became Leader of the Opposition, relocating to Cape Town.

From 2000 to 2007, Leon led the Democratic Alliance from its inception, becoming the longest-serving opposition leader of the democratic era. During this time, he was instrumental in strengthening multiparty democracy and ensuring robust parliamentary accountability.

His record of public service later extended beyond party politics when he was appointed South African Ambassador to Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay from 2009 to 2012. The appointment, made by an ANC-led government, reflected the respect he commanded across political divides.

Leon continues to be a valued voice in public life, advocating for the rule of law and effective governance. In 2025, he played an important role in negotiations that led to South Africa's first Government of National Unity, reaffirming his long-standing commitment to the country's democratic institutions. ●

OVER SEVERAL DECADES, TONY LEON HAS PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN SHAPING THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL CULTURE AND PUBLIC DEBATE.

Brian Kantor's contribution to Cape Town's economic life

Emeritus Professor Brian Kantor, who was awarded the Mayor's Medal for Economic Affairs, has made a lasting contribution to South Africa's economic thinking, while maintaining a deep and enduring connection to the City of Cape Town.

An economist, educator, and respected public commentator, his influence has been felt both in the lecture theatre and far beyond it.

As a long-serving Professor of Economics at the University of Cape Town, Kantor helped shape generations of business leaders, policymakers and academics. Known for his clarity of thought and demanding but generous approach to teaching, he played an important role in strengthening UCT's reputation as a centre of economic excellence.



to economic growth and confidence in Cape Town and South Africa more broadly. This was seen too in his role as the founding Chairman of the V&A Waterfront company, where he was

integral to the redevelopment of the Cape Town waterfront from 1988 to 2001.

Kantor has also been a consistent and trusted voice in public debate. Through regular commentary in leading business publications and his widely used book, *Get South Africa Growing*, he has helped many South Africans better understand the forces shaping the economy.

Through his teaching, writing, and public engagement, Professor Kantor has enriched Cape Town's intellectual life, and made a meaningful contribution to the city's economic and civic landscape.

Professor Kantor is currently completing a book, provisionally titled *Your Money and the Markets – Unlocked*, which serves as a guide to engaging with the financial markets. ●

For a peek into Professor Kantor's life, see Chapter 7 Personal Business on his blog, www.zaeconomist.com.

BRIAN KANTOR HAS MADE A LASTING CONTRIBUTION TO SOUTH AFRICA'S ECONOMIC THINKING, WHILE MAINTAINING A DEEP AND ENDURING CONNECTION TO THE CITY OF CAPE TOWN.

In his role as Chief Economist and Investment Strategist at Investec, he provided insight that guided investment decisions and business strategy, contributing

COMMUNITY NEWS

In addition to the winners of the major awards, a number of Capetonians were also nominated for the Investec Achievers Awards.

Congratulations to:

HARRY SCHERZER

Co-Founder and CEO Future Forex

HAZEL LEVIN

Executive Director, Jewish Community Services| Care Services

DIANA SOCHEN

Executive Director, Cape Jewish Seniors Association

MANDY EDISON

Executive Director ASTRA

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JOSH RYNDERMAN

Co-Founder and Winemaker, ESSA Wine Co

BASIL CRANKO

Gordon's Bay Business Association

RAEL PHILIPS

Co-Founder and CEO, Totalstay

VIEWS **CONSIDER THIS**

The Book of Exodus – an inspiration for our time

I write this article after Shabbat Shemot when we began reading the Book of Exodus. In this second book of the Torah, the focus shifts from the stories of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs to the narrative of the beginnings of Am Yisrael, the People of Israel.

Sefer Shemot tells the story of an enslaved ethnic group, the descendants of Jacob, enslaved by the mighty kingdom of Egypt. The central character of the opening chapters is the man, Moses. The story of his birth, adoption by Pharaoh's daughter, exile from his country of origin, and his eventual transformation into the liberator of the Hebrews is told, and many midrashim add more details.

But more than the personal story of Moses, Sefer Shemot relays the tale of the ancient Israelites. The Book is the origin story of the Jewish People. Interestingly the first chapter does not mention Moses at all but rather sets the scene of the liberation of the Hebrew slaves: "These are the names of the



RABBI MALCOLM MATITIANI

sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each coming with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. The total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue came to seventy, Joseph being already in Egypt." (Exodus 1:1-5). Thus the Book of Exodus is linked to the Book of Genesis. Indeed the Hebrew name for this second book of the Torah literally means 'names'. Rabbinic literature also calls the book Sefer Yetziat Mitzrayim – 'The Book of the Exodus from Egypt' – because it recounts how God, through Moses, frees the Hebrew slaves from oppression and describes the mass exodus of these slaves from Egypt, via the Sea of Reeds, into the wilderness. The diverse tribes of Israel and the mixed multitude that accompanied them eventually amalgamate into benei Yisrael – 'the children of Israel' (Israelites).

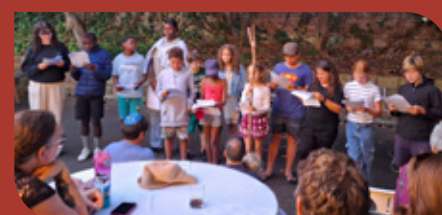
But the Book of Exodus is more than the story of our ancestors' freedom from enslavement in Egypt. Once out of Egypt, Moses leads them to Mount Sinai where they receive the Ten Utterances and laws. This unique Revelation of God to the entire nation is described in great detail. Moses' ultimate mission is not to deliver the Israelites to freedom for its own sake, but to enable them to worship the God of Israel without fear of persecution. In order to do that they need to leave Mount Sinai and to settle in the Land of Israel, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The last third of Sefer Shemot discusses the building of the Mishkan, the place of ritual worship that would be set up in the centre of the Israelite camp. This portable Tabernacle was the precursor to Beit Mikdash, the permanent Temple that would be built in Jerusalem by King Solomon. Once the



CANDLE LIGHTING TOGETHER

With over 100 people gathered at our First Night Chanukah celebration in December – candle lighting, children's performances, songs, dinner, *latkes*, and doughnuts – we were reminded of the power of community.



The Chanukah Story



The community enjoying the performance.

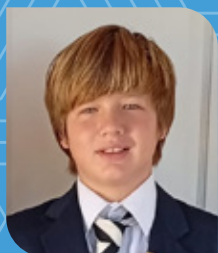
BNEI MITZVAH: MAZAL TOV!



Lila Flax



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Elian Kadar

Mishkan was completed the kohanim had to be ordained and the sacrificial rites set down. This is described in the Book of Exodus and sets the context for the third Book of the Torah, Sefer Vayikra, the Book of Leviticus.

While Judaism has evolved since the Torah, the principles of human dignity, freedom of expression and thought, the rule of law and values that ensure a just and moral society, and the worship of the God of Life and Compassion are intrinsic to who we are as a faith community and as a people. As we travel into the secular 2026 may we be inspired by the physical and spiritual journey recounted in Sefer Shemot. ●

STORIES

Loyalty betrayed: German Jews and the myth of disloyalty

The *Cape Jewish Chronicle* brings you the second article in our series on the Fabian family and the legacy of Kuno Fabian, the first member of the family to settle in Cape Town after fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s. (You can read the first article in the series [here](#).)

This piece explores the deep sense of belonging German Jews felt towards Germany, their strong German identity, and the profound shock of its betrayal during the Nazi era.

Kuno's great-nephew, Ryan Fabian, recently undertook a 1 500km solo cycle journey through France, retracing Kuno's experiences as a loyal German soldier during the First World War. The journey proved deeply instructive, prompting Ryan to challenge the persistent myth that Jews 'stabbed Germany in the back' and were responsible for the country's defeat in the war.

This accusation was not an isolated expression of antisemitism. Ryan points



Kuno in his 202nd Infantry Regiment uniform with the distinctive 'Pickelhaube' spiked helmet

to the *Juden-zählung* (Jewish Census) of 1916 as a particularly stark example. Conducted by the Prussian War Ministry, the survey was prompted by allegations that Jewish soldiers were avoiding frontline combat in favour of safer administrative posts. The results were never published because they directly contradicted the antisemitic claims. In fact, the census revealed that nearly 80% of German Jewish soldiers served on the front lines. While the findings should have put the allegations to rest, their suppression allowed the myth to flourish unchallenged.

"As opposed to this antisemitic narrative, Jewish loyalty to Germany is unmistakable," Ryan explains. He cites the Will of Lieutenant Josef Zürndorfer, a pilot who died in a crash in 1915: "As a German, I joined the war to defend my Fatherland. But also, as a Jew, to fight for the absolute equality of my co-religionists."

The evidence is compelling. Around 100 000 Jews served in the German army; many were wounded, and countless others were decorated for bravery.

This loyalty extended well beyond the First World War. "The Fabian family's military service dates back to the Franco-Prussian War of the late 19th century," Ryan notes. "All of Kuno's brothers served in World War I, including my grandfather. On my grandmother's side, her father missed the birth of all his children while fighting for the Kaiser on the Eastern Front. My great-great grandfather on my grandmother's side, Israel Guttman, was also an Imperial German infantryman...the list goes on. Significantly, Kuno had an illustrious military career, and beyond earning a 1st Class Iron Cross among other decorations, the surviving records show that



Richard Stern stands outside his shop with an Iron Cross in April 1933

he was wounded at least four times at various major battles in WW1. This reveals remarkable bravery and an intense dedication to a nation that would ultimately betray him."

Against this backdrop, suggestions that German Jews were anything less than loyal were deeply offensive. "Jewish veterans carried a profound sense of betrayal," Ryan says, "especially when the truth of the Holocaust finally emerged."

An example of the initial defiance from German Jewish

FINANCE

SAVING TAX

With the end of the tax year – 28 February – looming, remember to make use of all the available tax efficient investments to help you reduce your taxable income.

Kanan Wealth's Jonathan Henning advises readers to contribute to a Retirement Annuity (RA) and a Tax-Free Investment (TFSA) during February.

All contributions to an RA reduce your taxable income. If you earned R1 000 000 this year, and you contribute R100 000 to an RA, you will be taxed on R900 000 instead of R1 000 000.

All income earned and capital gains achieved inside a TFSA are free of tax. One can only invest R36 000 per year into a TFSA, so make sure you maximise this opportunity to reduce your future tax liability. ●

veterans can be seen in the now-famous photograph of Richard Stern, taken on 1 April 1933 (the day the Nazis began boycotting Jewish shops). The photograph shows the Jewish shopkeeper in Cologne leaning out of his shop door with his Iron Cross pinned to his lapel, while a young SA guard stands outside in attempted intimidation.

This comes close to home for the Fabian family, as veteran Arthur Winkler – Ryan's great grandfather – had his pharmacy in Tilsit forcibly confiscated by the Gestapo following a dangerous altercation. This was the final straw for many in the family who now began to flee Germany, resulting in their long journey to Cape Town. ●



Antisemitic poster

Sean O'Sullivan: Filmmaker, historian, and custodian of memory for our community

For nearly three decades, documentary filmmaker and historian Sean O'Sullivan has been one of the most quietly influential figures preserving and interpreting Jewish history in South Africa, particularly in Cape Town.

KAREN MILLER

His work has shaped how students, museum visitors, and broader audiences understand local Jewish stories, Holocaust memory, and a range of human rights histories. Yet Sean's career began far from museum halls and curated archives.

A UCT graduate with an Honours degree in History, Sean's first major film project took him deep into the forests of Madagascar, documenting illegal logging, an experience that introduced him to investigative fieldwork, complex ethical terrain, and the dangers surrounding environmental crime. He went on to work as a freelance cameraman for major international news networks including CBS, Reuters, and Eurovision, often in places where history was unfolding at high speed and personal risk was part of the landscape.

Over the years, this work took him into situations of real danger. In Zimbabwe, he found himself reporting amidst the wave of politically charged farm killings. In South Africa, he later documented the aftermath of the Marikana tragedy. These formative experiences shaped his sensitivity to injustice, memory, and the responsibility of bearing witness, qualities that would prove critical when he entered the world of historical documentary filmmaking.

Between 2006 and 2016 he worked with the University of Oxford, directing and shooting films for the Oxford Martin School and other clients and participating in research expeditions to the Aral Sea, Southeast Asia, the Amazon Basin, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Greenland. He also spent the summer of 2010 as cinematographer in Antarctica, filming on Palmer Base and across the Bellingshausen and Weddell Seas

This global experience enriched his historical sensibility and sharpened his ability to situate local stories within worldwide patterns of migration, conflict, and identity.



Sean in Jerusalem in 2022 with Wanda Albinksa, who survived the Warsaw Ghetto. She was the subject of Sean's film *Nobody Told Me*.



Sean in Turkey in 2005

O'Sullivan's first engagement with South African Jewish history came through a film on Mendel Kaplan, tracing Kaplan's Lithuanian roots and South African legacy. This project opened the door to more substantial work, beginning with his long association with the USC Shoah Foundation. Starting in 1995, he filmed South African Holocaust survivors, a commission that continues to this day. (The latest was on Hélène Joffe shown at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre (CTHGC) in November last year.) That work requires meticulous attention to detail: testimonies are recorded, preserved, and archived for research and education purposes, forming a vital historical record for future generations.

Through the Shoah Foundation, he was introduced to Myra Osrin and soon became

centrally involved in documenting survivors at the CTHGC. Over the past 25 years he has created approximately thirty films for the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation, many now embedded in the high school history curriculum and presented across all three Holocaust Centres in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. Sean's careful interviewing and documentation, alongside that of other filmmakers involved in the Foundation's projects, ensures their voices endure long after they can no longer speak in person.

His work with the South African Jewish Museum has been equally significant. For the Museum he has produced films exploring South African Jewish memory and migration, including *From Things Lost*, a project created with historian Dr Shirli Gilbert, and *Another Time, Another Place: The Jews of District Six*. He has also recently completed films on the Irma Stern Museum and is currently developing a documentary on Helen Suzman, the anti-apartheid parliamentarian whose moral clarity made her one of the most recognisable advocates for justice in South Africa

Sean's interests, as both historian and filmmaker, are wide-ranging. He is drawn to the intersections between people, ideas, and moral choices. His methodology reflects this: he enjoys integrating evidence from multiple sources, conducting forensic analysis of historical materials, and searching through archives to reconstruct stories with precision and care.

In recent years, he has also raised concerns shared by many historians and documentarians: the rise of AI-driven manipulation, where the words of interviewees can be altered or fabricated. In his field, where authenticity is the foundation of testimony, the dangers of a 'post-truth age' are particularly acute. O'Sullivan's commitment to careful methodology stands in direct opposition to these risks, asserting the importance of verifiable human stories in an era of synthetic information.

From Madagascar's forests to Antarctica's ice fields, to Cape Town's museums, Sean O'Sullivan has spent his career capturing the fragile, essential threads of human history. For South Africa's Jewish community, his work has preserved stories that might otherwise have been lost; and in doing so, he has strengthened the collective memory on which our future depends. ●

ARTS & CULTURE



Finding the funny side of life

Young Cape Town comedian on humour, heartbreak and big dreams

Comedian Sarah Abraham will present her debut one-woman comedy show, *Unattractive, Unmotivated, and Lazy*, at The Baxter’s Masambe Theatre on 6 and 7 February. The show is a story-led, conversational hour of stand-up, exploring dating, heartbreak, family dynamics, and the absurdities of life in your 20s.

The *Cape Jewish Chronicle* caught up with Sarah.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND.

I grew up in Cape Town, in Noordhoek to be exact, with three siblings all very close in age – I’m the third-born, which means I was almost always fighting for attention. I went to Reddam House Constantia and later studied graphic design and

marketing, followed by a BA at Vega. By day, I work at my dad’s company (yes, a bit of nepotism – which I joke about in the show). Like most people, school wasn’t exactly a highlight, but it all helped shape who I am.

WHAT SPARKED YOUR DECISION TO TRY STAND-UP COMEDY?

Honestly, a broken heart. After my first breakup – with an ex-convict, no less – I was filled with rage, pain and a serious need for adrenaline. My brother joked, “Why don’t you try stand-up? If they don’t laugh, you really couldn’t feel worse.” I took that advice, signed up for a five-minute open mic, and the adrenaline rush after performing was addictive. That was almost

four years ago, and I’ve been chasing that feeling ever since.

HOW DO YOU COME UP WITH YOUR MATERIAL?

Life does most of the work for me. I observe what happens to me and around me and ask myself if there’s a way to find humour in it. Life has highs and lows, and we all go through tough experiences. My process is about taking those shared negative moments and turning them into something people can laugh at – and relate to.

IS THIS YOUR FIRST PROFESSIONAL SHOW?

Not at all. I performed this show as a work-in-progress last year and it sold out, which gave me the confidence to take it further. I’ve also performed in Savannah’s Newcomers

Showcase in 2024. In addition, I created and ran Book Club Comedy Night, a platform that gave new comedians 15–20 minutes on stage instead of the usual five. It helped others grow – and helped me develop my own voice and audience.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS GOING FORWARD?

One day, I want to sell out the Baxter Theatre’s 585-seater. More than that, I want to bring joy and laughter to people who connect with my story. What could have been a sob story became something positive, and if I can bring hope through humour, then I know I’m doing something right. ●

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ARTS & CULTURE



Trevor Lomofsky, Hazel
Scalabrino, Ann Whine,
Ilana Young, Tsipi Brivik,
Fernanda Kaplan, Yvette
Polovin and Amanda
Summerfield (inset)

Recently, under Yvette's
direction, a team of artists
from the CJSA completed a
beautiful mosaic, essentially
a glass mural, which has
been affixed to an outside
wall at the CJSA centre,
housed in a beautiful old
Victorian house called
Stonehaven in Albany
Road, Sea Point.

"We have worked on a
depiction of the CJSA logo,"
Yvette explains. "It's more
than just a logo. It's a labour
of love. We started by
gathering glass and ceramic
tiles that matched our CJSA
colours, then laid out the
design on mesh so everyone
could get involved. It was
a joy to see our members
take ownership of different
sections, some carefully
cutting pieces for the letters
while others filled in the
bold, coloured shapes. After
the glue dried, we moved
the mesh onto the wall
for the final installation.
Following several rounds of
grouting and cleaning, the
mural is finally sparkling and
ready for everyone to enjoy."

This was clearly a meaning-
ful project for the mosaic
artists to be involved in, and
all have a great sense of
pride in the final product.

BEAUTIFUL NEW MURAL ON DISPLAY

Cape Town artist and
ceramicist, Yvette Polovin,
spends a great deal of
her time inspiring senior
members of our community
during her mosaic classes
at the Cape Jewish Seniors
Association (CJSA) in
Sea Point.

An enthusiastic advocate
for the organisation, Yvette
explains: "CJSA promotes
the interests and well-being
of Jewish seniors in Cape
Town, providing community
centres, services and
programmes to inform and
engage with seniors and
their families. The various
programmes on offer also
serve to promote social
interaction among a wide
range of people who make
up the older age cohort of
the community."



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