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## Editor's Note

Watched any good television shows lately on the streaming services that filled your home screens' hours before, during and since the pandemic? Chances are, you may have been watching Israeli filmmaking, either in Hebrew with subtitles or adapted for American audiences in English with American actors. From "Home-land" to "In Treatment" to "Your Honor," shows spawned in Israel have found huge American audiences, even as Hebrew-language series, like "Shtisel," "Srugim," "Fauda," "Beauty and the Baker" and others have had broad appeal. The remarkable production and cinematic success emerging from Israel is this issue's cover story.

Do you speak Jewish? Once, in the United States, if you answered yes, that meant only Yiddish, the language written in Hebrew letters but adapted from 9th century High German and transported to wherever Jews immigrated in the Diaspora. But that Eurocentric response fails to convey the diversity of "Jewish" tongues. These include the Judeo-Spanish dialect of Ladino, spoken by Sephardic Jews from the Iberian Peninsula to North Africa to Latin America, as well as modern-day Hebrew, the daily lingua franca of Israel. We tell that story.

Ladino was the ancestral language of the Finzi family of Ferrara, Italy, assimilated into Italian culture and seemingly

insulated from anti-Semitism until Italy's fascist government under Benito Mussolini acceded to the demands of Nazi Germany, its Axis partner. This led to the mandated persecution and imprisonment of Italian Jews, who were left with two options: flee or die. Here we share the remarkable Finzi family story of escape and refuge in the United States, and the singular effort by the U.S. government and advocate Ruth Gruber to bring 973 Italian Jews on a troop transport to America—for which Eric Finzi, a 21st century doctor and artist, owes his life.

Jewish immigrants brought not only their language but also their food when they immigrated to the United States. In "In Search of Kreplach: More Than Just Jewish Ravioli," we trace the Old World origins of this delectable dish to one family's American kitchen, complete with a recipe you can use. Most Jewish immigrants stayed in large cities, but some settled in small towns throughout the American heartland. Many of those small Jewish communities struggle to survive and, as their numbers dwindle, synagogues have closed, leaving only memories of a once flourishing past.

This, then, is our moveable feast for 2021, full of language, history, food and entertainment. 🍷

Enjoy!

—Eugene L. Meyer

## From the Vault

### Recalling Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, Prolific Writer and Thinker

By Cheryl Kempler

Immersed in the study of Jewish theology and biblical history, Trude Weiss-Rosmarin (1908-89) rejected the Orthodox faith of her assimilated German parents and re-envisioned her own during her childhood. A Zionist and a feminist, the 23-year-old scholar obtained her doctorate before immigrating to America with her husband in 1931.

In that year, the school they founded for Jewish women in Manhattan began to issue a newsletter, which in 1939 became the Jewish Spectator, a prominent quarterly magazine of Jewish thought headed by Weiss-Rosmarin for nearly 50 years. A

noted lecturer, she also authored numerous books.

Before and after World War II, the survival of Judaism was Weiss-Rosmarin's foremost concern. In her own life, she witnessed its depletion in an increasingly secular world, where suburban exodus and the growth of an affluent and scientifically minded Jewish population eroded traditional notions of faith and adherence to religious observance. Extra vigilance was needed, she wrote, to "ensure Jewish continuity by means of strengthening its base and foundation: Jewish distinctive

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Photo credit: Courtesy of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio at [americanjewisharchives.org](http://americanjewisharchives.org).

Essays by author, lecturer and publisher Trude Weiss-Rosmarin appeared in B'nai B'rith Magazine, then called the National Jewish Monthly, in the decades following World War II.

## 10 Israel's Golden Age of TV

Did you know your favorite television shows might have originated in Israel? Many of its scripts and shows have been bought by major streaming services. Shows like "Shtisel" and "Fauda" have gained international success.

By Dina Kraft

## 15 From the Fruits of War: The Artistic Garden of Eric Finzi

Eric Finzi, a doctor, and an artist, owes his life to a unique rescue mission that brought nearly 1,000 Italian Jews—including his father and grandmother—to the United States during the dark days of World War II.

By Eugene L. Meyer

## 19 Tongue Twister: What Jewish Languages Say About Us

What is a "Jewish" language? For many immigrants, it was Yiddish, the vernacular language they brought from Europe. But there was also Ladino, adapted from Spanish, and there is modern Hebrew, the lingua franca in Israel. We explore the tongues that reflect the many countries and cultures of our people.

By Beryl Lief Benderly

## 23 In Search of Kreplach: More than Just Jewish Ravioli

Dumplings in one form or another are a universal dish. We explore the origins and recipes for kreplach, the Jewish dumpling. Read how traditions go from history to table.

By Kenneth D. Ackerman with Alice Chezar

## 27 Small Town Synagogues: Struggling to Survive

It is no small feat for a Jewish community to survive in a small town. Places like rural Pennsylvania and Maine may seem unlikely locales for them. In such areas away from big cities, some synagogues have had to close their doors while others struggle to keep them open.

By Jennifer Lovy

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We are proud to win two American Jewish Press Association Rockower Awards for Journalistic Excellence.

Congratulations to Beryl Lief Benderly whose story, "Secret Shabbos: How the

'Sabbath Delight' Hid an Astonishing Archive" won second place in Award for Excellence in Writing about Jewish Heritage and Jewish Peoplehood in Europe category and honorable mention in Award for Excellence in Feature Writing category.

Read this story here: <https://www.bnaibrith.org/secret-shabbos.html>

## B'NAI B'RITH IMPACT

B'NAI B'RITH IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE GLOBE

### 32 "Durban Revisited" Series Brings Awareness to Anti-Semitic Legacy of the Durban Conference

Through published op-eds, ambassadorial meetings and a series of programs in partnership with the Jewish Broadcasting Service, B'nai B'rith raised awareness of the toxic legacy of the 2001 Durban conference—the U.N. conference on racism that degenerated into an attack on Israel.

### 34 B'nai B'rith Hosts 2-Part Series: Hezbollah: Sowing Global Terror

B'nai B'rith held a two-part virtual series to mark the anniversary of the 1994 AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In Part 1, B'nai B'rith spoke with Luis Curyzewski, whose 21-year-old daughter was killed in the attack, about his continued search for justice. In Part 2, two experts put the attack into a larger context and discussed Hezbollah's global influence.

### 35 B'nai B'rith Launches Initiative to Empower Women Leaders

A new initiative launched by B'nai B'rith aims to bring more women into the world of leadership and advocacy. The Women's Leadership Network meets virtually with professionals and experts so members can study B'nai B'rith's policy priorities and hone leadership skills.

### 37 B'nai B'rith Experts Assess Current Rise in Anti-Semitism

A series of virtual roundtables with B'nai B'rith leaders, staff and other experts in the fields of politics, social media and academics focused on global work to mitigate the spike in physical anti-Semitic violence and online hate manifested during the pandemic and the Israel-Hamas conflict in May.

### 39 The Next Generation of Jewish Leaders: "IMPACT: Emerging Leaders Fellowship"

IMPACT: Emerging Leaders Fellowship, launched this year in partnership with the World Union of Jewish Students, brings together Jewish students and young professionals from around the world. Fellows meet virtually with guest speakers and mentors to learn about a broad range of topics such as anti-Semitism, Israel advocacy and genocide prevention.

### 40 Great Lakes Region's Winning Scorecard

A flurry of summer activities, including an annual golf tournament fundraiser and memorial to former president Stephen B. Zorn, benefitted a variety of B'nai B'rith causes.

### 41 B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Partners with Bar-Ilan University for Jewish Rescuers Book

A project developed by B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem in partnership with Israel's Bar-Ilan University has resulted in the publication of a book of essays focusing on recently discovered stories of World War II Jewish Rescuers.

### 43 B'nai B'rith Leaders Attend Lodge Conference in Portugal

A visit to Porto, Portugal's new Holocaust museum was a highlight of a June 2021 conference organized by the city's recently formed B'nai B'rith lodge. Its Jewish community invited President Charles O. Kaufman and CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin to participate in the conference, where they spoke to young leaders and led interactive discussions.

### 44 B'nai B'rith's Bershad Scholarship Winners Look Back on Unique First Year Experience

In the spring of 2020, B'nai B'rith awarded four college-bound students the Bershad Scholarship, which helps cover tuition. Following their first year of college, the winners reflect on their experiences, how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their school year and what winning the scholarship has meant to them.

### 45 50 Years of Senior Housing: B'nai B'rith I, II & III Apartments Administrator Jim Lynch

Jim Lynch, a manager at the B'nai B'rith I, II & III Apartments in Deerfield Beach, Florida, was interviewed about his working life and the rewards of his job.

### 46 B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Ceremony Honors 2021 Journalism and Arts Awards Winners

B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem paid tribute to the outstanding journalists and broadcasters selected as recipients of its Award for Journalism Recognizing Excellence in Diaspora Reportage. The cultural achievements of a legendary entertainer were also recognized.

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B'nai B'rith Extra ..... Back Cover

# Reflections in the Rear View Mirror

By Charles O. Kaufman  
*B'nai B'rith International President*



**A**s my presidency of B'nai B'rith ends, I am sifting through a 40-month time capsule, reflecting on the worst and best of times.

From Pittsburgh and Poway, Calif., to Los Angeles and New York—and sadly a slew of American towns in between—we've witnessed anti-Semitic violence linked to anti-Israel behavior. With the demonization of Israel common on college campuses and in the streets, the warnings and calls for education and unity are warranted and demand our full attention.

We could once predict the source of Jewish hatred—Far Right groups. Today, that hatred is shared by leftist groups, Islamists and, worst of all, extremist Jewish groups. Modern society is seeing a spike in anti-Semitism, a seemingly incurable virus passed down through the generations. We must understand the complexities of anti-Semitism, teach its history, then confront it.

The passage of time has allowed today's generations to forget, ignore or reinterpret the Holocaust, the Six Day War and Yom Kippur War; the departure of Soviet and Syrian Jews; and the effect of such events as the murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics and the daring rescue from Entebbe of captive passengers on a hijacked El Al airliner.

Yet, countries are moving their embassies to Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish State. The Abraham Accords

live on as we await more announcements of normalized relations with Arab countries. B'nai B'rith's focus on UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) encouraged the agency to strip its "heritage" designation from the Aalst Festival, in Belgium, for its use of anti-Semitic stereotypes. And in August, B'nai B'rith received written approval to coordinate a program on the Hebrew language at the U.N. agency in Paris. These are signs of progress, if not miracles.

## Calling out the Haters

Lies persist as anti-Israel resolutions at the U.N. and poisonous hatred on social media expand out of control. I am proud that B'nai B'rith International has slogged through this muck in a bold, positive way during my administration. In the process, we raised our profile and visibility in the Jewish world. We called out the growing number of anti-Semites; alerted university presidents with direct and stern correspondence; confronted museum directors in Berlin and elsewhere for producing biased, pro-BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement) exhibitions presented as cultural displays.

We took the lead in discouraging major countries from participating in the U.N.'s 20th anniversary of the 2001 Durban Conference on Racism, that quickly turned into an Israel "hatefest." Finally, a well-timed article in Newsweek

called attention (<https://bit.ly/tokyo-ioc-silence-munich>) to the International Olympic Committee's repeated silence on the Munich massacre by Palestinian gunmen of Israeli athletes in 1972; after 49 years, the slain athletes were honored for the first time with a moment of silence during opening ceremonies at this year's Tokyo Olympics.

For B'nai B'rith the past 40 months were a time of innovation and creativity with blogs, webinars, columns, Op-Ed pieces and more. It was a time of aligning with strategic partners to B'nai B'rith, notably the American Jewish International Relations Institute (now known as AJIRI-BBI), and working closely on projects with the Combat Anti-Semitism Movement.

Israel's security and sovereignty rely on the strength and defense of the nation. Over time, borders can change, but only so far as they are secured. Agreements must be based on looking forward, not looking back and revising history. It's tragic to think how 8 billion people on the planet are consumed, if not obsessed, with roughly 15 million people and one sliver of land.

Now is time for the Children of the Covenant to invest in their identity. B'nai B'rith enjoys broad support from Jews and non-Jews. Today, anyone can become a Friend of B'nai B'rith, by making a donation, or similarly joining B'nai B'rith's Essex Street Society, or leave



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B'nai B'rith and the World Center-Jerusalem have enjoyed a long working relationship with Isaac Herzog (r), who was elected as Israel's president in July 2021. At that time, he met with Kaufman and other B'nai B'rith leaders to develop plans for future collaborations.

a tangible legacy through our Planned Giving Department.

In the past 40 months, B'nai B'rith has become operationally better, smarter and more efficient. We zoomed, posted, tweeted with greater frequency, maximizing our visibility from time zone to time zone. Fiscally, our Financial Management Committee has been meeting monthly in shirt-sleeve work sessions. All in all, B'nai B'rith is in a much better place today than it was 40 months ago. The footing is firm for the next administration to continue along the current path of growth. The seeds for innovative programs are planted and are sprouting.

Before COVID-19, we broke new ground in first-ever meetings with leaders in China and in Japan with President Shinzo Abe. We built on our previous advocacy with the trilateral relationships of Greece, Cyprus and Israel. We are connected most directly with past and present leadership in

Israel. They are counting on us to deliver on specific assignments, not just provide moral support.

### Carrying the Banner

We carried the banner to promote the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of anti-Semitism to countries, campuses and corporations. We brought B'nai B'rith to U.N. World Heritage cities like Lisbon and to nearby Oporto, where B'nai B'rith Portugal flourishes in a revitalized and historic Jewish community. We encouraged the growth of American lodges. From Youngstown, Ohio, and Frankfurt, Germany, from Beverly Hills and Atlanta to Melbourne, Australia, we are a global force.

Future B'nai B'rith leaders must always look to improve and grow—to communicate better, to build new relationships, to move forward the B'nai B'rith mission. For 178 years, we have

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# The Wannsee Conference: A Starkly Grim Anniversary

By Daniel S. Mariaschin  
*B'nai B'rith International Chief Executive Officer*



**J**anuary 20, 2022, will mark the 80th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference, the gathering of Nazi officials that put a stamp of approval on the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.”

At that point, the Nuremberg Laws, the discriminatory decrees targeting German Jewry, had already been in place for more than six years. The war in Europe had been burning since Sept. 1, 1939, and Jews were being rounded up and killed in the Soviet Union and in Poland.

The Wannsee meeting—named after the villa just outside Berlin where the gathering took place—was called by Reinhard Heydrich, who headed the RSHA (Reich Security main office), whose branches included the Gestapo and the SD internal security organization. Fifteen high-ranking representatives of Third Reich ministries and related offices attended, including Adolf Eichmann, who served as recording secretary for the meeting.

The meeting lasted only 90 minutes. Eichmann had prepared a list of the Jewish populations in both Nazi-occupied regions and those countries allied with, or puppet states of Germany, as well as the few European nations that were still free. The discussion centered on the deportation of Jews to “the east,” where they would either be worked to death or killed en masse. Eichmann’s notes of the meeting were euphemistically couched, but Heydrich’s message was clear to all: The Jews of Europe were to be liquidated.

According to statements made by Eichmann at his war crimes trial in Israel, there was widespread enthusiasm for the plan from those present.

## Nazi Racial Theory in Full Play

The other discussion item at Wannsee focused on what constituted a Jew. Nazi racial theory was in full play here, as the participants discussed how many Jewish grandparents or



Photo credit: Commons.wikimedia.org/Adam Jones

Built in 1914, Wannsee’s Villa Marlier is remembered for the 1942 meeting that determined the fate of Europe’s Jews. Today known as the Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, it functions as an educational center and memorial to the victims of the Final Solution.



The villa’s rooms have been converted into galleries, where a permanent exhibit “The Wannsee Conference and the Genocide of European Jews” is on view.



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non-Jewish partners, and whether or not children of mixed marriages were raised as Jews or Christians, determined whether or not one was Jewish. In the end, it made little difference as the Final Solution was carried out.

Only one set of minutes has been discovered, and that was in 1947. It is believed any other notes made by participants were likely destroyed in the waning days of the war.

Eight decades later, the term “Final Solution” is still chilling, even as we say it, or write about it. I had the opportunity to visit the Wannsee Villa some years ago on a mission of Jewish leaders to Berlin; today, it is one of Germany’s memorials to the Holocaust. The house itself is in an idyllic setting, in a semi-wooded area set on the Grosse Wannsee Lake that flows nearby.

The table around which the Nazi officials met is still there, with the name of the person who sat at each place clearly marked. It was jarring to see the alphabetical list of countries and their Jewish populations used for the discussion and knowing that within three years from the date of that meeting, most would be depopulated—or nearly so—of their Jewish communities.

One is reminded again of the “businesslike” approach to mass murder carried out by Heydrich, Eichmann and their henchmen and colleagues in crime. The fate of 6 million Jews in Europe decided within 90 minutes. After that, they most likely went on to their next meetings, probably feeling a sense of accomplishment at what they all agreed to at Wannsee.

One of the priorities of remembering the Holocaust is to personalize it, lest what the Nazis and their collaborators did over such a short period of time simply be a blur of history that, as we move further away from the Holocaust, perhaps lessens the enormity and utter devastation of

European Jewry. To be sure, we should never forget the magnitude of discussing 6 million murders.

For B’nai B’rith, the largest of the German Jewish organizations, one with more than 100 lodges in the country in 1933, the beginning of the end occurred in 1937, when the SS, as a gift to Hitler, shut the organization down. Those Jews who did not get out of Germany by early 1939 (there were more than 400,000 Jews in the country when Hitler came to power), were doomed, even before the meeting at Wannsee.

In the case of my family, particularly that of my mother’s relatives in Lithuania, their fate was sealed six or seven months before Wannsee, when the Nazis marched into the country in 1941 and began a campaign that saw, only a year and a half later, over 90% of the Jewish population murdered, most on Lithuanian soil. The Nazis didn’t bother deporting those Jews; most were simply rounded up and shot at ravines and forests. In the forest where my relatives were taken, some 11,000 Jews were killed, many from small shtetlach (villages) and towns in the region.

After all my years of studying the Holocaust, visiting sites like that in Lithuania connected to my family or concentration camps in Germany, Poland and elsewhere, and working on Holocaust restitution and remembrance programs, it is the utter frustration of knowing that European Jewry was abandoned, and not a major diplomatic finger was lifted, that is still so devastating. This is especially so when, after 1933, Hitler made his intentions clear each day, culminating in that January meeting at Wannsee. Nine years to do something—anything—to prevent or interrupt his genocidal designs, and not only was there little to show for it, but little to indicate that the international community was exercised about it at all.

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## Reflections in the Rear View Mirror

faced challenges without end. That is our history. Our mission has grown and evolved with the Zionist movement that led to the modern state of Israel, the Startup Nation—a dot on the map that has inspired me and many others every hour of every day.

Every B'nai B'rith president views this position in various ways. There are days when the president feels like Moses in the desert or at Sinai; or Noah building an arc; or Theodor Herzl cobbling together a world of dreamers; or David Ben Gurion constructing a Jewish State; or Benjamin Netanyahu or Naftali Bennett in building partnerships.

In some small way, these 40 months captured experiences of 40 years in the desert. As with Israel, may B'nai B'rith International continue in the future with strength, kindness and hope. 🇮🇱

Throughout Israel's history, B'nai B'rith's significant impact was evident, from the Jerusalem Lodge's 1902 founding of a national library to the naming of streets in various locations inspired by the organization and its leaders. With six million trees planted over seven decades since 1951, the B'nai B'rith Martyrs Forest near Jerusalem is the world's largest memorial to victims of the Holocaust. Central to the experience of those who visit is Polish sculptor Nathan Rapoport's monumental bronze "Scroll of Fire," including images inspired by Jewish history from ancient to modern times. L-R: B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin; President Charles O. Kaufman; and World Center-Jerusalem Director Alan Schneider.



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## The Wannsee Conference: A Starkly Grim Anniversary

In my first job out of graduate school, I worked at the Jewish Community Relations Council in Boston. One of my assignments was to organize a community Holocaust memorial program on the Brandeis University campus, where there was a statue of Job—meant to represent Holocaust victims—created by the famed sculptor Nathan Rapoport.

I had met Holocaust survivors before, but at that Brandeis commemoration I met one who had participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. I will never forget the sadness in his eyes. Though I never got to know him well, his face comes back to me at Holocaust memorial gatherings I attend, almost 50 years later.

I think, too, of the inscription on the Rapoport statue, placed there by a group of survivors from the Boston area: “My eyes shed streams of water

over the ruin of my poor people.” (Lamentations 3:48).


Now, 80 years after Wannsee, came news that the last known Warsaw Ghetto fighter, Leon Kopelman, passed away in Israel a few months ago.

Recent studies have revealed that most millennials and Gen-Zers cannot name one concentration camp or have any idea how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Some 10% in one study actually believe that Jews themselves contributed to their own demise.

When the question is asked “What was the result of the Wannsee Conference?” we will, today, most likely get shrugs and blank stares. The passing of Leon Kopelman is yet another call for urgent action to promote Holocaust education not only in our community, but beyond.

The passage of time, and the internet, have enabled Holocaust denial to become major ingredients in the spike in contemporary anti-Semitism. We consistently call out such rhetoric wherever it appears.

We have also featured discussions of the Holocaust on our podcasts, webinars and other virtual programming, including an interview with academic Judy Batalion, whose new book “The Light of Days,” focuses on the largely untold story of Jewish women who risked their lives as resistance fighters to smuggle food, weapons and forged documents into the ghettos of Poland.

It took 90 minutes to seal the fate of our brothers and sisters in Europe. In their memory, we owe a steadfast commitment to telling their tragic story—and, especially, about how it all began. 

## Recalling Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, Prolific Writer and Thinker

separateness.” She felt that it was the duty of every Jew alive after the Holocaust to “replace” the faith of another who had been murdered.

How does one maintain belief in God in an increasingly rational world? That was one of the questions that Weiss-Rosmarin answered in a number of features in B’nai B’rith’s National Jewish Monthly (NJM, now B’nai B’rith Magazine) during the 1950s and 1960s.


Weiss-Rosmarin simplified concepts and arguments for readers experiencing doubt and confusion, whom she feared were treading a path leading them away from their Jewishness. The content of her essays was intended to persuade them that leading a Jewish life conformed to 20th century notions of leading a good life. Some of them underscored her conviction that of all religions, Judaism’s

essential altruism, and its commitment to individual freedom and thought, was the most modern of faiths.

Comparing Judaism and Christianity in articles published during 1955-56, she notes: “Judaism does not exclude love or make light of its importance. It places ‘law’ and ‘love’ in a relationship of interdependent equality. The Sages held that God is just because He is merciful, and He is merciful because He is just. The Hebrew genius expressed this conviction when it invested the word *tzedakah* with two meanings, justice and charity. In Judaism, provision for the needy and helpless is not left to the subjective emotion of love...; it is an objective requirement of justice, complied with by personal devotion and loving kindness.”

Her NJM 1958 essay “What Can a Modern Jew Believe?” explained that:

“Judaism has no catechism. It does not instruct its confessors precisely what to believe of God and man’s destiny. To be sure, the Talmudic folklore and many early teachers propounded in minute detail what they believed about God, and sin, and the last judgment... These views, however, as all views on matters of the belief, are not binding on other Jews. In the realm of the definition of God, Judaism recognizes no authority.”

In her assessment of Weiss-Rosmarin’s life, Jewish history writer Deborah Dash Moore commented: “Judaism was probably her first true love, and one that she never abandoned. Her passion for Judaism informed her Zionism, her politics, her cultural vision, her interpretation of religion, and her feminism. It was her prism to refract the world around her.” 



# ISRAEL'S GOLDEN AGE OF TV

**Shows find worldwide  
audiences thanks  
to streaming, and  
powerful storytelling**

**By Dina Kraft**

MENU



**A**t the premiere of one of the most expensive productions in Israeli television history, a lavish period piece spanning three generations called “The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem,” the cast poses in a flash of designer suits, gowns, sequins and stilettos in Tel Aviv for the local paparazzi.

Among them are faces from some of Israel’s best-known shows abroad. There’s Hila Saada, from “The Beauty and the Baker,” a comedy picked up by Amazon about a supermodel who falls in love with a baker (an American remake appeared on ABC); Itzik Cohen of “Fauda,” who plays an army officer in the hit counterterrorism thriller; and the main star power, Michael Aloni, best known for his role in Israel’s most recent internationally acclaimed hit: “Shtisel.” Both “Fauda” and “Shtisel” were acquired by Netflix and were breakout successes, helping prompt this new age of Israeli television internationally. “The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem” itself was written by Shlomo Mashiach and Ester (Esty) Namdar Tamam, whose series “Your Honor,” about a judge and the son of a mob boss, premiered last year on Showtime.

The melodrama tells the story of a Sephardic family in Jerusalem, starting in 1919 when the country was under British rule, and was adapted from the novel of the same name by Sarit Yishai-Levi. And as it goes with every new Israeli TV show these days, the chatter instantly turns to which American network or international streaming service might buy it. That’s something Oded Davidoff, the director, prefers to play down, choosing instead to speak of the pull of the series itself.

“I think people will get a sense of the history of this place, of watching how this country became a country. The conflict is there, but so is the sense of living together,” says Davidoff, referring to the mix of Jews of various backgrounds and Palestinians living in the city. He is smiling and looking relaxed after the premiere of the first two episodes.

Davidoff speaks near a pair of vintage MG convertibles that flank the entrance and next to appetizers set on tables fashioned to look like they come from a Jerusalem shuk, a nod to the setting of the show. The touch of Hollywood style glamour suggests how Israeli TV is beginning to try on bigger-budget productions like this—a costume-and-setting-rich period piece—a departure from other Israeli shows, known for producing powerful content on a shoestring and still finding success. (Its creators joke that



Photo credit: NATI LEW/yes Studios

David (Israel Ogalbo) and Luna (Swell Ariel) in “The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem.” Produced by yes Studios and starring some of the country’s most popular actors, this love story set against the epic backdrop of Israeli history has it all: a family curse, military battles, fabulous period settings and costumes and even a belly dance or two.

even though it’s expensive by Israeli standards, the cost of one episode does not amount to the cost of feeding the cast and crew of a big-budget series like “The Crown”).

According to those who consume it, the secret sauce of Israeli TV begins and ends with old-fashioned storytelling. Marry that with the “conflict as author” of so many complicated and charged stories, a compelling and often addictive mix suited for today’s binge viewing can sometimes follow.

“I think the most important thing that happens here is that there’s lots of great material. We have lived in a conflict zone for so many years and people here really know how to tell a story from it. That’s key to it all—the story,” says Davidoff.

Danny Syrkin, director of “Tehran,” which is the first non-English language series on Apple TV+ —a thriller about an undercover female Mossad agent working to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program, echoes that sentiment. Glenn Close, reportedly a fan of the show, will be joining the cast in Season 2, portraying a British woman living in Tehran in a role specially created for her, according to Deadline, an entertainment news website.

### As Old as the Bible

“Jews come from a storytelling tradition as old as the Bible,” says the Moscow-born writer and director who immigrated to Israel with his family as a young child. “We have been able to get to a high level of TV-making even though our resources are not

as big as in other places, including Europe. But it makes us try to think in terms of smart and agile storytelling.”

Israeli series are shot without pilots, and episodes are filmed over just two or three days. The creator, writer and director are often the same person.

“You create and solve your problems in the writing, rather than in special effects,” says Adrian Hennigan, TV critic at Haaretz, the Israeli newspaper. “You have plausible characters in plausible situations. They know their limitations and accept them and, within those confines, make great drama.”

The roots of good storytelling on a budget finding an international audience can be found in “In Treatment,” the first Israeli show whose concept was sold and remade into an American version, in this case by HBO in 2008. It was cheap to make largely because it’s entirely set in a psychotherapist’s office, each episode delving into the story of a different patient being treated. After running for three seasons, HBO is now bringing the series back, this time with Uzo Aduba (of “Orange Is the New Black” fame) in the lead role.

What’s changed since 2008 and the era of Israeli adaptations it kicked off—Showtime’s thriller “Homeland” included, which was the most successful of them all—is the rise of streaming services. These services from the big names like HBO, Netflix, Apple TV+ and Amazon have all picked up Israeli shows in their original form, now accessible to viewers worldwide to choose with the original Hebrew subtitled or dubbed into the local language of one’s choice. Smaller streaming services like TK are also offering Israeli TV shows and drawing audiences.

Danna Stern, managing director of yes Studios, a production and distribution company that produced “Beauty Queen” and sold “Fauda” and then “Shtisel” to Netflix after plans for both of their American remakes fell through, delights in this new access of original Israeli content. She also believes the industry is evolving beyond Middle East conflict stories it is most known for.

But she also knows the competition to be recognized in that space is extreme. “There’s an abundance of content, so breaking through the clutter to get yourself seen and noticed means your work has to be special, it has to resonate, and the question is: How do you do that?”



Photo credit: VERED ADIR/yes Studios

Created by Dana Idisis and Yuval Shafferman, “On the Spectrum,” an award-winning dramedy about three friends with autism who face and overcome the challenges of daily life together, stars (l-r): Neomi Levov as Zohar, Niv Major as Ron and Ben Yosipovich as Amit. For HBO Max’s English-language version, the Hebrew dialogue was dubbed by graduates of the Los Angeles-based not-for-profit Exceptional Minds, a vocational academy and digital studio that trains autistic artists.

An answer lies in the example of “Shtisel.” It’s a series that almost was not made in the first place; few production houses were interested in the story of the travails of an ultra-Orthodox family in Jerusalem. But yes Studios took a chance on it, and it mesmerized its mostly secular Jewish audience in Israel, known more for its hostility toward the ultra-Orthodox than its curiosity about them. It also became a singular example of a crossover hit for ultra-Orthodox viewers, who don’t own televisions. Still, word of the show spread quickly among them, leading to illegal downloads watched surreptitiously from cell phones.

The show has an intimate feel, with the camera’s gaze fixed firmly on the family and their cloistered, ultra-Orthodox world in a neighborhood of Jerusalem. And that’s at the core of its appeal, that window into a world foreign to most viewers. The storylines don’t deal with greater political or societal issues, but with the characters’ lives.

“The stories are very human stories. We try to be as specific as possible in language and food but not to address the usual conflicts we hear about, and that is why it speaks to so many people, including people who are not Jewish,” says Dikla Barkai, the show’s producer and a secular Jew.



“I was surprised I connected to it. It was a world I did not know anything about,” she says. “But when I read the script, I fell in love.”

Two seasons of the show aired in Israel before it went off the air in 2015. In 2018 Netflix picked it up without any marketing fanfare. But a fan base emerged, many of them Jewish women in the United States and the United Kingdom, according to Stern, and they started spreading the word about the show among themselves and on Facebook. That momentum led to Netflix adding another season. So, the cast and crew reassembled.

“It was a dream coming back for a third season. I have to thank our viewers for making this happen,” says Aloni, who plays Akiva Shtisel, or Kive, a gifted painter and dreamer who tries to fit his art within the confines of his community. But the more significant theme for Akiva and his father seems to be about two men grappling (usually quite clumsily) with love and loss.

Aloni observes: “You see at the end we are all flawed, and that’s why this show was able to break barriers and reach wide audiences around the world.”

### The Conflict and the conflict

Israel’s conflict with its neighbors likely seems abstract and confusing to the average television viewer in the United States and around the world. But two recent shows provide an up-close look at its impact on the people who live there. In “Valley of Tears” screened by HBO Max, viewers get a harrowing up-close view of the 1973 Yom Kippur War that almost led to Israel’s destruction.

The true story of the violence that led to the outbreak of the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza inspired “Our Boys.” The HBO miniseries was created by two Jewish Israelis, Hagai Levi (an executive producer of “In Treatment”) and Joseph Cedar, and a Palestinian Israeli, Tawfik Abu-Wael.

For TV critic Hennigan, “Our Boys” is a favorite because it tells a story from multiple perspectives. In this case that meant not just telling the tale of three Jewish teens kidnapped and killed by Hamas in the West Bank, but focusing primarily on the murder of a Palestinian teenager burned to death by Jewish extremists in revenge. “It tries to reflect the dynamic here and reflect that on screen...but that was a big shock for people,” he



Photo credit: courtesy of yes Studios

Michael Aloni portrays teacher and talented painter Akiva (Kive) in “Shtisel,” a serial about the trials and tribulations of a multigenerational Haredi family living in Geula, Jerusalem produced by yes Studios. Premiered on Israeli television in 2013, it went on to become a 2018 runaway hit on Netflix, where fans can now stream all nine episodes of the show’s third, and final season.

said of Israeli Jewish viewers accustomed to having the focus on their own trauma, not that of Palestinians.

Another possible sign of Israel’s TV industry evolving: Some recent productions seen in original form on streaming services have absolutely nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict or religion. “Losing Alice” stars a powerful female lead and was written and directed by a woman, both anomalies in the industry in Israel. The crew was 50% women.

The show was launched on Apple TV+ and stars Ayelet Zurer. International viewers may know her from her acting in American movies and her role in “Shtisel” as a love interest to Akiva Shtisel.

“It’s about a woman getting closer to 50 and wondering about the price between art and life. And that’s coming from my own point of view, and it’s pretty universal,” says Sigal Avni, the show’s writer and director, who immigrated with her family to Israel from the United States as a girl and now lives and works in both New York and Tel Aviv.

“The Israeli television industry has come a long way in the short number of years we’ve had TV,” says Avni. Israelis had one channel, the state channel, until the 1980s. Israel’s TV regulatory system has helped spur that growth because it forces Israeli satellite TV stations to invest 8% of their revenue back into production and its commercial channels to put back 15%.

That translates into more opportunities to make shows and a bigger appetite for risk.

An example of this is “On the Spectrum,” a show about three young adults with autism who are roommates in Tel Aviv. Its audience increased exponentially when HBO Max bought it.

Dana Idisis, writer and co-creator based the story on her autistic brother. “I wanted to write a story in which he was the hero, where he deals with society and not where society needs to deal with him.”

Esty Namdar Tamam, writer and producer of “The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem” hopes more international co-productions will become the norm in Israel so creators can marry their stories with more funding to bring Israeli TV to an even higher level. Otherwise, she charges, the practice of networks and streaming services merely shopping around for story concepts and ideas to remake smacks of cultural capitalism, noting Israeli creators get paid very little for selling their ideas.

“More budgets can let the creatives soar even higher, especially now,” she says, as “the world is becoming a place where you can watch everything.” 📺



Photo credit: VERED ADIR/yes Studios

**A tangle of Shtisels.** L-R: Kive's father, Shulem (Dovale Glickman), the family patriarch, with Nuchem (Sasson Gabay), his brother from Antwerp, Belgium. During season 2, Kive falls in love with his first cousin Libbi, Nuchem's daughter, but the relationship fizzles when he fails to keep his promise to her that he will give up painting. New Yorker critic Alexandra Schwartz praised the show “with no nudity, no violence and no dragons” as “funny, moving and humane.”



Noted Israeli character actor Sasson Gabay (l), aka Uncle Nuchem, enjoys a bonding moment with CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin in B'nai B'rith's Washington library/recording studio in 2019.

Acclaimed Israeli actor Sasson Gabay, known to “Shtisel” fans as Nuchem Shtisel, was on tour starring in the Tony Award-winning musical “The Band’s Visit” at the Kennedy Center when he visited B’nai B’rith’s Washington, D.C., headquarters on Aug. 5, 2019. During a podcast with CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin, the Iraqi-born performer spoke about his extraordinary life and career, and the need for the bridging of cultures through art, music and theater. A case in point: “The Band’s Visit,” is the story of musicians in a touring Egyptian orchestra who develop new friendships when they accidentally wind up in a desolate Israeli town. 📺



**Listen to the podcast here.**

<https://bit.ly/bb-sasson-gabay-podcast>



# From the Fruits of War: The Artistic Garden of Eric Finzi

By Eugene L. Meyer

**R**uth Gruber, an indefatigable photo-journalist instrumental in rescuing 982 Italian Jews from the Holocaust, was 90 when Eric Finzi, the American-born son and grandson of two of them, approached her at a reunion of survivors and their offspring.

"I thanked her," recalls Finzi, there with his wife and two grown children. "I realized my children existed only because of her. To realize one person could make such a difference! I told her I exist only because of you. She just smiled. She said, 'It was my pleasure to shepherd all these wonderful people across the ocean to America.'"

The Finzi name is perhaps better known linked to its Contini relatives, as in "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis," the acclaimed Academy Award-winning 1970 Vittorio De Sica film, based on a historical novel, that captured the plight of affluent and educated Italian Jews as the Fascist vice was tightening. The story Eric Finzi tells resembles their plight, but in his real-life version there is an escape and a happy ending. Ferrara, a city in northern Italy whose Jewish population dates back to the 13th century, is Eric Finzi's ancestral home and the setting for the film.

Photo credit: photo by Steve Arbury, courtesy of Radford University Art Museum

Finzi's art has been illustrated in numerous articles and has been seen online and at museums and galleries in the United States and Europe. "Trail," was installed at Radford University Art Museum in Radford, Va. during a 2015 solo exhibit that included his epoxy paintings inspired by the cinematic masterpiece "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis."





Photo credit: Photo by Mark Gulezian courtesy of Eric Finzi

In Eric Finzi's 2014 assemblage, "Tennicyle," the ghostly glass racket symbolizes the fragile world of the fictional tennis-playing Finzi-Continis, while the wheel-less bicycle rims evoke the drama of his real family's perilous wartime escape, which nearly ended in tragedy. This artwork was featured in a show devoted to the theme of inherited memory at The Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco during 2016-17.

A renaissance man who has pursued dual careers in medicine and art, Finzi, 65, is especially indebted to Gruber, a determined, diminutive woman who, while working for the U.S. Interior Department, convinced the government to transport Jewish Italians on the troop ship SS Henry Gibbins, from Naples to

the Port of New York in July 1944.

It would not have happened were it not also for his grandmother, Nechama (Nelly) Alkolay Finzi, who, when the opportunity arose and with limited options, chose to save her son Alfons over her husband David. It was, her grandson says, a "Sophie's Choice," and the rescue has inspired much of his art—encompassing paintings and sculptural objects—displayed in galleries from Radford, Virginia to New York, Chicago and San Francisco to Ferrara.

One of his paintings at the 2003 New York show, the first to feature the refugees, was of a young woman, from a photograph taken on the ship coming over. "Somehow, she'd now grown up and was now an older woman," Finzi says, "and she bought the painting."

### A Unique Mission

The transatlantic transport was a unique mission. It was the only one the U.S. government undertook to

rescue imperiled European Jews despite resistance from powerful anti-Semites in the State Department.

Once their ship landed, on Aug. 3, 1944, the refugees traveled by train to Fort Ontario, a deactivated army base in Oswego, New York, on Lake Ontario, where they were interned behind a barbed wire-topped fence. They were to be sent back to Europe when the war ended, but thanks again to Gruber's insistence, they were allowed to remain. But first they had to briefly cross into Canada and reenter the United States in Niagara Falls, New York. The Finzis crossed the border on Feb. 2, 1946. Alfons, Eric Finzi's father, was then 21. His passport was waived, he was registered and fingerprinted and indicated he "intends to become a U.S. citizen." Nelly indicated likewise.

So, Alfons Finzi stayed, resettled in New York City, married in 1950, became a plastics manufacturer and amateur inventor, and raised two children—Eric, and his sister, Rima.

The family's journey had begun in Vienna, where Eric's grandfather, David Finzi, had a business and where his father, Alfons, was born. The family lived there from at least 1925 to 1937, when Eric's father was 12.

"My father described a relatively happy childhood in Vienna," Eric Finzi said. "His mother was active socially in Viennese society. My father was raised primarily by a French governess when he was very young. His parents spoke Ladino at home when they wanted private conversations. They had a privi-



Photo courtesy of Eric Finzi

Finzi's parents, Hilda and Alfons Finzi, on their wedding day in 1950.



Photo credit: courtesy of Eric Finzi

**Eric Finzi is a doctor and artist who creates works in a wide range of media.**

leged lifestyle for sure. They just never dreamed anyone would come after them because they were so assimilated.”

They left as anti-Semitism increased, leading up to Germany’s annexation of Austria in March 1938.

David Finzi and his family survived by moving from city to city and country to country, first to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, then to Skopje, Macedonia. David was imprisoned in Ferrara and asked Nelly to use family jewels and cash to bribe the guard to release him. Their older son, Miko, trying to free his girlfriend in Nazi-occupied Croatia, had disappeared and was presumed dead, and she wasn’t about to lose her surviving son, Alfons, too. “She thought, ‘I’m going to need this to keep us alive,’” Eric Finzi says.

So, she said no to her husband. Eventually, he escaped, walked to Bulgaria, joined the partisans fighting the Nazis and immigrated to Argentina. As a Sephardic Jew who spoke Ladino, closely related to Spanish, he could assimilate. Husband and wife never spoke again.

### **Surviving by Stealth**

By 1943, Nelly and her son Alfons were living on rations with forged papers saying they were Italian Catholic refugees in Attigliano, a small village guarded by just one German soldier. Alfons had a girlfriend there but never told her he was Jewish and wouldn’t have intimate rela-



Photo credit: en.wikipedia.org

When American photojournalist Ruth Gruber (seen in a 2007 photograph) learned of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s intent to grant safe haven to nearly 1,000 European refugees at Fort Ontario in Oswego, N.Y. in 1944, she volunteered to escort them on their sea voyage from Italy to the United States. Gruber died at the age of 105 in 2016.

tions for fear she would find out.

Looking for an escape route, he walked 50 miles in four days to Rome, liberated from the Germans on June 4, 1944. There he sought out the head of the Jewish community who knew his family. The man had a friend who arranged for Alfons and Nelly to board the U.S. troop ship. With little time to spare, Alfons returned to the village and secured two bicycles for them.

Halfway to Naples, the bicycles had flats. Alfons and his mother proceeded on foot until American GIs in a Jeep offered them a lift. Eric Finzi would use bicycle tires in his art because, he said, “For me the bikes became symbolic of refugees trying to flee. For the show in Ferrara, I collected 1,000 bicycle tires and rims to create sculptures and based a lot of paintings on bicycles.”

The fleeing Italian Jews—many of them affluent, educated professionals—shared the ship with an equal number of wounded American servicemen. Eric Finzi’s father, who already knew several languages, studied English with a dictionary and tried to converse with the soldiers. He asked one what he’d done before the war. “I was a bum,” the man replied. Alfons looked that up in his German-British English dictionary. The definition he found was a person’s behind.

Arriving in New York, the refugees boarded trains to Oswego, where they were held at the former army base. Eventually, Alfons was permitted to attend Oswego High School, from which he

graduated. The internees were released before the camp closed in February 1946.

Eric Finzi’s father found a home and a new life in Queens, where Eric attended public schools, skipped two grades, then entered the University of Pennsylvania at age 16, bringing with him his artwork and tools. He studied science and medicine, hoping to do biomedical research. Instead, he became a dermatologist, which he describes as “highly visual and hands-on, and plays to one of my strengths, visual recognition, and doing something with my hands, which I loved about painting and pottery and ceramics.”

Finzi’s father, Alfons, became an American citizen in 1951, but the war haunted him. The family never spoke Italian at home, and Alfons Finzi seldom spoke of the past.

“His coping strategy was not talking about it,” Eric Finzi says. “And he’d never get emotional. He’d just suppress the emotions because it was just too painful to think about. His uncle and cousins all got killed in concentration camps. It was only when I was a teenager and a young adult that, upon repetitive questioning, the story would slowly come out, a little bit at a time. His mother never recovered psychologically from all of her losses and never really adapted to her new life.” Nelly died in May 1987, Alfons on Nov. 16, 1993.

### **A Surprising Encounter**

Gruber died Nov. 17, 2016, at the age of 105. Shortly after, the rabbi at her son’s synagogue, Adat Shalom, in Bethesda, Maryland, asked if any-

one wanted to speak about a recently deceased loved one. Her son, David Michaels, rose. Eric Finzi was four seats away. "He said his mother was Ruth Gruber. I couldn't believe it," Finzi recalls. "It was a very emotional time when he stood up and talked about his mother dying."

Michaels remembers that Finzi leaned over and said, "We have to talk."

"Then," Finzi says, "I went over and thanked him profusely for his mother enabling my existence. It was a most amazing coincidence."

It wasn't the first time one of Ruth Gruber's Jewish Italian families had approached Michaels, a high-ranking public health official during the Clinton and Obama administrations, so he and Finzi had an immediate but not

unprecedented connection.

In New York, Michaels said, the refugees and their children were frequent visitors to his childhood home. "They were in and out of the house. We called them my Oswego family when I was growing up."

And with that accidental meeting in the Bethesda synagogue, Eric Finzi joined the family. ☑

## B'nai B'rith and Fort Ontario

**M**onths before the Aug. 5, 1944, reopening of Fort Ontario—the Oswego, New York, Army barracks refitted as an internment camp for the mostly Jewish refugees arriving from Italy—the State Department reached out to B'nai B'rith, whose members in Upstate New York volunteered to assist officials in attending to the inmates' many needs.

Local B'nai B'rith leader Jack Cohen recruited lodges in Rochester and Syracuse to collect bedding and children's winter clothes, solicit arts and crafts materials and sports equipment donations, and order special food for the High Holidays. A synagogue and several common rooms and recreational spaces located inside the confines of the camp were also furnished by B'nai B'rith. Men from the lodges befriended many of the inmates, who viewed them as a source of emotional support and as a link to the outside world.

A mix of young families and older people, 918 out of 982 Fort Ontario residents were Jewish, most of whom had been in hiding or were concentration camp prisoners. Nine men were B'nai B'rith members.

Many of the men, women and children living behind Fort Ontario's barbed wire were experiencing trau-

matic stress, exacerbated by spartan conditions and the subzero cold of Oswego, where snow fell from October to May. Nonetheless, they optimized their situation, writing a newsletter in three languages, performing music recitals, exhibiting their art and developing relationships with the locals. Some participated in a 1944 Christmas radio broadcast from the camp; their grateful thanks buoyed a war-weary nation.

Knowing little English at the start, teenagers attending Oswego High School graduated at the top of their class. Twenty-three births and 13 deaths occurred during the camp's operation.

Although the refugees had pledged to return to their nations after the war ended, a successful publicity and letter-writing campaign, supported by B'nai B'rith, achieved the desired results: President Truman allowed 900 inmates to apply for citizenship when Fort Ontario closed in February 1946.

**B. B. SERVICE OF THE MONTH**

**SERVE REFUGEES**

WHEN 900 refugees, saved from concentration camps and death chambers, trudged gladly into America's best free port (pictured above), they discovered that magnificent arrangements had been made for their reception and religious activities—by B'nai B'rith.

And recognition is paid to them, because they are here for the duration, at Fort Ontario in upper New York State. Among them is a former leader of B'nai B'rith in Argentina, Dr. Rabinovitch, a prominent physician.

Of the 100 leaders, 40 are Jews from various European lands, including Poland. They were a great tribute to the Government when it was asked to receive them—special services, at the request of the U. S. Department of Justice, for their sustenance, the world immediately. Robert Louis, National War Service Director, spent two weeks at Fort Ontario and nearby Syracuse. A total of \$100,000 was appropriated from the B. B. National War Service Fund. Four hundred houses were turned over (two of them are shown above, at extreme left and extreme right, each) containing a reception, writing, and game room. In addition, B'nai B'rith furnished a large community hospital center, radio, movie projector, library

more, arts and crafts shops, foreign language books, Shema Torah and other religious objects. 720 furnishings were new, and it required more than three years to bring them into the West.

The 1000 workers who officials of the War Relocation Authority, which is in charge of the project, B'nai B'rith judges in Syracuse and Rochester organized with him, is called New York B. B. War Service Group. Everything that B'nai B'rith supplied—with the exception of the religious articles, of course—was for the use of all the new comers, Jew and non-Jew alike.

The committee seems to realize that the Order must be to identify and identify themselves on Sept. 3 but the synagogue was dedicated soon after the visitors arrived, and it was a working and impressive event. B'nai B'rith had furnished two Silver Torahs, a complete Mishkin, 15000, prayer books for all comers, a chalice, and other articles. Services are now being held daily. At the dedication, special prayers were offered for Dr. Rabinovitch, whose executive order made America's first "free port" possible.

**YOUR MEMBERSHIP MADE THIS GREAT HUMANITARIAN SERVICE POSSIBLE**

THE NATIONAL JEWISH MONTHLY

In 1944, B'nai B'rith Magazine, then called The National Jewish Monthly, published a notice about the organization's work improving life for the European war refugees housed at Fort Ontario, a former Army Camp in Oswego, N.Y.

A living memorial to Fort Ontario, the exhibits and interactive website of Oswego's Safe Haven Museum contain extensive information about those who began their new lives in the camp. ☑

-- Cheryl Kempler





Photo credit: courtesy of yes Studios

Haredim heart-to-heart. Older members of Jerusalem's fictional Shtisel family like Rabbi Shulem (l) usually communicate in Yiddish, while those of his son's Kive's generation speak Ashkenazi Hebrew, liberally peppered with Yiddish expressions. Religious terms in the hit drama's script are rooted in biblical Hebrew and Aramaic.

# TONGUE TWISTED: What Jewish Languages Say About Us

By Beryl Lieff Benderly

Getting to know the vivid but fictional Shtisel family of Jerusalem has given Netflix viewers around the globe two unusual opportunities: Taking an intimate peek into the unfamiliar world of ultra-Orthodox Jews and hearing Yiddish spoken as a daily language—common in many Jewish communities a generation or two ago but vanishingly rare outside Haredi enclaves today.

Over the hit show's three seasons, the multi-generational Haredi clan has faced such contemporary challenges as infidelity, bereavement, infertility and career and romantic tangles, with members switching seamlessly among Hebrew in multiple versions—both the national language of the Jewish state and the ancient language of holy scripture and prayer—and Yiddish, the *mameloshen* (mother tongue), based on German but written in Hebrew letters, of millions of pre-World War II Europe's more than 7 million Ashkenazi Jews. The series subtitles don't indicate who is speaking what when, so fans not

conversant with these two major forms of Jewish speech are likely unaware of which they're hearing, or even that more than one is in play.

In that respect, "Shtisel"'s many language-limited fans resemble the overwhelming majority of America's Jews, who, at 6.9 million strong, according to a 2021 Pew Research Center report, constitute the world's second largest Jewish population. Only 13% of them claim to "understand most or all of the words when they read Hebrew," found Pew in a 2013 survey. Many fewer know Yiddish. Only 155,582 respondents report using it as a home language, according to U.S. Census data published in 2015, though more than that number speak and understand it. Those whose home language is Spanish-based Ladino, another major Jewish language, number in the hundreds.

That they don't carry on their daily lives in a Jewish language makes U.S. Jews something of an anomaly in the millennia-long history of the Jewish people. "Until recently," writes



Photo credit: lngsac/commons.wikimedia.org

Prospective diners in Ashkelon, Israel who spot the red signage and golden arches logo—branding that needs no “FrumSpeak” accompaniment—are assured in Hebrew and English that this McDonald’s is one of 50 serving kosher fare in the country.

American-Israeli ethnolinguist Jeremy Benstein in his book “Hebrew Roots, Jewish Routes,” “being Jewish meant living in multiple languages. Hebrew was learned in cheder, Yiddish was spoken in homes, and many also knew the language of the area or country in which they lived,” Benstein said in a Zoom interview from Tel Aviv. Today, though, he added, “When you have to [decide] what language to have an international Jewish conference in, you do it in English.”

Linguists call the situation of a community using multiple languages for specific purposes stable diglossia. Generally, the language repertory includes a “high” literary tongue transmitted through education and used in formal and prestigious situations, plus one or more less formal vernaculars for everyday life. For all of Jewish history, Hebrew, the *lashon kodesh*, or “holy tongue,” has served for prayer, study and scholarship, and during certain historical epochs, for everyday speech as well.

### Everyday Speech

But parts of the Tanach—in the books of Daniel and Ezra, for example—as well as in an invocation as central to Jewish life as the Kaddish, the mourner’s prayer, the names of the Hebrew months and words as intimate as *abba* and *ima* (mom and dad) are not Hebrew, but Aramaic. This distinct but related language was the first of the non-Hebrew Jewish tongues. In 539 BCE, when the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon to Judea, Benstein says, they “came back speaking Aramaic,” the imperial language of the conquering empire, which they adopted along with “a ton of other stuff” they incorporated, including the calendar and the writing system used for Hebrew to this day. A widespread lingua franca throughout much of the Middle East, Aramaic passed many words to Hebrew as the two languages fused into one used in Talmudic and rabbinic literature. “In fact, *lashon kodesh* means this synthesis of Hebrew and Aramaic,” Benstein adds.

Yiddish, the largest Jewish vernacular of most of the last millennium, is also a “fusion language,” born of a process that began in the 12th century CE when Jews from “Romance-speaking areas...settled in the regions of the Middle and Upper Rhine,” writes linguist Uriel Weinreich in his textbook “College Yiddish.” There they “adapted large portions of local varieties of German,” amalgamating them with the rich vocabulary of words from Hebrew and Aramaic and from the Old French and Old Italian that they brought from their previous homes. In later centuries, as Jewish settlement spread east, Yiddish also appropriated words and grammar from Slavic languages, including Polish, Czech, Ukrainian and Russian.

Other Jewish languages emerged, the Israeli sociolinguist Bernard Spolsky of Bar-Ilan University writes in the book “Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger,” “in the special circumstances of diaspora isolation, persecution and regular migration.” Also usually written in Hebrew letters, these include Ladino,

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ען אייערע בריווע אין יודאף אויף איינ-  
ער אידישען טיפרייטער און זיי וועלען  
דאס אזוי לייכט מיט פערנעניגען לעזען.  
אלע סארטען ארבייט פיר שוהלען,  
לאדזשעס, סאסייעטיס, א. ו. ו. א. ו. ו.  
אונזער אידישען טיפרייטער, דער איינ-  
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Demand and Supply. This advertisement dating from the heyday of the Yiddish typewriter between 1910 and 1920 encapsulates the bilingual experience of generations of Jewish immigrants and their children, including landsmen in Seattle, Washington. Not only were they fluent in both Yiddish and English, but they now could possess the latest technological advancement to keep in touch with loved ones in “the old country.”

a linguistic merger with Spanish carried throughout the Mediterranean world after the expulsion from Spain, as well as Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-French and others.

Which combination of languages Jewish communities have used at any given time has depended on their particular circumstance. Jews living as the majority in their own country, whether in Biblical kingdoms or modern Israel, have used Hebrew as both their literary language and their daily speech, Spolsky notes. Persecuted minorities under non-Jewish regimes have tended to develop distinct Jewish tongues, keeping Hebrew for religious and literary purposes while also speaking languages of the surrounding community. When Jews are accepted as full, equal citizens, as in America and Western Europe after emancipation in the 19th century, they generally assimilate and lose their linguistic distinctiveness. They sometimes learn Hebrew at religious school classes or at college.

### Changing Times, Changing Tongues

Thus, the volcanic changes in Jewish life during the 20th century reshaped the Jewish linguistic landscape. Neither of the languages that Jews most commonly speak today, English and Hebrew, was prevalent among Jews early in that century. But at that time, for the first time in human history, a movement began to transform an ancient language not nor-

mally spoken for millennia into both the official language and daily vernacular of a modern nation state. In that process, the state's founders preferred the crisp Sephardi pronunciation used in the Middle East to the Yiddish-imbued Ashkenazi, which they denigrated as symbolic of the subservience of the galut (in Sephardic Hebrew, or golus, in Ashkenazi, meaning exile). Over decades, Sephardi-accented Modern Hebrew also eclipsed Yiddish, Ladino and other Jewish dialects as the vernacular of Israel.

Likewise, by the time large numbers of Eastern European Yiddish speakers began reaching the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa and other English-speaking countries near the turn of the 20th century, the Jews of America, as well as France, Germany and Britain were already using the non-Jewish local languages in daily life, and immigrant Yiddish passed from daily use in a generation or two. Then, the Nazi Holocaust and the worldwide dispersion of tragically few survivors extinguished Yiddish and other Jewish fusion tongues in their former heartlands. Next, large numbers of Jews from Arab lands came and assimilated into Hebrew-speaking Israel after it became independent.

But the Hebrew an Israeli uses to order a falafel in Tel Aviv or visit the dentist in Beer Sheva differs from that of Biblical times so drastically that a

speaker of one would be hard pressed to understand another.

However, Benstein argues, the case that they are one language is strong. “Changes like that happen all the time,” he says. “From Chaucer to Shakespeare, massive changes” happened in English grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and usage. But, he adds, “We have this very strongly internalized sense of continuity that for us means we’re speaking one language...that ties us to our ancestors.”

The changes of the last century also mean, Bar-Ilan University sociolinguist Spolsky writes, that “Jewish language varieties that survived the Holocaust have proved, with the exception of Hasidic Yiddish, to be fragile and are becoming extinct as spoken vernaculars.” The large, vibrant secular communities that used Yiddish in daily life are no more. Today, only some Hasidic and other ultra-Orthodox groups have continued an unbroken tradition of using the mameloshen, becoming the only communities transmitting it as living speech to new generations. Their high birth rates do ensure a relatively small but growing Yiddish-based culture into the future.

For secular spoken Yiddish, interest in learning the language appears to be growing among non-Orthodox would-be speakers, as indicated by the proliferation of courses offered at universities, independent institutions such as the Yiddish



Book Center and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and even the free language learning website Duolingo, which launched its first Yiddish course in April. Various groups are also offering instruction to would-be learners of Ladino.

While using English in daily life, Spolsky writes, Yiddish enthusiasts and scholars have adopted “various activities (courses, clubs, web lists, theater, camps) to maintain and build endangered heritage languages and varieties.” This means “Yiddish hasn’t been lost, but its status in the Jewish linguistic repertoire has been changed.”

### An American Jewish language?

But Jewish languages continue to evolve. Sociolinguist Sarah Benor, of Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Los Angeles, says she is “hearing this new Jewish language developing around me.

People who are Orthodox have a very distinctive way of speaking English, and the more Haredi [thus isolated from secular American culture] they are, the more distinct their English,” reaching its fullest development in the form some call “Yeshivish.”

This version of American speech—rich in Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish words used in study and religious life and arranged in mostly English syntax—can produce such statements as this, from the book “FrumSpeak” by Chaim Weiser: “Be’erech a yoivel and a half ago, the meyasdim shtelled avek on this makom a naiya malchus with the kavana that no one should have bailus over their chaver, and on this yesoid that everyone has the zelba zchusim.” So begins the opening line of the Gettysburg Address.

“People use language to determine other people’s and their own location” in

society and have done so as far back as the story in the Book of Judges, when the Gileadites identified enemies trying to pass as friends by having them say the word shiboleth (rendered in English as “shibboleth”), HUC’s Benor continues. The inability to pronounce the telltale “sh” gave the impostors away. The “Yeshivish” American patois “has become a marker of Orthodoxy” that is “much more common in younger than older” members of Orthodox communities, she says.

But in doing so, these Jews are only following the ancient Jewish practice of locating themselves socially through language. Whether they are the Shtetls debating family matters in Yiddish or an American child studying to memorize the unfamiliar words of her bat mitzvah portion in the modern Sephardi pronunciation, how Jews relate to Jewish languages speaks loudly about who they are. 🗨

**T**he Jerusalem Lodge—the first B’nai B’rith lodge initiated in pre-state Israel, in 1888—adopted Hebrew as its official language for the recording of meeting minutes and preparation of legal documents. The teachers, attorneys, rabbis and journalists who joined the new organization aimed “to strive...to revive the [Hebrew] language and support the organization at all times according to our ability.” In 1890, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922), the Lodge’s first secretary, and a linguist, author and translator, organized B’nai B’rith’s Hebrew Language Committee (Va’ad ha-Lashon ha-Ivrit). Its members, including educator and translator David Yellin and university professor Joseph Klausner, studied ways to conform their country’s various Hebrew dialects and create new words, which continue to be used today. Its successor, the Academy of the Hebrew Language, was established in 1953.

The Russian-born Ben-Yehuda dedicated his life to the modernization of biblical Hebrew, which would be used for both speaking and writing; he fervently believed that it would serve as a force to unite Jewish settlers of diverse beliefs, traditions and origins. “A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew,” which he was compiling at the time of his death, was finished by lexicographer and scholar Naftali Herz Tor-Sinai in 1959. 🗨

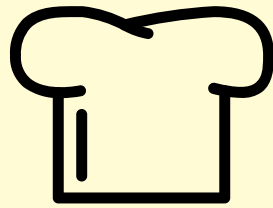
Ben-Yehuda observed:

*“There are two things without which the Jews cannot be a nation — the land and the language.”*



Photo credit: Commons. Wikimedia.org/Widener College Collection, Judaica Division, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

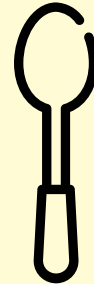
A 1912 photograph of the B’nai B’rith Jerusalem Lodge’s Hebrew Language Committee.



# In Search of *Kreplach:*



## More than Just Jewish Ravioli



By **Kenneth D. Ackerman with Alice Chezar**

**W**hat ever happened to kreplach? You hardly see them anymore. Other Jewish foods like gefilte fish, matzah balls, kugels, and lox and bagels seem ubiquitous in America today. But not kreplach. If you want them, you really have to look for them.

This wasn't always so. Jews have been eating kreplach for over 700 years, since the 13th century, at least. Not long ago, they were a staple in every Jewish deli; most every family had its secret recipe. But like many "old country" traditions, kreplach has become increasingly scarce.

I recently went searching for kreplach—literally. It didn't go well. Even in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, where I live, I found only two restaurants with kreplach soup and a Maryland kosher supermarket selling two frozen types. That was about it.

Our family, like many, once had its own kreplach tradition, with memories of hot kitchens thick with aromas of fried liver and onions and faces of older relatives, but over the years it disappeared. My mission, with the help of my intrepid cousin Alice, has been to rediscover this Jewish essential.

## Why So Rare?

Kreplach is hard to make. When I think of my mother making kreplach years ago, I remember an exhausting three-day affair: hours spent grinding meat, potatoes and onions with a big metal hand-cranked contraption, rolling dough with a big wooden roller that looked more like a weapon than cookware, then assembling and cooking the mixture—each step a full day of frying, beating and pressing. Modern food processors have eased the pain but, even so, fresh-made kreplach is rarely the answer to a spur-of-the-moment “What’s for dinner?”

Then there’s the competition, all the convenient Asian and Italian restaurants with their dumplings and ravioli, dim sum and gyozas, plus the closer Eastern European cousins like pierogi and pelmeni, all just a quick drive or delivery call away. So why bother?

In many ways, kreplach are the ultimate Jewish food, misunderstood, irritating to deal with, never respected. Typically, writer Nora Ephron, in her novel “Heartburn,” featured her main character’s signature recipe for kreplach complete with kreplach jokes. But for the movie, the scriptwriters changed it to lasagna.

Kreplach deserve better. Like a good book, good wine or good friend, they are originals that improve with age. Jewish tradition always reserved kreplach for special occasions. When you made them, you made plenty, enough for a big group with extra to share and save. Even the name denoted special status. Etymologists trace the name “kreplach” to French crepes or Middle High German krappes or krapfes. But Jewish tradition connects them with three Jewish holidays when they’re often served: Kol Nidre for the “K” sound, Hoshana Rabbah (the seventh night of Sukkot) for the “R” and Purim for the “P.” That gives you the “krep,” then add “lach” for a little bunch, krepel for a single.

Kreplach’s traditional three-cornered shape also was steeped with symbolism:



Cousin Alice’s kitchen in California functioned as an experimental kreplach laboratory.

Haman’s three-cornered hat from Purim, the three parts of the Jewish Tanach (Torah, Prophets and Writings), the three patriarchs, the Kabbalah’s three parts of the soul, among others. Even the exhausting cooking, the hours in a kitchen with mothers, daughters, even an occasional son, grinding meat and kneading dough, were a seasonal event, a bonding of generations and families.

## Dumplings: The Universal Food

Pioneering psychologist Carl Gustav Jung theorized in the 1910s that certain myths and concepts common to all humanity formed a “collective unconscious” with roots deep in our psyches. So, it seems with dumplings, perhaps the most widely adapted food on earth, with origins as disparate as ancient China, ancient Greece, even ancient Egypt. Marco Polo is credited with carrying the idea of Chinese dumplings back from Peking during his famous travels in the late 1200s—likely the longest takeout delivery in history. The first modern ravioli emerged in Venice shortly thereafter, soon morphing into early versions of kreplach in nearby Jewish communities.

But just as plausible are stories of dumplings crossing the Asian continent with Mongols or Tartars, taking root in early Russia. They called them mantou



Work in progress: Alice’s quest for perfect kreplach inspired by my mother’s recipe resulted in the production of numerous prototypes. Here’s one example.

(from “savage head”) by the time they reached northwest China. From there, the dumplings migrated to Turkey as manti, then further north to become Polish pierogi, Ukrainian uszka and vareniki, and others. Still another line traces Russian pelmeni, or “ear bread” (for its shape), to Siberian hunters who froze them for long treks through northern forests—an easy way to carry meat over long distances. Just add sauce as needed.



Wherever people learned to raise grain and make dough, be it Europe, Asia, Africa, even pre-European America, they soon seemed to figure out how to stuff the dough with meat, veggies or some protein and yield a portable, storable food they could easily boil, bake, fry or add to a soup on short notice.

### Peasant Food

Italy and France made them fancy—crepes, tortellini and ravioli. Germans made them delicate: dampfnudeln, germknodels. But in the cold, rugged backwoods of Eastern Europe where Jews began concentrating in the late Middle Ages, they evolved as peasant food, made from scraps or leftovers, with thick dough, often served in soups or stews to soften the edges. Germans called them maultaschen, literally “feedbags,” with schupfnudeln for potatoes.

Over decades and centuries, every locality developed its variations as cooks flavored them with available spices and vegetables. Pelmeni and vareniki kept the dough thin while pierogi grew it thicker.

For Jews, the requirement for kosher meat and separation of meat from milk added more complication. Without butter, kreplach dough grew harder. Fillings became seasonal, ranging from fruit and cheese to turkey, beef, onions, liver, lamb, schmaltz (chicken fat), whatever was at hand. Jews in Turkey and Persia added nearby favorites like eggplant and chickpeas, seasoned with a universe of local spices. Jews in the Central Asian Emirate of Bukhara developed their own unique form called dushpara, a kreplach-like dumpling with ground beef but crafted into a unique shape with connected ends and wing-like edges, and served with a special broth made from chickpeas, cilantro and fried onions.

So intertwined are the cultures today that, in Russia, frozen pelmeni sold in markets are often made with pasta machines imported from Italy, while many Jews in America are drawn to Chinese dumplings that evoke distant memories from their own past. Some Chinese restaurants in Jewish neighbor-



Photo credit: photos courtesy of Kenneth Ackerman

**The ultimate kreplach: One picture may be worth a thousand words, but one taste is worth a million.**

hoods have even advertised their wonton soup as “kreplach (with pork).”

### Our Family

Our family used to have a special kreplach tradition, brought to America when my grandparents emigrated from southern Poland in the 1920s. My generation—the sisters, brothers and cousins born in America in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s—remember my grandmother cooking large batches in her small apartment in Brooklyn’s Borough Park, then my mother continuing the tradition in Upstate New York until she passed away in 2004.

We always fried them, never put them in soup. Sometimes adding ketchup or soy sauce. They were always a treat because we didn’t get them often. But, as with many Jewish families, the tradition stopped. My generation saw the hard work, discovered the convenient alternatives, and so it slid. Also, unlike most other families, my mother and aunts hated having kids in the kitchen, even daughters, considered them a nuisance and shooed them away, so family recipes didn’t always pass down.

My cousin Alice was an exception. She grew up in Brooklyn and, in the early 1970s, she co-authored a classic

counterculture food guide called “The Munchies Eatbook (Or How to Satisfy the Hungries Without Eating Everything in Sight).” In it, she captured several family recipes including my grandmother’s amazing Bubbie’s Chocolate Cake, but kreplach were a bridge too far.

Only after Alice had published her book did my mother finally relent and agree to tolerate her presence in the kitchen one time—only once! and not to touch anything but just watch and take notes—while she cooked kreplach. Alice wrote the recipe down, but then filed it away. The job seemed too daunting, so much struggle with Chinese take-out just around the corner.

But recently—partly at my urging—she agreed to give it a try, becoming my partner in rediscovery. It was time to roll up her sleeves and get in the kitchen.

### Rediscovery

Before all the chopping and grinding, making kreplach requires, first, a strategy and second, time. Alice had the plan, and the long COVID-19 shutdown gave us the hours and days.

Working in her kitchen in California, armed with her modern Cuisinart and 30-year-old notes from my mother, Alice decided to make the meat fillings first, a day in advance—pot roast, liver, onions and chicken fat. The dough would come next, rolled out in large sheets, then cut into three-inch squares for the shells. Finally, she would assemble the packages, filling each square, folding it in half, then boiling the result.

“After years of procrastination, I finally felt up to it,” she confided before starting. “But so much responsibility. I didn’t want to mess it up.” Alice began by cooking the pot roast using a simple recipe from her mother. Then came the liver and onions, which add a distinctive taste. Then into the food processor they went to grind, but carefully, she cautioned, “fine, not mushy.”

On day two she made the dough, then rolled it. Alice took turns at the counter with a friend. “We rolled and rolled. It felt like rolling the tide as it came in and


out. We rolled and it retreated, rolled and retreated. I began to appreciate the muscle needed for this.” But even after all that rolling, the dough came out too thick, making the kreplach rubbery and unwieldy.

For her second attempt, Alice shifted strategy, adding a pasta attachment to her standard mixer for the dough. This time the dough was perfect, but still the kreplach weren’t right. “When these

were boiled and fried, I almost cried,” she explained. “We were almost there, but the size was wrong. Too small. Not enough filling.”

It took the third attempt finally to get it right. This time, Alice carefully cut the perfectly thin dough into precise 3-inch squares, filling each a bit more with the meat filling. She had it down, a batch of four dozen kreplach that tasted just right. She was ready to share.

I got my own shipment from Alice’s kitchen in California delivered overnight to my house in Virginia in a shoebox lined with ice packets. I fried most and put the rest in soup. Soon the smell in the kitchen grew irresistible. I added soy sauce. They were amazing.

Some things are just too good to lose in the dust of time. Now, for the first time in print, I can present Alice’s Kreplach, based on our own family’s secret recipe. 

## Alice’s Kreplach Recipe: Yields 3-4 dozen

### Filling:

- 2 ½ – 3 pounds pot roast, cooked stove top or roasted
- 1/4 – 1/8 pound beef liver, sauteed until no longer pink inside
- 2 onions, sauteed until golden brown

Mix all three together in a food processor until finely chopped. Season to taste. When you add the liver, drink in the scrumptious aroma. Savor the moment and season to taste. Cover and put aside.

### Dough:

- 4 cups sifted flour
- 4 eggs at room temperature
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt or to taste
- Approximately 5 tablespoons cold water
- 2 extra egg whites for sealing the kreplach

After preparing the dough, place on a lightly floured surface, knead with hands until smooth and elastic. Form a ball and wrap with plastic wrap to avoid drying out. Let rest for 20 minutes.

### Rolling the dough

Unwrap one section of dough and place on heavily floured surface. Roll out with a rolling pin until as thin as possible. Then cut the thinly rolled dough into approximately 2½ to 3-inch squares.

### Filling the kreplach

Place 1 heaping teaspoon of filling in each square. Brush a little egg white along two edges and fold over to make a triangle. Press edges together with fingers.

### Boiling the kreplach

After all kreplach are made, drop each into a large pot of lightly salted boiling water, stirring gently with wooden spoon to keep separate. Simmer for twenty minutes. Remove from the pot, strain and shower with cold water and allow to cool.

At this point you have three options: (a) fry in a little vegetable or canola oil, (b) brush each with oil and bake at 350°F until golden brown or (c) serve in soup. Or else you can just transfer them into plastic freezer bags and share with friends. They are, after all, for special occasions.

Enjoy!

# Small Town Synagogues: Struggling to Survive

By Jennifer Lovy



Seven more years. That's how long Lynne Newman wants to see Congregation Sons of Israel keep its doors open. That would be enough time for her two grandchildren to become a bar and bat mitzvah at the Chambersburg synagogue. Now 7 and 10, the children represent the fourth generation of her family to worship at the 102-year-old shul, the only synagogue within several counties of South Central Pennsylvania.

Keeping it open longer than seven years would be preferable, but Newman, 75, knows that congregations in small towns frequently struggle to survive. She's fearful that Sons of Israel, with its aging members, may not even be around in three years when it's time for her granddaughter's bat mitzvah. When she grew up, there were close to 60 kids in the Sunday school. Now there are five, and two are her grandchildren.

"It worries me because we're indicative of a great many small towns across the country where the Jewish populations are declining. People move, kids go to college and don't return, and older people pass away. We're lucky if we get a minyan," says Newman, who over the years has, as a lay leader, conducted services and officiated funerals,

baby namings and unveilings when the congregation didn't have a rabbi.

Ronni Cook, a fellow congregant, shares in Newman's apprehension. She tried to recruit new members by offering yoga classes, book clubs, food festivals and a knitting group. She found and convinced one mother to send her four-year-old to the Sunday school and hopes to get the mom involved in the congregation. Otherwise, her efforts were largely unsuccessful.

"I know people have left the cities because of the pandemic. There's got to be some Jewish people who have moved here. I just don't know how to find them. They're not looking for us. We have a Facebook page and a website. I've left flyers at the chamber of commerce and real estate offices, and I've asked a few people at the local college to send interested Jewish students our way. But, with everything we're doing, we're not attracting new members," says Cook, who at 70 is one of the younger congregants.

## Funding a Home Far from big Cities

Early on, those who left the more urban areas followed general migration patterns, settling in new towns and communities that developed along trade routes and in

places where critical resources were found. Jewish pioneers saw opportunities and set up shops in frontier outposts, often a good alternative to competing with established merchants in larger cities.

Many started out as peddlers because they didn't need much in training, capital investments or English fluency, according to Lee Shai Weissbach, a retired University of Louisville history professor and author of "Jewish Life in Small-Town America: a History." These peddlers weren't necessarily poor immigrants, according to Weissbach. Many were successful and moved to small towns because they saw it as an opportunity to earn more money. As they became more established, they brought over family members to join them. As the Jewish population in a specific area increased, often the progression was to start a Hebrew Benevolent Association or burial society before establishing a synagogue.

Whether it's rural Pennsylvania, the middle of the Bible Belt, or some other sparsely populated area, Jews living in these communities frequently find themselves thinking about the longevity of their congregations and finding creative ways to survive. While many small-town synagogues have either permanently closed or



struggle to survive, some have stable or even growing membership.

Approximately 1,100 miles away from Chambersburg, in Fort Smith, Arkansas, United Hebrew Congregation sits unassumingly at the dead end of a residential street. Although Jews have lived in Fort Smith since the 1840s, it wasn't until after the Civil War when rapid economic growth attracted more Jewish residents. The synagogue's 1886 founding was preceded by a cemetery association, a Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society and a B'nai B'rith chapter.

Today, membership is small yet stable, but congregants know that being a small-town synagogue puts them in a precarious state with an uncertain future.

Selina Rosen, 61, conducted Friday night services on the United Hebrew Congregation Facebook page throughout the pandemic, packing the hour-long service with personality, prayer and parsha interpretations (along with a frequent and fervent message asking congregants to get vaccinated).

Rosen isn't a rabbi. The Arkansas synagogue hasn't had a full-time clergy member since the mid-1960s. She's a science fiction writer who owns a small publishing company and lives on a three-acre farm 20 minutes from the shul.

There are about 100 people paying dues to the congregation that can seat 200 in the sanctuary. About half the synagogue members no longer live in the area but continue paying to support the congregation. On a given Shabbat, between 10 and 20 congregants participate in services.

"We do pretty well considering where we are and what we're doing, but there have been many times when we thought



Photo credit: courtesy of Ronni Cook

Rabbi Ilan Pardo (l) and synagogue member Ronni Cook (center) accept a proclamation from the town's mayor, Walter C. Bietsch, honoring Congregation Sons of Israel in Chambersburg, Pa. during its 2019 centennial.

the synagogue was on the brink of extinction," says Rosen.

### Some Stable, Even Growing

Not every small congregation is in survival mode. There is stabilization and even growth in some areas, especially if there is a nearby medical facility, college or university, according to Matt Boxer, an assistant research professor at Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Steinhardt Social Research Institute. For example, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, a city with a population of 46,000, there are several hospitals and The University of Southern Mississippi. Its only synagogue, Temple B'nai Israel, maintains a stable but small congregation that includes young families.

Similarly, Beth Israel Congregation, located near Colby College in Waterville,



Photo credit: Lynn Rosen

In Fort Smith, Ark., lay leader Selina Rosen provides virtual messages of encouragement to her United Hebrew Congregation Facebook followers from her living room each Friday evening. Rosen is also a science fiction writer, publisher and farmer.

Maine, is a growing synagogue in a college town. During the pandemic, membership grew by 10, bringing its size up to 75 membership units (defined as an individual or a family), according to Rabbi Rachel Isaacs, the congregation's spiritual leader.

Isaacs says the growth represents a trend she and her colleagues in other small Northeast communities are noticing. As the executive director of the Center for Small Town Jewish Life at Colby College, Isaacs has a good sense of rural Jewish life. Her organization provides access to Jewish resources, educational opportunities, programming and community-building experiences for those in geographically isolated communities throughout Maine and portions of northern New England.

She attributes the increase in part to COVID-19. When remote work became





Photo credit: en.wikipedia.org

An 1882 founders' plaque is on display at Temple Beth El in Jefferson City, Mo. Today, membership consists of about 25 families; services are led by congregants.

an option, she and her colleagues saw an influx of families drawn to Maine for its "fresh air, affordable housing, local food and a slower pace of life."

Jeffrey Tremblay, the head of school at Levey Day School in Portland, Maine, says the pandemic contributed to the growth at his school, where enrollment doubled from 23 to 46 students last year. Tremblay says that while COVID-19 brought families to the area from larger cities such as Boston and New York, not all growth is attributable to relocation. A small number of students transferred from area public schools, attracted by in-person learning during the pandemic and the quality of education provided, says Tremblay.

According to the American Jewish Population Project, there are about 7.6 million Jews in the United States. Between 80% and 85% live in nearly four dozen urban areas, which means over a million Jews live outside the more densely populated communities like Chambersburg, Fort Smith, Hattiesburg, Waterville and Portland.

"A lot (of people) are in places where there are between a handful to a few thou-

sand Jews, and they need Jewish services too," says Boxer, who in 2012 witnessed the closure of his childhood shul when members couldn't even get a minyan for Kol Nidre services at this Niagara Falls, New York congregation.

"Growing up, we always had the same 10 people show up to Saturday morning services, and it wasn't because they were particularly religious. It was because if you didn't show up, it wasn't going to exist. That can profoundly impact Jewish identity, but it's also a really tough way to live," says Boxer.

Obtaining kosher meat or food that is kosher for Passover, attracting a minyan and enrolling enough students to attend Hebrew school are just some of the challenges faced by Jews in small towns. But, thanks to online resources and several organizations dedicated to supporting those in isolated regions, living a Jewish life outside large metropolitan areas has also become more accessible.

The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL), located in Jackson, Mississippi, began as the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in 1986. Formed to preserve artifacts, including historical documents from small-town Southern Jewish Communities, the organization now provides services and cultural programs to strengthen Jewish life in 13 southern states.

"We offer resources tailored to meet the needs of communities of all sizes—from the largest congregations to the last-Jews-in-town," according to the ISJL website.

Then there's the Jewish Community Legacy Project (JCLP), which helps

declining congregations plan for the future by addressing perpetual cemetery care, archive and artifact preservation and asset distribution. The synagogues in Fort Smith and Chambersburg are among the more than 100 congregations the organization has helped.

"Just like we would write our will, there's no reason why a congregation can't think about the what if, create a legacy plan, and then continue doing their own thing," says the group's Senior Vice President Noah Levine. "We're not an organization that closes synagogues down. We're an organization that helps synagogues plan."

In 2016, Temple Beth El, a congregation dating to 1879, sought its help. Located in a historic neo-Gothic building erected in 1883 in downtown Jefferson City, Missouri, the synagogue consists mainly of a small chapel. It lays claim to being the oldest synagogue in continuous use west of the Mississippi.

This congregation maintains a membership of 30 households, consisting of mainly those in their 60s and 70s. Some no longer live in the area but want to support the temple, which almost always garners a minyan. On a typical Friday night, there are between 10 and 13 households, more during the High Holidays.

Ann Tettlebaum, a retired CPA and temple treasurer for more than 10 years, indicates that membership remained steady over the last decade. What's lacking, she says, is the number of families with children. The last bar or bat mitzvah was probably 10 years ago. When her children, now in their 40s, were growing

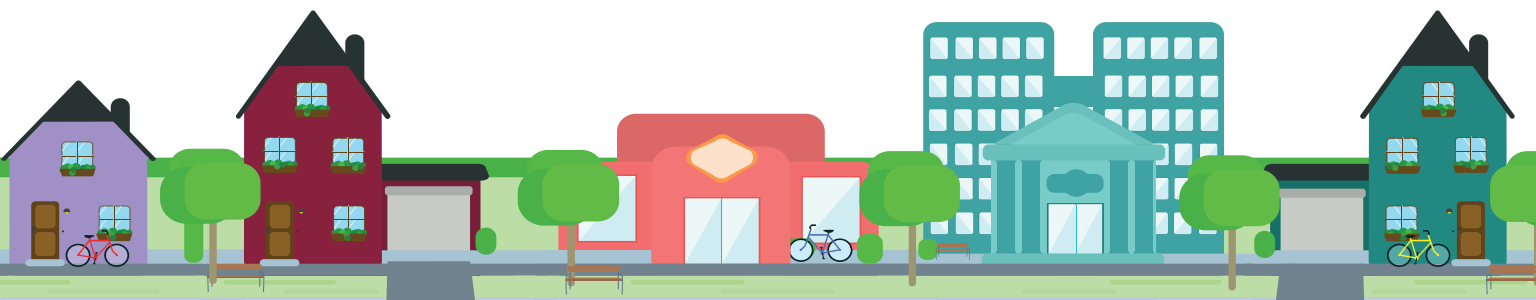


Photo credit: courtesy of Beth Israel Congregation,  
photo by Sarah Rockford

The warm and communal atmosphere at Beth Israel Congregation, a Conservative synagogue in Waterville, Maine, attracts diverse worshippers. Rabbi Rachel Isaacs (at lectern), a faculty member and chaplain at Colby College, won the Covenant Foundation's 2020 Pomegranate Prize for her innovative approach to Jewish education.

up, there were more students, but still not enough for a Sunday school. The kids traveled around 30 miles to Columbia, Missouri, for their Jewish education. Today there aren't any members with young children.

Tettlebaum chaired the temple's long-range planning committee and describes contentious discussions about the congregation's future because some members didn't see value in planning for a possible dissolution.

"They felt that there had been times where the temple membership was very low, but we've always bounced back. Being in the state's capital, government jobs bring people here, so you never know who could move into the city.

"We're always hopeful that more Jews will find themselves here," says Tettlebaum, adding hopefully: "And stay."

Despite the discord, members worked with JCLP in creating a long-range plan, compromising by including language: "In the unlikely event that the temple ceases to be viable" in plan documents.

The plan asks members to determine whether they can continue to fulfill the purpose of the temple. It asks them to consider if there are enough members to hold weekly services. If not, are they willing to maintain the building as a house of worship for holidays, visitors and special events by following the tenets of Judaism? Similarly, it asks them if there is a reasonable possibility that the Jewish population of the community will increase in the foreseeable future. Are there financial resources to maintain the building? Are other options available to service the religious needs of Jewish persons in the area if the congregation dissolves? Will they be



able to maintain status as a federally tax-exempt place of worship and a nonprofit?

Nearly two and a half hours away in Alton, Illinois, congregants faced declining membership and a future where growth was unlikely. So in 2014, members of Temple Israel approached JCLP for guidance. Five years later, when they decided to close, congregants already had a plan encompassing selling the building, establishing an endowment fund to maintain the legacy of the temple, and preserving artifacts and historical documents.

Matt Boxer, the Brandeis research professor, knows what it's like to watch a congregation vanish. He compares the 2011 closure of his childhood shul, Temple Beth Israel, to losing a family member.

"When you're part of a [small] Jewish community, it's like having an extended family, and for me, it was almost like growing up with a whole bunch of surrogate grandparents," he says.

Following the closure, his mom wouldn't drive past the building. "It hurt too much to see that this place where we spent so much of our lives was no longer a synagogue," he says. "It was sold to a church, which is a fairly common story for small Jewish communities because who are you going to sell the building to if you have to shut down? There's not a lot of options."

However, his father, the longtime volunteer chazzan (cantor), was somewhat relieved. "He didn't have that enormous load on his shoulders anymore, and, at the same time, it was also very, very sad because even though it was a burden, it was one that he willingly took on because the community meant so much to him," says Boxer.

"Most synagogues don't close because they run out of money. They close because they run out of people," says JCLP's Levine.

Newman and Rosen agree. Newman's Chambersburg congregation has a decent amount of investments, bequests from those who left money to the synagogue, and others willing to donate if necessary.

Rosen says thanks to some generous donors, their Arkansas congregation is financially sound. Without the burden of a rabbi's salary and the benefit of congregants who do a lot of the work, they save money. And while she hopes the synagogue remains viable forever, she believes that a building isn't crucial.

"Judaism doesn't really need the shul. Judaism is a religion that is easily practiced at home. But you go to shul for the community, and everyone has times where they need a community," says Rosen. 📍



# B'NAI B'RITH IMPACT

B'NAI B'RITH IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE GLOBE

## Our Work

*By Andrea Cure  
Director of Development*



**A**s you read through this issue of IMPACT you will see we have launched new programs that specifically seek to engage new audiences and educate the leaders of tomorrow: The **Women's Leadership Network** is designed to engage more women with the work of B'nai B'rith International, combatting the notion once and for all that B'nai B'rith is a "men's only" organization, and the **IMPACT: Emerging Leaders Fellowship**, a virtual fellowship program for Jewish students and young professionals worldwide. Truly one-of-a-kind, the

program is a partnership initiative between B'nai B'rith International and the World Union of Jewish Students.

Both programs seek to educate, inspire and empower participants. It is only through programs such as these that the global Jewish community will be able to stand in defense of Israel and to speak out against anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry.

Such programs would not be possible without you, and all our members and supporters worldwide.

Thank you for your continued partnership.

IMPACT is published quarterly, online – posted on the home page, with back issues archived.  
Please visit the website to read new additional content for the December 2021 IMPACT.

# “Durban Revisited” Series Brings Awareness to Anti-Semitic Legacy of the Durban Conference



Photo credit: Sloan Copeland, the Jewish Broadcasting Service



Photo credit: Darah Golub, the Jewish Broadcasting Service

During the broadcasts from the Manhattan studios of JBS, Mariaschin (left) and Michaels (right) led discussions on the history and consequences of the notorious conference.

Throughout 2021, B'nai B'rith aimed to bring awareness to the toxic legacy of the 2001 U.N. World Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa. The 2001 conference devolved into demonstrations of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel hate and resulted in a declaration that singled out Israel alone for implied characterization as “racist.”

B'nai B'rith's efforts to mark the 20th anniversary of the original conference were capped with “Durban Revisited,” a series of televised programs produced in partnership with the Jewish Broadcasting Service (JBS), leading up to the Sept. 22 U.N. summit marking the anniversary.

“As soon as it was clear that the U.N. would again be used to keep alive that legacy of Durban—which challenged the very legitimacy of Jews' equal rights—we realized that we needed not simply a local response, but a global one,” said David Michaels, B'nai B'rith director of U.N. and intercommunal affairs.

The partnership between JBS and B'nai B'rith for “Durban Revisited” was encouraged by Millie Magid, B'nai B'rith U.N. Affairs chair and a longtime supporter of JBS. JBS broadcast the

series through its website and on cable television stations. The programs are also viewable on B'nai B'rith's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

The series featured an array of distinguished guests, such as former Soviet prisoner of conscience Natan Sharan-sky, former United States national security advisor John Bolton and French public intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy. Programs included interviews with guests by B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin and panel discussions moderated by Michaels, as well as a special message by B'nai B'rith President Charles O. Kaufman.

New York Times columnist Bret Stephens and Mariaschin kicked off the series on August 30 with a conversation on Israel, Zionism and anti-Semitism.

Stephens said the 2001 Durban conference exposed both how prevalent anti-Semitism still was at a time when it

was thought to be a form of hatred that was “on the wane,” and the extent to which anti-Zionism is another form of anti-Semitism.

“The Durban conference probably had more of an impact on the Jewish population than outside of it, obviously because it was so nakedly hostile to Jews, so it began a process of a kind of awakening to the fact that hatreds that stretch back many thousands of years weren't at all dormant and, in fact, that they were resurging,” Stephens said.

Other guests of the programs included Ahmed Shaheed, former foreign minister of the Maldives; Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, deputy mayor of Jerusalem; Ellie Cohanin, former U.S. deputy special envoy to combat anti-Semitism; and Sherri Mandell, co-founder and co-president of the Koby Mandell Foundation, which was founded in honor of her son, who was murdered by terrorists in 2001.



**“Durban Revisited” is available for viewing on B'nai B'rith's YouTube channel**

<https://bit.ly/bnaibrith-durban-revisited-interviews>

On the day of the U.N. summit, “Durban Revisited” culminated in an interview with B’nai B’rith Honorary President Richard D. Heideman, who led the largest multinational Jewish delegation at Durban in 2001 and ultimately a walkout from it, along with his wife, International March of the Living President Phyllis G. Heideman. In 2011, when the U.N. held a conference

to mark Durban’s 10th anniversary, B’nai B’rith held a high-level counter-conference.

B’nai B’rith led the global Jewish response to Durban’s toxic legacy through published op-eds, advocacy directed at world leaders, interventions at the U.N., webinars and the “Durban Revisited” series. The organization also called on world democracies to not participate in

the anniversary summit. At press time for IMPACT, at least 38 countries declined participation. As Michaels said, “We couldn’t allow the pandemic to get in the way of challenging the defamation of the world’s only Jewish state.” 📺

An international roster of world leaders and policy makers, journalists and experts on anti-Semitism and Israel offered their views during “Durban Revisited,” a series of programs that delivered an in-depth exploration of the 2001 U.N. conference held in Durban, South Africa. Co-produced by B’nai B’rith and the Jewish Broadcasting Service, the broadcasts featured interviews and panels moderated by CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin and U.N. and Intercommunal Affairs Director David Michaels. B’nai B’rith Honorary President Richard D. Heideman, who led the Jewish caucus at Durban and ultimately a walkout from it, along with his wife, International March of the Living President Phyllis G. Heideman, described their experiences.

## NONE SHALL BE AFRAID: FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM

Fighting anti-Semitism is at the core of what we do.

Since our founding, B’nai B’rith has developed tolerance programs and spoken out strongly against anti-Semitism in all its forms. “None Shall Be Afraid” is our flagship response to the world’s oldest hatred.

# NONE SHALL BE AFRAID

FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM

Twenty years ago, a United Nations conference on racism devolved into a festival of hate against Jews and the Jewish state

**B'NAI B'RITH INTERNATIONAL**  
PRESENTS  
**DURBAN REVISITED**  
A Special Series on Israel, Anti-Semitism and the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa

**PREMIERE**  
**AUGUST 30**  
ON  
**JBS JEWISH BROADCASTING SERVICE**  
America's Jewish Television Network  
reaching over 75 million homes nationwide

**FEATURING**

 <b>NATAN SHARANSKY</b> Former Soviet prisoner of conscience and Israeli government minister	 <b>BRET STEPHENS</b> New York Times columnist	 <b>JOHN R. BOLTON</b> Former U.S. National Security Advisor and Ambassador to the United Nations	 <b>BERNARD-HENRI LÉVY</b> Public intellectual and author
 <b>CHARLES D. KAUFMAN</b> President, B'nai B'rith International	 <b>RICHARD D. HEIDEMAN</b> Honorary President, B'nai B'rith International	 <b>PHYLLIS G. HEIDEMAN</b> President, International March of the Living	 <b>DANIEL S. MARIASCHIN</b> CEO, B'nai B'rith International
 <b>IRWIN COTLER</b> Canadian Special Envoy on Preventing Holocaust Remembrance and Combating anti-Semitism	 <b>RUTH BARONESS DEECH</b> Member of the British House of Lords	 <b>ALMA HERNANDEZ</b> Member of the Arizona House of Representatives	 <b>AHMED SHANTEED</b> U.N. Special Representative on Freedom of Religion or Belief and former Foreign Minister of the Maldives
 <b>OLGA MESHOE WASHINGTON</b> CEO, B'nai B'rith International	 <b>GEORGE DIEK</b> Ambassador of Israel to Azerbaijan	 <b>FLEUR NASSAN-NAHOUM</b> Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem	 <b>ELLIE CONAHAN</b> Former U.S. Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat anti-Semitism
 <b>GERALD M. STEINBERG</b> President, NGO Monitor	 <b>SHERRI MANDELL</b> Counselor, author and co-founder of the Koby Mandell Foundation	 <b>DAVID J. MICHAELS</b> Director of U.N. and Intercommunal Affairs, B'nai B'rith International	 <b>TEISHA BADER</b> News Anchor, JBS



# B'nai B'rith Hosts 2-Part Series: Hezbollah: Sowing Global Terror

*July 18 is the shared date for two deadly attacks on Jews*

B'nai B'rith International hosted a two-part virtual series—Hezbollah: Sowing Global Terror—to commemorate the shared anniversaries of two deadly attacks on Jews.

The bombing of the AMIA (the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association) building in Buenos Aires that killed 85 and wounded more than 300 took place July 18, 1994. Terrorists detonated a car bomb, killing and maiming those who worked at the AMIA building and destroying the structure that housed so many Jewish Agencies in Buenos Aires.

In 2012 on the same date, a suicide bomber blew up a passenger bus carrying Israeli tourists from Tel Aviv at the Burgas Airport in Bulgaria. The explosion killed the Bulgarian bus driver and five Israelis and injured 32 other Israelis.

Even though there is ample evidence that Hezbollah—a terrorist group that's a proxy of Iran—is behind both attacks, there is reluctance to tackle the terrorist organization head-on to this day.

Part 1 of the virtual series commemorated the 27th anniversary of the AMIA bombing—the deadliest terror attack in Argentinian history—and the continued search for justice.

In this part of the series, Adriana Camisar, B'nai B'rith's special advisor on Latin American and U.N. affairs, spoke with Luis Czyzewski, whose 21-year-old daughter, Paola, was killed in the bombing. Camisar, who is also from Argentina, interviewed Czyzewski over Zoom in Spanish, with simultaneous English translation. B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin also provided a special introduction.

Czyzewski described the day of the attack, the effect of Paola's loss on his family and his search for justice for his daughter and the other victims. Paola was on winter break from her law studies and was at the AMIA building to assist her parents with some work. It was the first time Paola had ever been in the building.

Czyzewski said that, although his family found ways to move forward, the memory will always be there, and the absence will always be there.

Czyzewski said that despite investigations uncovering a lot of information on the attack, there have been no convictions in the case.

Over that past 27 years, Czyzewski and other families fighting for justice have explored many options for holding the perpetrators responsible.

One option is a law allowing trial in absentia—trying a person when they are not present. Martin Bormann, a Nazi, was convicted through a trial in absentia during the Nuremberg trials.



Photo credit: commons.wikimedia.org/jaluj

The name of Alberto Nisman, the prosecutor who was seeking justice for the AMIA victims, was appended to the 1994 casualty list after he was murdered in 2015.



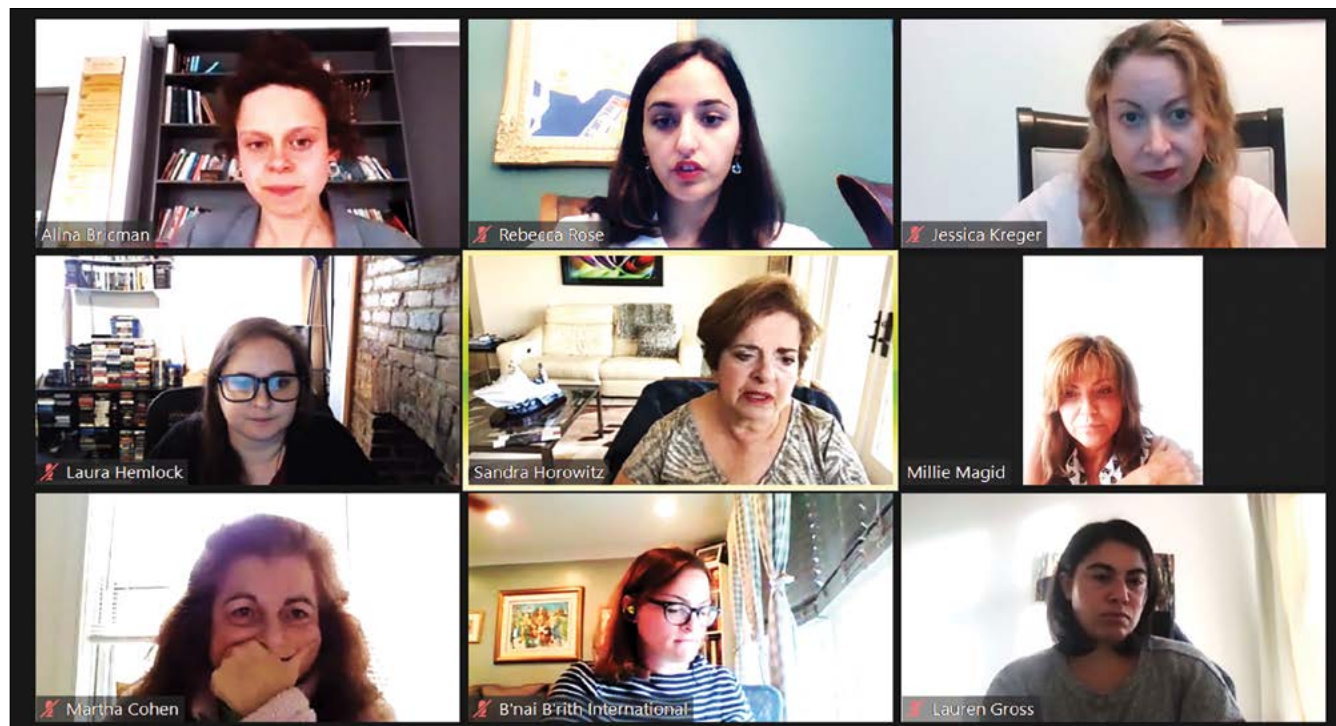
B'nai B'rith honored the anniversary of the July 18, 1994, AMIA tragedy with a two-part virtual conversation on July 16, 2021.

B'nai B'rith Argentina is also studying international agreements to which Argentina and Iran are both signatories that might allow Argentina to demand that Iran cooperate with the Argentine judiciary.

A third option is to accuse Iran before a United Nations international terrorism office, using the U.N. as a

*continued on page 36*

# B'nai B'rith Launches Initiative to Empower Women Leaders



On May 4, B'nai B'rith Director of EU Affairs Alina Bricman (top row, extreme left) spoke about issues of concern to the European Jewish community and answered questions from Women's Leadership Network members.

The Women's Leadership Network is a new B'nai B'rith initiative to foster an intergenerational group of female leaders focused on B'nai B'rith's advocacy efforts. Members of the network come together to learn from one another and experts in the areas of B'nai B'rith's policy priorities, to ask questions and to hone leadership skills.

The network is led by Laura Hemlock, chair of the New York branch of B'nai B'rith Connect—B'nai B'rith's young professionals group.

"Having a network specifically for women is important as women's voices are often underrepresented in advocacy spaces. The Women's Leadership Network provides a space for women to learn

together and sharpen skills through a unique lens of women's empowerment," Hemlock said.

At its first meeting in February, held virtually, participants discussed current policy toward Iran and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 agreement with the U.S., China, France, Russia and the U.K. intended to reduce Iran's stockpile of materials used to produce nuclear weapons. Millie Magid, B'nai B'rith's chair of U.N. affairs, and David Michaels, director of U.N. and inter-communal affairs, were speakers.

Rebecca Rose, B'nai B'rith associate director of development & special projects, said learning about issues like

Iran policy from experts helps network members better understand the frequently shifting political landscape and gives them the knowledge and confidence to advocate on behalf of B'nai B'rith. She said the network's overall goal is to bring more women into B'nai B'rith's advocacy work, which attracts people across the political spectrum.

The Women's Leadership Network's second meeting, held in May, featured Alina Bricman, B'nai B'rith director of EU Affairs, who led the group in a discussion of key issues facing European Jewish communities, including laws prohibiting Jewish religious observance such as ritual slaughter and incidents of anti-Semitic



Iranian-born American journalist and human rights activist Ellie Cohan, who served as U.S. deputy special envoy to combat anti-Semitism in the Department of State from 2019-2021, was the featured Women's Leadership Network speaker on June 2. In her presentation, she indicated some of the causes ascribed to the current rise in global Jewish hate crimes.


violence. Bricman discussed how B'nai B'rith is involved in these issues and led a discussion where participants weighed in with questions and comments.

On June 2, the network had former Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor & Combat Anti-Semitism Ellie Cohan as its first outside guest speaker. Cohan addressed rising anti-Semitism in the U.S., the direct correlation between the recent conflict in Israel and the global surge in anti-Semitic violence and the growing lack of support for Israel in the U.S. The group ended the session with a meaningful dialogue on the importance of female empowerment and leadership in the world of advocacy and diplomacy.

As Women's Leadership Network member Sandra Horowitz pointed out,

B'nai B'rith began as a fraternal organization, but society has changed since its formation. B'nai B'rith has grown to include women at all levels, including high leadership positions. The Network hopes to continue this growth.

"The Women's Leadership Network will empower more women to take on leadership roles and have their voices heard at B'nai B'rith. By having more women leaders, it allows for greater diversity of viewpoints to be shared and models for the next generation of women leaders that B'nai B'rith is a welcoming place for them," Hemlock said.

If you are interested in joining the Women's Leadership Network or know someone who is interested, please contact Rebecca Rose at [rrose@bnaibrith.org](mailto:rrose@bnaibrith.org). 

## B'nai B'rith Hosts 2-Part Series: Hezbollah: Sowing Global Terror

*continued from page 34*

vehicle to put pressure on Iran. Czyzewski said many family members of AMIA victims have suggested this option to the Argentine government.

Czyzewski said that one reason he keeps fighting after all of these years is his family—he recalled a moment when, at a family meeting, one of his granddaughters told him, "Grandpa, please keep on fighting."

He said they also fight so that the perpetrators are held responsible and so that Argentina cannot be pointed to as a country where terrorist attacks can be carried out with impunity.

"We are fighting because we would like our kids and grandchildren to live in a better country than the one we had to live in," Czyzewski said.

Camisar and Mariaschin thanked Czyzewski for his continued work on the AMIA case.

"We will continue to demand justice in this case, as we have done from the very beginning," Mariaschin said.


In Part 2, "Shared Threads: AMIA, Burgas and Other Global Terror Attacks," expert guests put the AMIA attack into a larger context, discussing Hezbollah's influence around the world.

Mariaschin spoke to Matthew Levitt, Washington Institute Fromer-Wexler fellow and director of its Jeanette and Eli Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, and Gustavo Perednik, personal friend of the late AMIA prosecutor Alberto Nisman and author of books on Nisman's work.

The conversation covered both the AMIA bombing and the 2012 bombing against Israeli tourists at the Burgas Airport in Bulgaria.

Nisman was appointed the main prosecutor of the AMIA case in 2005. In 2006, he presented an 800-page opinion that asserted Iran's guilt in the case. In 2013, he presented another report that revealed that the attack was not an isolated incident, but an act of an international terror network.

Perednik said Nisman would have approved of linking the AMIA and Burgas cases because it exposed the international reach of Iran's terrorist activities, which he said was Nisman's main aim.

"Hezbollah sees terrorism, as Iran does, as another 'tool' of foreign policy, no more or less legitimate, and therefore it doesn't make a difference if you're targeting military or government or civilians, it's all the same [to Hezbollah]," Levitt said. 



# B'nai B'rith Experts Assess Current Rise in Anti-Semitism



B'nai B'rith's subject matter experts shared their insights during the June 1, 2021, global roundtable "Jews and Israel Under Attack." Top row, l-r: CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin; Director of Latin America Affairs Eduardo Kohn; B'nai B'rith Canada Director of Government Relations Brian Herman. Middle row, l-r: B'nai B'rith Director of EU Affairs Alina Bricman; Deputy Director of the International Center for Human Rights and Public Policy Eric Fusfield; World Center-Jerusalem Director Alan Schneider. Bottom row, l-r: B'nai B'rith Director of U.N. and Intercommunal Affairs David Michaels; Director of B'nai B'rith U.K. Bureau of International Affairs Jeremy Havardi. All described increased anti-Jewish incidents in their regions, impacted by negative messaging from all forms of media.

Optimism resulting from the successful negotiation of Israel's 2020 Abraham Accords rapidly faded after a marked rise in anti-Semitism during the pandemic further intensified following the Hamas attacks on Israel in May 2021. Touted as outrage directed against Israel's defensive response, physical assaults, epithets and stereotypical references replayed age-old behaviors and attitudes on a global basis.

During a June 1 virtual roundtable, "Jews and Israel Under Attack," B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin interviewed the organization's experts from North America, Latin America and Europe, who cited accusations of Israeli apartheid and other false information disseminated by both right- and

left-wing groups. These reports have spurred heightened anti-Semitic activity victimizing Jewish communities and a weakening of support for Israel by evangelicals and other Christian groups, and by Diaspora Jews.

In a letter thanking President Joe Biden for his unconditional condemnation of all forms of anti-Semitism, B'nai B'rith urged him to support federal funding to enhance security at synagogues and Jewish centers and to appoint government personnel to monitor domestic and international anti-Semitism. B'nai B'rith has appealed to social media CEOs and to Department of Education and college administrators to hold accountable those who target Jews under the guise of political protest or for any other reason,

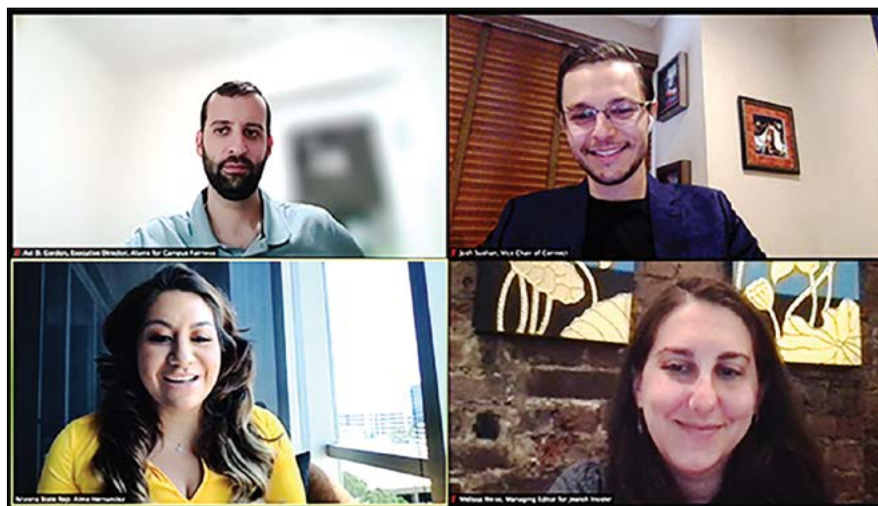


On June 15, Kohn spoke to Ariel Gelblung, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Latin America, about the political and economic crisis fomenting anti-Semitism in Latin American countries.

defined as anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Panelists concurred with Mariaschin that this definition is “as relevant as it could ever be” in his reaction to what he described as this “shamelessness [the violence], which was not a surprise, but which is now a daily occurrence.”

Working with European governmental bodies in formulating long-range plans to combat anti-Semitism, Jewish organizations including B'nai B'rith's EU Office underscored the need for more protection at religious sites and memorials; the approval of new laws safeguarding Jewish ritual practices; support for individuals and groups allied with Israel and the Jewish community; and the promotion of Holocaust education and the Jewish contribution to European culture and society in schools and to the general public.

B'nai B'rith Latin America's June 15 online conversation, “Anti-Semitism and Latin American Democracies Under Attack,” focused on the economic and political crisis facing Latin American countries, where many experiencing heightened poverty due to the pandemic have become susceptible to anti-Semitic and anti-Democratic messaging from the



A B'nai B'rith Connect panel about online anti-Semitism was moderated by Jewish Insider Managing Director Melissa Weiss (bottom row, right) and included panelists: Arizona State Rep. Alma Hernandez of Tucson (bottom row, left); Avi Gordon, Alums for Campus Fairness executive director (top row, left); and Connect Vice Chair Josh Sushan (top row, right). Noting the uptick in vandalism of Tucson's Jewish buildings during May, Hernandez noted: “The hate we see online translates into the hate in our own circles. Individuals put it out without taking the time to ask us [Jewish community members] or to think about it.” Gordon remarked that on campus, “administrators are caught off guard when teachers make anti-Semitic remarks that they don't even realize.” He urged colleges to offer unequivocal support to Jewish students.

right. Venezuela's support of Iran and the presence of Hezbollah contribute to this worsening situation.

“Platforms of Hate: Anti-Semitism on Social Media,” a June 29 B'nai B'rith Connect webinar, featured young leaders actively engaged in fighting anti-Semitism through political action, campus advocacy and outreach to tech corporations and social media engines. Millions worldwide who accept and spread lies, canards and intentionally false reports about Jews and Israel via

social media and internet sites lack the knowledge to analyze or question them. Other influencers include teachers who inappropriately impose their opinions in class. Wary of being politically incorrect, corporate executives downplay Jewish hate or fail to take a proactive stance, because diversity politics and policies “often favor one group over another.”

Jews elected to student government have made a positive impact, as have state and national legislation directed against Jewish hate crimes. Speakers underscored the need for accuracy about Holocaust and Zionist history as an antidote to the hate disseminated through the internet. 📌



### B'nai B'rith Fighting anti-Semitism in Fort Worth

B'nai B'rith President Charles O. Kaufman spoke at a May 27, 2021, pro-Israel rally organized by B'nai B'rith's Garsek Lodge and other communal organizations in Fort Worth, Texas.

Read the full story on our website: <https://bit.ly/fort-worth-pro-israel-rally>



# The Next Generation of Jewish Leaders: “IMPACT: Emerging Leaders Fellowship”

**B**'nai B'rith, in partnership with the World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS), launched the “IMPACT: Emerging Leaders Fellowship” in early July. Fellows will learn from and interact with guest speakers and mentors in immersive virtual sessions to develop advocacy, diplomacy and civic engagement skills. Topics covered will include those of relevance to the Jewish community, such as anti-Semitism and Israel advocacy, and broader issues such as genocide prevention and coalition building.

Ariel Goldberg, a fellow from South Africa, said the program will allow him to overcome the South African Jewish community's isolation from the rest of world Jewry, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

“I hope to emerge from this experience with a better understanding and developed perspective on what it means to be an activist fighting for human rights, especially Jewish rights,” Goldberg said.

Alina Bricman, B'nai B'rith's director of EU Affairs and one of the coordinators of the Fellowship, said she hopes the Fellowship will foster a new generation of leaders in Jewish communities and advocacy spaces.

Caterina Cognini, EU Affairs officer at B'nai B'rith, is another coordinator of the Fellowship and oversees the project. Bricman said assigning this role to a young staff member further emphasizes the program's focus on peer-led education.

The Fellowship held its first virtual session on July 2, where the members heard from B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin, Director of Legislative Affairs Eric Fusfield and WUJS President Jonathan Braun.

“The excitement and active participation of the fellows managed to come through despite the virtual setting and



On July 2, B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin (not shown) and B'nai B'rith Director of EU Affairs Alina Bricman (top row, extreme left) met virtually with a diverse group of young people participating in the six-month-long IMPACT: Emerging Leaders Fellowship program. Members will explore topics including anti-Semitism and Zionism through lectures and interactive discussions led by B'nai B'rith staff and other experts. The program was established in conjunction with the World Union of Jewish Students, an umbrella organization that has united and represented independent Jewish student associations in countries around the world since 1924.

the late hour in some of the time zones,” Bricman said.

The inaugural cohort of the Fellowship is made up of 23 Jewish students and young professionals from more than 15 countries. Bricman said diversity is an important piece of the Fellowship. When selecting speakers and fellows, they ensured a diversity of gender, geographical locations, professions and perspectives.

Vanessa Roth, from Germany, said she first learned of the Fellowship through B'nai B'rith's social media channels. She said the program caught her attention because it will provide knowledge and experience that she can bring back to the small Jewish community in her hometown.

Roth said she hopes to learn more about subjects such as Israel's diplomatic

relations and how to combat anti-Semitism on college campuses, an issue that is personal to her as a Jewish student.

Roth also hopes to gain new perspectives by interacting with her peers. “A personal exchange between Jews around the world is very important because not every young Jewish person in the world is the same.”

Roth and Goldberg, along with the 21 other fellows, will spend the next six months meeting virtually with one another and learning from speakers like Peter Stern, director of content policy stakeholder engagement at Facebook; Israel's ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva, H.E. Meirav Eilon Shahar; best-selling author Yossi Klein Halevi and longtime Jewish nonprofit professional Stacey Aviva Flint. 



# B'nai B'rith Great Lakes Region's Winning Scorecard: Summer 2021 Community Programs

The Great Lakes Region covers Michigan, Fort Wayne, Ind. and Toledo, Ohio. Here's a run-down of its members' busy summer season, highlighted by the **39th annual Stephen B. Zorn Memorial Golf Outing fundraiser**:



Scholarship Committee Co-Chairs Rick Sherline (left) and David Lubin (right) with Jaden Jubas, one of four students who received scholarships funded by the event proceeds.



All smiles after their tournament victory, the winning team included (l-r): David Lubin; Glen Young; Charlie Young; Ron Ruks; Nick Haratsaris and Jeffrey Tackel.

Benefitting a variety of B'nai B'rith programs, the Stephen B. Zorn Memorial Golf Outing was played on the Tam O'Shanter Country Club's course in West Bloomfield, Mich.

## Yad Ezra Food Bank Donation



On August 30, 2021, Lila Zorn (l), Great Lakes Region president and Judi Shapiro (r) Project H.O.P.E. chairperson, presented a \$1500 check to Daniella Harpaz Mechnikov (center), executive director of Yad Ezra, a philanthropy that delivers kosher food and traditional Passover fare, health care products and household items to more than 1,200 vulnerable Jewish families and individuals living in Southeast Michigan. The charity receives year-round support from the Great Lakes Region, as part of its community service programs.

## Diverse Minds Books Gift



On July 9, Zorn (l) and Great Lakes Region Vice President Joel Marwil (r), presented a selection of B'nai B'rith Diverse Minds books to Sinéad Nimmo (center), Child Life Projects specialist, on behalf of the Children's Hospital of Michigan. Marwil's efforts have resulted in the distribution of Diverse Minds books to a libraries and children's facilities in the community.

From 2006-2018, B'nai B'rith's Diverse Minds Youth Writing Challenge awarded scholarships to high school students who were asked to write and illustrate books for younger readers which promoted tolerance and diversity. B'nai B'rith published the winning books, which are donated to public schools, libraries and organizations nationwide.

# B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Partners with Bar-Ilan University for Jewish Rescuers Book

Since 2011, B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem and the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers During the Holocaust have pioneered in the identification and recognition of Jewish people who risked their own lives to save others of their faith during the Holocaust. Each year, candidates selected for the Jewish Rescuer Citation and/or their family members are honored at the B'nai B'rith Martyrs Forest in Jerusalem during the annual Holocaust commemoration, Yom HaShoah. To date, more than 344 men and women from nations including France, Germany, Greece and Lithuania have received the award.

In April 2021, a new milestone was attained with the publication of "All Our Brothers and Sisters: Jews Saving Jews During the Holocaust" (Peter Lang International Academic Publishers), a 334-page book edited by B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Director Alan Schneider, who organized the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers During the Holocaust and who administers the annual Jewish Rescuers Citation program, and scholar and author Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, Jewish history professor and director of the Arnold and Leona Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel.

According to Schneider, "This book is unique because it covers a number of topics [about rescuers in various countries] which have not been dealt with previously."

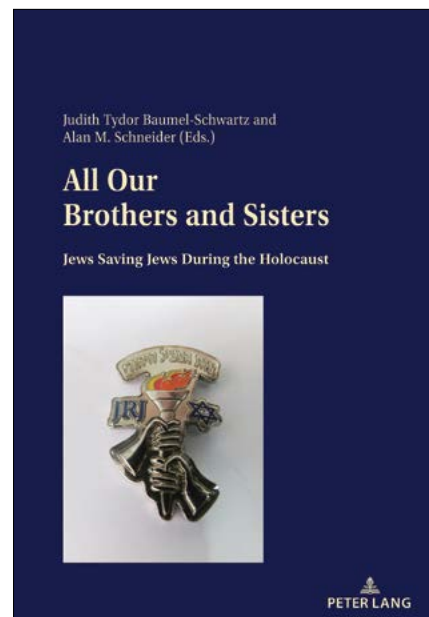
"All Our Brothers and Sisters," also available in a digital edition, represents the first collaborative venture by the Institute and the World Center. Including contributions by international historians, it's a compilation of essays written by the



On June 15, 2021, B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin (upper left) interviewed B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Director Alan Schneider (upper right) and Bar-Ilan University's Arnold and Leona Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research Director Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz (bottom row), editors of "All Our Brothers and Sisters: Jews Saving Jews During the Holocaust," which includes 18 essays that chronicle dramatic and compelling stories of Jewish rescuers in Europe and Western Africa.

The book's cover features a photograph of the lapel pin that the World Center and the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish rescuers award to honorees or their families during the annual Yom HaShoah ceremony at the B'nai B'rith Martyrs Forest.

academics who participated in the Jews Saving Jews Forum, an online discussion group devoted to this subject established by the Finkler Institute in 2019. Each of its 18 chapters focuses on individuals—men and women of all backgrounds and ages, even as young as 15—or groups organized in Nazi-occupied Europe and Asia that saved Jewish lives from the 1930s until the end of World War II. Their remarkable stories are revealed through archival documents, as well as in oral histories and testimonies of rescued survivors, and the words of the rescuers themselves. Making detailed plans



or acting in the moment, these men and women achieved the miraculous in cities, ghettos, prisons, camps, hospitals, orphanages and other locations during a time when altruism and conscious ethical

choices were repressed by the instinct to survive by any means.

During a virtual discussion as part of the B'nai B'rith Conversations series, CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin, who called the book “a contribution to our understanding of the human condition,” interviewed Schneider and Baumel-Schwartz, as they described the spirit of collaboration between Bar-Ilan University and the World Center in their development of the concept for the forum and the resulting book. Speaking about its contents, Schneider cited the bravery demonstrated by Jewish doctors and medical personnel who saved the

lives of Jews in the ghettos and camps. He and Baumel-Schwartz noted the little-known deeds of the Romaniote Jews in Greece, as well as rescuer efforts in West African nations including Algeria and Morocco. Baumel-Schwartz, who only learned of her own father's heroism in saving others at Auschwitz after his death, stated that “All Our Brothers and Sisters” is “not a book about one rescuer, country or group, it is the only book that gives an opportunity for the reader to take ‘little peeks’ of what was going on in so many countries, and [to examine] the personality traits of people who had to walk into the lion's jaws.”

She noted that subsequent research will be posted on the website of the Finkler Institute's ongoing forum, which may possibly present the opportunity for a second volume.

As the passage of time widens the distance between the events of the Holocaust and the present day, the study of its hitherto neglected aspects gains in importance. It is hoped that the fascinating narratives of “All Our Brothers and Sisters” will encourage others who are involved in the investigation of the Holocaust to develop new areas of research to expand our knowledge and ensure the Shoah will never be forgotten. 📖



## B'nai B'rith's Dutch Relief Efforts

B'nai B'rith was the only Jewish organization honored by the Dutch government in 1947 for its non-sectarian European Relief Program, which provided food and clothing to refugees, children and others in need. Acting Consul General of Holland G.R.G. van Swinderen and B'nai B'rith Secretary Maurice Bisgyer (l) hold a plaque written in the Dutch language, whose translated dedication reads: “Presented to B'nai B'rith for the innumerable tangible evidence of brotherly love, by which the people of the Netherlands, encouraged and strengthened during the time of their greatest need, arising from the devastation of war, were enabled to begin life anew.”

When the Netherlands was flooded six years later, B'nai B'rith donated \$10,000 (the equivalent of more than \$99,000 today) to assist its citizens during the disaster. 📖

## In Fort Worth, Texas, B'nai B'rith Lodge is a “Difference Maker”

IMPACT's June 2021 issue included an article about the May 2 online event honoring Jewish American Heritage Month organized by Isadore Garsek Lodge of B'nai B'rith in Fort Worth, Texas.

In June, the 146-year-old lodge was honored as a “Difference Maker” for its community service work by CBS Fort Worth news radio affiliate 1080 KRLD. On June 25, the station broadcast an interview with lodge President Alex Nason, in which he describes the full extent of the lodge's amazing achievements during the pandemic; the interview transcript appeared in the Texas Jewish Post. 📖

### LISTEN TO THE KRLD RADIO INTERVIEW:

<https://bit.ly/bb-giving-thanks-to-first-responders>

### READ THE INTERVIEW IN THE TEXAS JEWISH POST:

<https://bit.ly/bb-garsek-lodge-difference-maker>



# B'nai B'rith Leaders Attend Lodge Conference in Portugal

In June 2021, B'nai B'rith President Charles O. Kaufman and CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin were invited by the Jewish Community of Oporto, Portugal, to take part in a two-day Young Leadership Conference organized by B'nai B'rith's first Portuguese lodge, established in Oporto in 1919.



During the conference, Kaufman led discussions focusing on topics including action to fight the escalation of anti-Semitism and developing support for Israel. Pedro Siza Viera, Portugal's minister of state for the economy and digital transition, also spoke at the conference.



The sessions were held at the Kadoorie Mekor Haim Synagogue and at the new Holocaust museum, where Mariaschin (l) shared the dais with Ambassador Luis Barreiros, head of Portugal's delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Expressing the increasing need for Holocaust education, Mariaschin noted that "We live in a time when historical context is deemed expendable. We mustn't allow those who seek to delegitimize and demonize Israel to selectively put forth wildly biased narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That's why it is vitally important to know our own history, if we are to push back effectively in a time when Israel is demeaned daily, especially on social media."



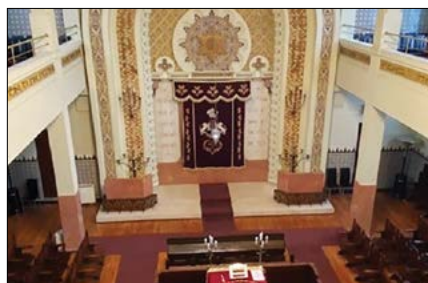
Left and center photos: Scrolls, religious texts, archival documents and liturgical objects are housed in the Bauhaus-inspired Jewish Museum, run by the Jewish Community of Oporto. At its 2019 dedication, Kaufman observed that "This Jewish Museum will punctuate a reawakening of Jewish life in Portugal. It should serve as a beacon of light to the rest of Europe."



Top and bottom photos: Oporto is now home to 500 Jewish people from 30 countries, many of whom attend the Kadoorie Synagogue, the largest Jewish house of worship on the Iberian Peninsula. Opened in 1938, it was built with support from the Baghdadi Jewish philanthropist Sir Elly Kadoorie (1867-1944) and dedicated to the memory of his wife, Lady Laura Kadoorie (1859-1919), whose ancestors left Portugal during the Inquisition in 1536. 📍



With connections to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem and other international institutions, Portugal's first Holocaust museum is located near the synagogue. Multi-media exhibits that document the history of European Jewish life before the advent of the Nazis are a prelude to panoramic digital images, authentic artifacts and replicas, intended to teach visitors about the tragedy of the camps. It also spotlights Jewish heritage in Portugal, a place of refuge for many escaping Hitler during World War II. Opened to visitors in April 2021, the museum includes a memorial wall, a study center and a screening/lecture room.



# B'nai B'rith's Bershad Scholarship Winners Look Back on Unique First Year Experience

In the spring of 2020, B'nai B'rith awarded its Bershad Scholarship to four college-bound high school seniors. A little over a year later, recipients—who each receive \$20,000 annually for the four years they are studying—reflected on their untraditional first-year experience, affected by the pandemic, and what winning the Bershad Scholarship meant to them.



## Uriel Sussman

Sussman is studying in Yeshivat Har Etzion, near Jerusalem, through Yeshiva University's S. Daniel Abrahams Israel Program. His first-year courses focused on building methodological skills in Talmud and the Old Testament. He said these courses allowed him “to take an active role in transmission of our Jewish tradition.”

He said that, although pandemic restrictions preventing students from leaving campus and living in a “capsule system” could be stressful, they ultimately created a unique bond among his peers and allowed them to focus on their studies.

When asked what the Bershad Scholarship meant to him, Sussman said that he used to be unsure if he would be able to make his dream of helping to shape the future of the Jewish community a reality. “I wondered whether I really had what it took to make a difference,” Sussman said. “To me the

Bershad Scholarship was a confirmation of dreams. It was a nod from the Jewish leaders of today that they, who had barely met me, thought that I had something to contribute.”



## Talia Levin

“It was quite a year!” Levin said of her first year in the Barnard/Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) List College Double Degree Program. Currently she is exploring a major in Bible at JTS and sociology/psychology at Barnard.

Levin said that, despite pandemic restrictions keeping classes and clubs online, she was able to connect with other students through advocacy clubs, student government and Hillel.

“Winning the Bershad scholarship means so much to me as it has aided in the difficult task of funding my education and motivates me to consider how I can contribute to the Jewish community for years to come,” Levin said.

She said she looks forward to a more normal college experience in the new school year.



## Alexa von Mueffling

Von Mueffling is a pre-med student studying biology at Barnard College. Although unable to live in the dorms or attend classes in person because of the pandemic, she said, “I was determined to make the best of it.”

“My mother often joked that she was attending classes along with me, since she was working from home while I was attending college from home,” von Mueffling said.

As the daughter of a single parent who would work multiple jobs to provide for her and her younger brother, von Mueffling said the Bershad Scholarship allowed her to afford the higher tuition of a private college and have access to the research opportunities at Barnard. Over the summer, von Mueffling worked at a radiation oncology lab at Columbia University Irving Medical Center.

The Bershad Scholarship Fund was created in the 1970s and has been awarded to 30 students to date. The scholarship was established by Michael Bershad in memory of his wife, Florence, to provide assistance to students to obtain a college education. When he was young, Michael's family could not afford to send him to college. Upon Michael's passing, his family added his name to the scholarship fund. 📌



# 50 Years of Senior Housing: B'nai B'rith I, II & III Apartments Administrator Jim Lynch

The B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Network was born 50 years ago—in 1971—when the B'nai B'rith Apartments opened in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, for low-income seniors in need of housing.

The Senior Housing Network, operated by the Center for Senior Services (CSS), is now made up of 38 communities across the country, one of the largest being the B'nai B'rith Apartments in Deerfield Beach, Florida, which opened in 1987. Now known as B'nai B'rith I, II & III Apartments—II opened in 1994 and III in 2008—the location has a total of 270 units across the three buildings.

Jim Lynch has been the building administrator of B'nai B'rith I, II & III Apartments for 17 years. As administrator he handles everything including interviewing prospective residents, turning over apartments and coordinating with the maintenance staff.

Although it's busy and unpredictable, Lynch says he and his staff love their work.

"It's something we can take back with us to say, 'Hey we did something today, look what we did today.' It's not like a regular property management job, it's pretty rewarding," Lynch said.



Building staff and B'nai B'rith leadership members join senior apartment dwellers for an event that combines painting with wine drinking and cheese tasting, all of which boost the flow of the creative juices.

Lynch manages a staff of 10, all of whom have been with B'nai B'rith Apartments for years. The newest staff member has been there for nine years, the longest-serving for more than 30 years—longer even than Lynch.

"They've grown old with the seniors," Lynch joked.

Lynch and his staff interact with residents on a daily basis, although those interactions have looked different over the past year due to the pandemic. Because they work with a vulnerable population, Lynch said dealing with the changes was extra challenging.

"We are just trying our best to get through this pandemic like everyone else," he said.

B'nai B'rith Apartments was able to bring in three vaccine clinics for the residents and has been gradually opening buildings and providing small activities for the seniors.

Despite all of the changes brought on by COVID-19, Lynch said the most important part of the work has not changed.

"I think the whole program process has really stayed the same, just as far as being able to get people a really nice place to live and they can live in dignity and age in place, and they all love that," Lynch said.

Affordable housing where seniors can age in place is in high demand in Florida. B'nai B'rith Apartments had a three-year waiting list—now down to about a year and a half—and CSS hopes to add a



B'nai B'rith I, II & III Apartments residents in Deerfield Beach, Fla. are invited to celebrate Passover traditions during the annual communal Seder.



Photo credit: All photos courtesy of the staff members of B'nai B'rith I, II & III Apartments

Building Administrator James Lynch (r) with 102-year-old Deerfield Beach tenant Joanna and her son.

fourth building that could be home for 70 low-income seniors.

Lynch said residents love living at B'nai B'rith Apartments because the program allows them to live somewhere they can afford and where they can maintain dignity and independence.

"I get it all the time, they move in and they're like, 'Wow, this is amazing, thank you so much. Thank you for letting me have my own place, thank you for letting me be independent, to live on my own and not to have to worry about where my next meal's coming from.' So those are the things that make you feel really good," Lynch said. 📍



# B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Ceremony Honors 2021 Journalism and Arts Awards Winners

B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem honored recipients of its 2021 Award for Journalism Recognizing Excellence in Diaspora Reportage, considered the most prestigious prize for Israeli media reporting on Diaspora issues. The July 1 ceremony took place at the Konrad Adenauer Conference Center, Mishkenot Sha'ananim.



Professor Yedidia Z. Stern, president of the Jewish People Policy Institute, delivered the keynote address, "The Israeli Identity Crisis."



Greeting the audience, Alan Schneider, director of B'nai B'rith's World Center-Jerusalem (at right, with award winner Danny Sanderson), remarked that "The recent conflict between Israel and Hamas helped to deepen the chasm between Jewish American progressives and the State of Israel. A recent wide-ranging survey of American Jews undertaken by the Pew Research Center before the conflict found that among American Jews, of whom 27% do not practice their faith, fully 60% attest that they have little or nothing in common with Israeli Jews. Here lies the challenge of our generation: To turn around this growing trend of alienation between the two greatest communities of world Jewry."



The 2021 Award winners are: Nurit Canetti, anchorwoman, editor-in-chief and producer of Galey Zahal—IDF Army Public Radio (broadcast media category), and Dan Lavie, Diaspora Affairs correspondent of Yisrael Hayom (print media category). Honoring her 45-year career, The Jerusalem Post's "Grapevine" columnist Greer Fay Cashman received a Lifetime Achievement Award. A special citation for Fostering Israel-Diaspora Relations through the Arts was given to rock music icon Danny Sanderson. Bottom row (l-r): Schneider; Canetti; Sanderson; Cashman; Lavie. Top row (l-r): Sheleg; Auerbach; Stern; Hadas Hacohen; Shalev; Weill.

The award jury includes: Ya'akov Ahimeir, past editor and anchor, Israel Public Broadcasting Corporation and 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award winner; Professor Yehudith Auerbach, School of Communication, Bar-Ilan University; Professor Sergio DellaPergola, The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University; Sallai Meridor, former Israeli ambassador to the United States and former chairman of the Zionist Executive and Jewish Agency for Israel; Professor Gabriela Shalev, Higher Academic Council, Ono Academic College and former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations; journalist Yair Sheleg; and Asher Weill, publisher and editor of Ariel: The Israel Review of Arts and Letters (1981-2003). 📌

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# B'nai B'rith Senior Housing at 50, and Beyond

By Mark D. Olshan

Associate Executive Vice President, B'nai B'rith International

**F**ifty years of B'nai B'rith senior housing! When you say it out loud, it's hard to believe we opened our first sponsored building a half-century ago in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Fast forward and we have sponsored an additional 37 buildings that provide about 5,000 seniors with affordable housing, making us the largest national Jewish sponsor of low-income, nonsectarian senior housing in the United States.

But our housing program is much more than a collection of buildings. Over the years, we have focused on creating a senior housing network family. We have organized annual training sessions for board members, management professionals, staff and service coordinators. Additionally, our weeklong Resident Leadership Retreat, held every other summer at the B'nai B'rith Perlman Camp in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania, provides leadership training for the residents.

In celebration of our anniversary, we have produced programming highlighting our buildings' history by interviewing the very people who have and who continue to provide affordable housing in the community. You may have noticed video interviews, social media and blog posts on our website highlighting our properties around the country. "<https://bit.ly/50years-CSS>"



Happy Campers: Janel Doughten (bottom row, seventh from right), now associate director of the Center for Senior Services, with members of the 1997 Resident Leadership Retreat in front of the lodge at the B'nai B'rith Perlman Camp in Lake Como, Pa.

### Memorable Moments

This work has certainly brought back memories. I remember June 1, 1983, my first day at B'nai B'rith. The housing program had been operational for 10 years, but I was hired as the first full-time director. Rabbi Joel Myers, the program's associate executive vice president, and my immediate supervisor, showed me my office, where I found boxes full of files. Rabbi Myers said to me, "Mark, it's all yours. Have at it." Well, I jumped in and created enduring memories.

I recall my first ribbon-cutting ceremony at Amos Towers in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and giving a speech to mark the building's opening, and working with Burnis Cohen and Al Kulakoff on the application for our Mollie & Max Barnett Apartments in Fort Worth, Texas. This

was the first building I supervised, from initial meetings with local volunteers and submission of the application for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding to getting the funds, cutting a ribbon and opening the building to residents in 1986.

In 1987, I started the Resident Leadership Retreat to acknowledge members of the resident councils that were beginning to operate throughout the network. The goal was to provide them with guidance on strengthening their councils and offer them a vacation experience in an overnight camp setting. As time passed, my colleague, Janel Doughten, the associate director of B'nai B'rith's Center for Senior Services (CSS), expanded the retreat from three to seven days, providing significantly more programming.



Hard hats and spades: Groundbreaking for B'nai B'rith Covenant House, a senior residence in Tucson, Ariz. in 1995. Mark Olshan, "with a beard and gray suit" appears fourth from left.



Olshan and Philip Abrams, then-undersecretary for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Washington, confer in the early 1990s.

More recently, in the 1990s and early 2000s, we received grants to build two Tucson, Arizona, projects, B'nai B'rith Covenant House and the Gerd & Inge Strauss B'nai B'rith Manor on Pantano. I was happy to be there when we put shovels in the ground. I was the guy with a beard in a gray suit.

While working closely with the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Committee, I spent many hours in housing industry working groups to strengthen and grow the senior housing programs. We worked on Capitol Hill with like-minded organizations advocating for, and eventually implementing, the program for resident service coordinators. These are property staff members who connect residents with an array of available community services, thus allowing seniors to "age in place," precluding a premature move to a more institutional setting.

But given everything we accomplished, what makes our network truly special is the genuine partnership between B'nai B'rith CSS staff and local leadership.

### Looking Back, and Ahead

The past 50 years would not have been possible without volunteers in the community. I look back to Abe Cramer, the first chairman of the Senior Housing Committee and our visit with Phil Abrams, who was undersecretary at HUD. Over time, we continued strengthening our relationships at HUD, meeting with numerous housing secretaries like Samuel Pierce, Jack Kemp, Henry Cisneros and Andrew Cuomo.

Equal in importance to honoring the past is charting a path forward for the next 50 years, ensuring our sponsored buildings will remain open for the next generation of residents. Working with the local board at the Adelstein Family Project H.O.P.E. B'nai B'rith House in the Bronx, New York, we used tax credits to rehabilitate the property, providing a more modern living experience.

Currently, we are working with other sponsored buildings to achieve similar results, making sure the successes of the past 50 years remain permanent. In our

current political climate, obtaining monies for new construction can be difficult; consequently, we focus on preserving our properties for future generations.

But the future is focused not just on the bricks and mortar, but also on a continuing sense of community. This year, we launched the first virtual B'nai B'rith Senior Housing training. This will now be annual, conducted over Zoom, allowing for maximum participation. Given the pandemic, our training will heavily underscore emergency preparedness.

It has been a privilege to celebrate our senior housing's golden anniversary. Watching our portfolio grow from 10 to 38 properties, alongside our expanding programs, is a source of great pride. Most importantly, the B'nai B'rith senior housing network is looking to the future, and I can proudly report the future looks bright. 🌟

*Mark D. Olshan, who holds a doctorate in psychology, is associate executive vice president at B'nai B'rith International and director of the organization's Center for Senior Services.*

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