

SHORESH

שורש

**Congregation Etz Chayim
Community News**

WINTER 2024

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**Matheson Memories
Tree Talk**



When Shane Solomon founded Republic Architecture in 2010, he had a very clear vision for it.

"I was laser focused on the kind of clients I wanted to have and the type of work I wanted to do. It was really important for me to do public work—work that was publicly funded, work that had a sustainability slant, like government legacy buildings," he says.

Shane recalls that even as a kid, he was interested in a particular type of building: "There's those special buildings... go into a federal park and experience what a building is like or a museum or a legislative building, those buildings have a certain feel about them. They are for many people to use. These buildings last longer than we do in many cases. I always had interest in those kinds of buildings."

He tries to explain his attraction to these structures, unique in their magnitude and significance to a community, as well as an era. "You're dealing with a building that is of a certain size and is built to last many generations. Buildings like that don't happen very often in any city. Manitoba will only get one legislative building like that, a building of that scale. Buildings that are built for the public and to last through the ages, those don't happen all the time," says Shane, who has an undergraduate degree in microbiology and a Master's of architecture.

Heritage Restoration

A lot of Republic's work is in heritage-restoration of important Canadian buildings, Shane says. Many of these are in Eastern Canada (because of the age of those buildings), but some local projects include restoration of the chamber and rotunda at the Manitoba Legislative Building in 2017 and restoration of Lower Fort Garry in 2018. Currently, Republic is restoring Peggy's Cove lighthouse in Nova Scotia.

When restoring a heritage building, the team is working to adapt it to modern society, he says. "It provides a very interesting design challenge to take modern construction principles and the



Republic Architecture home base

knowledge of building envelope today and apply it to buildings that are two, three, four hundred years old, and have them appear as if they are still two, three, four hundred old. Those buildings were built with hay and mud in some ways. To make them more sustainable, usable, and accessible, that's exciting work. How do you integrate ramps into a building that was never considered for ramps, without changing the way the building functions or looks?" he says.

These types of renovation often come with a high price tag. But sometimes, Shane says, his firm can help a client offset that expense by coming up with new uses or income generating opportunities. For example, since its restoration, Lower Fort Garry can be rented as an assembly space for hosting an event. This was not possible previously because the washrooms were not adequate for that type of use.

Noble Accessibility

Restoration of the Manitoba Legislative Building Chamber involved a unique challenge for which Republic found an elegant solution. The chamber is tiered downward, like a theatre, originally with stairs for descending. The client (the government of Manitoba) wanted to make the chamber fully accessible.

"We came up with a solution to build a new floor on top of the (existing) theatre space to lessen the tiering and then integrated ramps to each tier," he

"There's something noble about everybody being able to access the space the way it was intended."

explains. "We matched each material with the existing material that was there, the same marble from Tennessee, the same bronze details."

He says the design solution was to completely encapsulate that floor, so that all the intervention could be removed, and the original is perfectly preserved underneath. "Anybody who enters that space could be fooled to think that it is the identical space just somehow lifted, just somehow accessible. And if in 10 years or 100 years somebody wants to take it apart, the original is totally encapsulated below."

Shane says a much easier solution could have been to create a platform and install a power lift. "But that doesn't treat everybody equally because you couldn't move through the space in the same way."



Shane with Lyla, Koen (L) and Ethan (R)

“There’s something noble about everybody being able to access the space the way it was intended. So, we took that approach. We like that solution because it preserved what was there without damaging it in any way, which was important in that building and it made it truly accessible for all.”

Durable, Sustainable Home Turf

Since Shane established Republic, the firm has grown from a staff of 1 into a 60-person operation. In 2016, Republic bought a 1957 building in downtown Winnipeg and restored it into its new home (see photo previous page), to which Shane cycles or runs more than he drives, he says. They prioritized sustainability and energy efficiency in the restoration, and while it looks similar to the original building, it is 75 percent more energy efficient than it was before, Shane says

“We kept all the steel, brick, and glass in the exact location it was before but went from a single-pane (window) system to a very sophisticated curtain wall that’s warm to the touch in the winter. The natural gas and electrical costs for this building are less than a quarter of what they were prior to it being renovated. We’ve created a building that’s far more durable and way more sustainable,” he says.

A few years ago, Republic designed a new *gadol* building (the primary meeting space) for B’nai Brith (BB) camp. Shane says they tried to make the building as flexible as possible and have it reflect its predecessor. Since the *gadol*’s completion, he has delighted in photos of “kids using that building to do many different camp activities that we didn’t even consider upfront. It’s truly this flexible building that they use all day, different sizes, different scales, outdoor, indoor. It’s really well used by the camp,” says Shane, who also likes volunteering his time

and generally sits on three different boards at any given time. (Today, he is treasurer for the Downtown Biz and sits on two professional boards.) “If I feel like if I can add value to a board, I am happy to volunteer my time,” he says.

The Path Here

Shane grew up at the Bnay Abraham synagogue. “My memories are there with my grandparents, and all life-cycle events from weddings to Bar Mitzvahs to funerals of my immediate family were there,” he says, then adding he feels like he also grew up at the Rosh Pina. His family lived in the North End and most of his friends were Jewish, so he attended all their B’nai Mitzvah—many at the Rosh Pina.

Today, Shane and wife Lyla, a school psychologist, and their two sons, Koen and Ethan, belong to Congregation Etz Chayim. Koen recently celebrated his own Bar Mitzvah—with the unique honour of being the last one at 123 Matheson. “It was a really great experience,” Shane says.

As a kid, Shane hadn’t drafted a mental blueprint for what his future life would look like (indeed, many of us don’t). He enjoyed building and tinkering as a boy, but didn’t really know what an architect did, he says. So, his career path to architecture was not a straight line, having pursued an interest in microbiology first—an unusual trajectory for an architect, he says (most get a bachelor of environmental design or architecture first). But his diverse background has helped him, he says, and “the profession is a very good fit for me.” So, the point is, he got here. ■

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Finding Her Place in the Forest

In her early 20s, Sima Yakir Feuer observed something fairly random, which may have set the course for her fulfilling career in urban forestry. On a camping excursion with friends in Nopiming Provincial Park, she says, “I drove by this little building on a river that had government trucks parked outside, and I thought, who works there? What do they do? And how would I get a job there?!”

Three decades later, Sima is living her dream job as an urban forester with the province of Manitoba. “I’m so happy, this is exactly where I want to be. If I could have chosen my ideal employment, this is what I would have chosen. Who does that?” she says.

Getting here was probably some combination of serendipity, intuition, and passion. Sima says she didn’t dream about this line of work as a kid. “I always loved trees and forests, being outside and camping and hiking and all those outdoor activities. But I don’t think I knew I could have a career in this. It wasn’t on my radar.”

The Quest for Forest Work

After Nopiming, Sima began pursuit for the elusive forest job, starting with the nonprofit Manitoba Forestry Association (MFA). “I didn’t know exactly what they did, but I thought, ‘it says forestry in their name, maybe they know something about what those people do in the park,’” she laughs. The MFA offered information about education options and connected Sima with someone from the Province of Manitoba’s Forestry branch, who shared details of what a career in forestry could look like and recommended a course of education.

Today, Sima’s work as an urban forester is bolstered by a diploma in forest resources technology from Malaspina University College (now called Vancouver Island University), in Nanaimo and a Bachelor of Science degree in environmental studies from the University of Winnipeg. She also completed the University of Manitoba’s arborist training program and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) certificate in public engagement, and has received

ongoing professional development opportunities, like law enforcement, and GIS (Geographical Information System) and data management training, through her work for the Province of Manitoba.

Sima’s daily work ranges from supporting communities with technical assistance related to their urban forests; to public outreach and education related to tree health and the importance of urban forest canopies (the trees forming the canopy of an urban area); to developing public policies and administering grant funding to communities throughout the province.

Urban Forest Support

“I help communities manage their urban forests,” Sima says. That could include small towns or large cities. While geographically, most of Sima’s work is focused on forests found within urban limits, “sometimes we deal with forest health between communities because those might be corridors for insects (or disease) to travel.”

A large part of Sima’s work as an urban forester is tree planting, through various tree-planting initiatives, both provincial and federal. “As a province, we work with these organizations and groups for tree-planting projects,” Sima says. For example, as part of Canada’s approach to addressing both climate change and biodiversity loss, the federal government’s 2-Billion Trees (2BT) commitment promises financial support to organizations for planting trees until 2031. Through this initiative the Province of Manitoba is cost sharing with the federal government to administer the 2 billion tree program in Manitoba, says Sima, who is also the Prairie Region representative of Tree Canada’s Canadian Urban Forest Network.

Sima’s career in forestry began with more traditional forestry work, having moved into urban forestry about 20 years ago (when she was ready to begin a family). During Sima’s Malaspina University College days, she would return home to Winnipeg for summers and was hired by Manitoba’s Department of Natural Resources, Forestry Branch for seasonal fieldwork.



Sima Yakir Feuer

“I always loved trees and forests, being outside and camping and hiking and all those outdoor activities. But I don’t think I knew I could have a career in this. It wasn’t on my radar.”

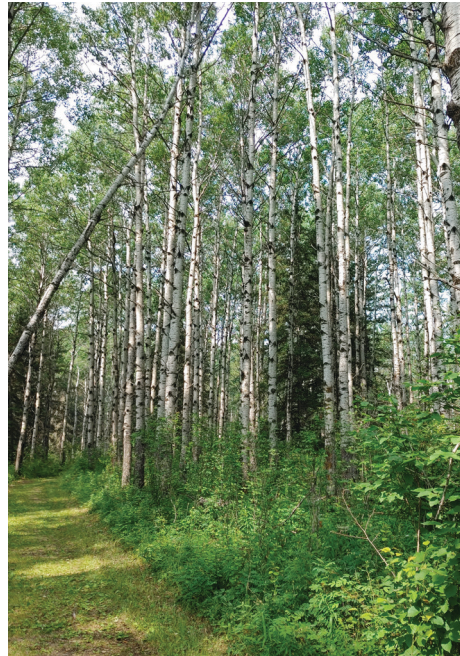
“It was amazing, I got to see the whole treed part of the province. I did a lot of work by helicopter, floatplane, quad (ATV), and a lot of camping—they would drop us off in a plane somewhere, we’d set up camp and stay there for 10 days, and then they’d pick us up. That was before cell phones, but we had radio contact,” she says.

The Art and Science of Growing Trees

Once Sima had earned her diploma in forest resources technology, the Manitoba forestry branch hired her back full-time. Some of that work involved forest health work (managing forests affected by menaces like tent caterpillars) and a lot of it involved silviculture survey work. Silviculture is the art and science of growing trees, Sima explains. “After a fire or natural disturbance, you go into an area and see how the forest is coming back: is it growing? Does it need to be replanted? How are the plantations doing?” Deforested areas don’t always grow back the same, she says. For instance, a Jack Pine forest might come back more Aspen if a forest fire was hot enough to destroy all the cones (some of which could otherwise have become new pines). Sometimes that’s okay, she says. “I think that’s where the art and science comes in, because at a landscape level, you might want things to stay the same, but each little block could change over time, and that can be ok.”

Like most work, Sima’s comes with challenges, some of these arising from a lack of human awareness or concern about how their actions affect forests. For example, working with Dutch Elm disease is challenge enough—this is one of the biggest urban forestry problems in the province, she says. The inherent challenge is then exacerbated “when people don’t understand how the disease works and spread infected firewood from one area to another, and then potentially kill the trees in that area. That can be quite frustrating,” says Sima, who is also a Forest Health Officer with the province—she has received officer training and can enforce the law under the Forest Health Protection Act.

Damage and disregard for trees in urban areas is another source of frustration in Sima’s work. “There is a lot of naturally forested land” within cities she says. Sometimes, during construction, “large areas of trees are removed instead of working around the trees,” with little awareness of the resources and time necessary to have grown them (some 80-years’ worth of sun, rain, and care). Other trees are occasionally damaged with the same disregard. People operating “snowplows and other equipment sometimes don’t



“People are very grateful that we’re able to share that information with them, and then they spread it to other people, which is pretty gratifying,”

understand the impacts of what they’re doing,” she says, offering this example: “A younger tree that’s taken 15 or 20 years to get to where it is, still not a giant, mature tree, and then they push a whole bunch of snow up against it and it snaps. Then you’ve lost 20 years of effort into growing that one tree.”

The Joy of Tree Planting

But the rewards of Sima’s work are substantial. One is the pleasure she frequently gets to witness in others: “seeing the joy brought to people when

we plant trees—it’s such a special activity,” she says.

Equally satisfying, she says, is the opportunity to participate in educating communities about caring for their urban forests and keeping their trees alive. “We have some great conversations with the public at some of our outreach events. People are very grateful that we’re able to share that information with them, and then they spread it to other people, which is pretty gratifying,” says Sima, who is an advisory board member for Trees Winnipeg (a non-profit charity dedicated to promoting tree benefits and concerns in Winnipeg’s urban areas) and is on a steering committee for Envirothon (a Manitoba high school environmental education competition run by the Manitoba Association of Watersheds).

While she says there are other directions she could have taken her career, “my passion and goals are related to forest health and taking care of the forest,” and she has tried to focus on work that betters the world ecologically.

At home, Sima lives by the same principles and values as at work, making “choices that are helpful and not damaging to the environment.” Mindful of her energy consumption, Sima’s home has a high efficiency furnace, and she has her eye on new heat pump technology (which transfers heat from outside air, ground, water, and other sources to a building’s interior or hot water tank). She has goals for an electric car, buys secondhand clothing as often as possible, eats mostly organic food, uses biodegradable and ecofriendly soaps and detergents, and targets products with minimal packaging, to name just a few of the things Sima does to reduce her carbon footprint and live more sustainably. And she works hard to instill these same values in her kids, Nomi and Aaron.

Even some volunteer work Sima does lines up with her ecological philosophy. She chairs the pre-used uniform sales for Gray Academy through the Gray Academy Parents Association (an initiative she previously co-chaired with Sharon Goldenberg). “It helps that people don’t necessarily have to pay for new uniform pieces if that’s something they’re not able to do. And it’s important that the clothes don’t end up in landfill. We sell mountains of clothes.”



Worlds Colliding

Sima's synagogue roots are from both Beth Israel and Rosh Pina synagogues. Her parents, Phil and Brenda Yakir, belonged to Beth Israel when she was growing up, while her maternal grandparents belonged to Rosh Pina. For High Holidays, Sima attended the Rose alternative service with her parents and brother in the basement of 123 Matheson. "Then, I would walk upstairs and go sit with my grandparents," she says, who were davening at Rosh Pina.

Today, Sima sits on the Congregation Etz Chayim board of directors, and she used to chair the Youth and Family committee. "I did try to bring a bit of my background to that role," she says, incorporating environmental awareness wherever possible.

It's probably safe to say that Sima brings a bit of her background to most of her life roles, and she is just as respectful of others' turf as she is her own. When travelling, something Sima loves to do, "I'm traveling with an ecological lens, with the goal of trying to improve the environment where we are and spending time outdoors," she says. For example, when she took her kids to Mexico years ago, they stayed on an eco-resort where waste was minimized, and they took an opportunity to plant trees in an area where reforestation efforts were underway.

Sima doesn't hesitate when asked if she thinks forests are superpowers.

"Yes. And for many reasons," she says. "They clean the air, cool our environment, provide beautification, habitat homes for wildlife, medicinal value, and human health value." She adds that many studies show how quality of life is improved and levels of stress are decreased by trees, and in certain countries doctors can now provide a prescription for forest bathing (also called forest therapy).

"There are real health values to humans in trees and forests. And there isn't really anything else that we can do that's so simple, or anything else that exists that gives back to the world and to people and to the environment the way that trees do," Sima says. It seems Sima may *always* be looking through that ecological lens, it's how she sees the world. In this way, she is doing all that she can to help to repair the world, *tikkun olam*. ■

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The Significance of Trees in Judaism

“It is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and all who uphold it are blessed.” These words comprise the first line of a poem found in the book of Proverbs (3:18), a song we often sing at the end of the Torah service as the scrolls are returned to the ark: *Etz chayim hi la'machazikim ba...* In this poem, the Tree of Life is a metaphor for the Torah; Etz Chayim has become a treasured symbol in Judaism. Indeed, trees have a great deal of significance in Jewish liturgy.

The Tree of Life in Jewish liturgical writings precedes the Proverbs metaphor. In Genesis, we first hear about the Tree of Life, which stood at the centre of the Garden of Eden along with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The branches of the former covered all of Eden, and the tree yielded 500,000 different fruits; eating from the Tree of Life meant living forever. We are taught that it's partly because of this tree that G-d banished Adam and Eve from the garden after they ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge: “lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever,” (Genesis 3:22)

Comparing People to Trees

Since biblical times Jews have been comparing people to trees and vice versa—there are many references to this concept throughout Jewish liturgical writings, from the Torah and classical rabbinic literature to medieval and modern rabbinic literature. For example, referring to a prohibition against destroying fruit trees, Rabbis of the Talmud called it both an immoral act of destruction and a danger, since the death of the tree is equivalent to the death of a person, who resembles the tree.

We find many prohibitions in Jewish law related to trees (and other plants), including ones concerning planting, mixing, grafting, and harvesting fruit from trees. These rules are interpreted more strictly in Israel than they are in the diaspora. *Kilayim* are prohibitions that forbid us from planting particular combinations of seeds, mixing grape seeds with other kinds of seeds, grafting, crossbreeding animals, arranging a team of different kinds of animals to work together, and mixing wool and linen in clothing. While the prohibitions are more stringent in Israel, in the diaspora, Jews may plant a variety of tree species close to one another, but we must not graft a branch from one species of tree onto another. Grafting a branch to a different variety of the same species is acceptable.

We are also prohibited from maintaining a tree that is *kilayim*; we must instead dig up the tree. If crossbreeding occurs naturally or by accident, we are prohibited from eating any fruit the tree bears.

The Law of *Orlah*

Jews are prohibited from eating the fruit of a tree for the first three years after it was planted. This prohibition is referred to as *Orlah* and includes both trees planted from seed and replanted trees. Fruit harvested in a tree's fourth



year, called *neta revai*, is considered sacred. Fruit harvested in the tree's fifth year is just regular fruit.

Counting for *Orlah* does not occur from the date the tree was planted but rather, by the number of *Rosh Hashanah* that have passed. If planting occurred 45 days or more before Rosh Hashanah, a tree begins its second year at Rosh Hashanah. If planting happened fewer than 45 days before the new year, that tree begins its first year at Rosh Hashanah (and the days leading up to it are not counted).

Tu B'Shevat, the birthday of trees, also plays a role in counting for *Orlah*. After the last Rosh Hashanah in the count, identifying the end of the *Orlah* period for a tree, any fruit the tree bears between that Rosh Hashanah and *Tu B'Shevat* is still *Orlah*, because it has been produced from the preceding year's sap. New sap doesn't start flowing until after *Tu B'Shevat*, so only fruit the tree bears after *Tu B'Shevat* in the fourth year is no longer *Orlah*.

While in general Jews are forbidden from cutting down a fruit tree, there are certain conditions that make it permissible: the tree no longer bears fruit; the area is needed to build a home; the tree could cause damage or injury; or wood from the tree is more useful than its fruit.

Trees hold a special place in Jewish thought. The tree stands as a metaphor for the Torah, our guide of divine wisdom, teachings, and laws for living good and honourable lives as Jews. And trees stand as symbols of life and the transition from generation to generation, *l'dor va d'or*. Moreover, trees stand as a symbol of Jewish resilience, spirit, vitality, and the strength to endure. ■

Living Amongst the Trees

Can forests help save us from climate disaster?

Tu B'Shevat is a good time to look at our relationship with trees. On the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat (Thursday, January 25, in 2024), we celebrate Tu B'Shevat, recognized among Jews as the birthday of the trees and, more generally, as an ecological awareness day. Tu B'Shevat has roots in the early Middle Ages as an agricultural holiday to approximate the age of trees for tithing. But in 1948, when the State of Israel was named the Promised Land for Jews worldwide, a tradition of planting trees there took hold. Today, Jews living in Israel and throughout the diaspora continue to plant trees on Tu B'Shevat and donate money for doing so.

Symbiotic Relationship

Humans and trees enjoy a symbiotic relationship. Trees provide humans with shade, food, firewood, lumber, and they help us control soil erosion and improve soil fertility. Most importantly, trees and humans have an inverse relationship with oxygen and carbon dioxide: to live, humans inhale oxygen and release carbon dioxide, while trees breathe in and store carbon dioxide and release the oxygen that humans need. Carbon is also released into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide through burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas), cutting down trees, and destroying wetlands.

Climate Change

Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is a driving force of climate change. When it accumulates with other gasses (like methane, nitrous oxide), energy from the sun becomes trapped, and Earth's temperature rises: the "greenhouse effect." This results in more extreme heat in areas, cooling in others, and extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and violent storms.

There are serious impacts to climate change. Perhaps the most critical is how it will affect world water resources. Water is also connected to other resource- and social-issues like food supply, health, and ecosystem integrity.

Because trees sequester carbon from the atmosphere and filter the air, it's tempting to look to reforestation as a possible

"There is a balance of wanting to capture that carbon, but in a way that is successful."

rescuer to the global-warming crisis. Indeed, countless tree-planting initiatives have been launched worldwide, from the Canadian government's "2-Billion Trees (2BT)" commitment and Tree Canada's National Greening Program to global initiatives like Plant-for-the-Planet's Trillion Tree Campaign.

Can Forests Help?

While there's little dispute about *whether* tree-planting initiatives could help, there is debate among climate scientists over the *size* of benefit we can expect from planting trees. Trees reduce carbon in the atmosphere, but deforestation is one of the largest sources of carbon dioxide in the environment. When trees are felled, much of the carbon stored within them escapes into the atmosphere, more if the wood is burned. What does seem to matter is where the trees are planted. In warmer climates, newly planted trees grow more quickly and capture the most CO₂. In colder regions, planted trees darken the areas they're replacing—grass or snow. Dark surfaces absorb more heat, so a dark, tree-covered surface will trap more of the sun's heat—exacerbating the warming there, or reducing the overall benefit gained. In temperate regions, planting trees may have no net effect on climate.

"There is a delicate balance between trees' ability to take in CO₂, reducing warming, and their tendency to trap additional heat and thus create warming. This means planting trees only helps stop climate change in certain places," says Michael Marshall in the BBC article "Planting trees doesn't always help with climate change." (May 26, 2020)

For planting initiatives to help, trees must be suited to the environments they're



planted in, says Sima Yakir Feuer, urban forester with the province of Manitoba. "You don't want to plant a tree that causes more problems. There is a balance of wanting to capture that carbon, but in a way that is successful."

Other Reforestation Complications

There are political barriers to massive reforestation. Many deforested areas have been adapted to agriculture, which couldn't continue if reforested. Also, planting trees in dry areas could lead to water scarcity, since new trees use so much.

Some conifers emit aerosols (alpha- and beta-pinene) into the atmosphere. This can cause cooling by dispersing sunlight back into space, or acting as a catalyst for formation of clouds, which reflect sunlight away from Earth. However, these aerosols can also react to form methane or ozone, a greenhouse gas at low altitudes.

Urban Reforestation

It's possible tree planting could have the largest cooling impact in urban centres. Trees "can be a powerful tool in reducing temperatures within cities," Sima says. "If temperatures are reduced, we use less energy to air condition. That is going to make a difference in urban areas."

Trees can play a significant role in addressing climate change. But the mechanisms involved are varied and complex, and it's difficult to predict the effects accurately and completely. To reap the benefits, we will need to plant the right trees in the right places. But we will also need to find other ways to reduce global carbon emissions. ■



Photo: Nomi Feuer

Through the Cracks of Hate

By Nomi Feuer

This beautiful birch tree grows in the most terrifyingly dead ground, the soil of Auschwitz. I was stricken at how such beauty can thrive in the darkest parts of the history of human beings, and I was initially conflicted while taking this photo. How could I take a photo of a tree, one of G-d's beautiful creations—which sustains us and provides us with oxygen to breathe—in a place so full of hate? This very photo was taken where our people were so mercilessly destroyed not even a century ago.

It took me a while to understand the meaning of this tree, and why I felt so compelled to capture it in a photo when I entered the infamous concentration camp. In Judaism, the tree is a symbol of life (my very synagogue is called Etz Chayim). This is not an image of darkness, rather it is a symbol of Jewish resistance and continuity despite horrifying devastation. We are still here, and we will never go away, even though we have faced attempted genocide, expulsion, and destruction over and over. The tree of life will always find a way to flourish, even through the cracks of hate. ■

Nomi wrote this piece for a recent March of the Living presentation.

Write for Shoresh

If you have something to say (or someone you know, does), please reach out to the editor at lesliemalkin@lofc.ca. We love when Etz Chayim members write for Shoresh!

Making History

As we turn the last page on one chapter, a new one begins.

"There's no end to the story," said Denny Hornstein. "It's the end of one portion and the beginning of another." While in the bigger picture, Denny is talking about Congregation Etz Chayim's move from Matheson to Wilkes, in the moment she is talking about the living, evolving history that is being created as the Congregation Etz Chayim Memories Project. Denny and husband Mel Hornstein co-chair the Honouring the Past committee, which has been working on this special project: an ongoing, interactive, multimedia presentation of shared memories, stories, history, photos, documents, and other remembrances of Congregation Etz Chayim. Ongoing, because the plan is to continue receiving and adding memories from members into the future.

"Hopefully this project will be fluid enough that once we're at the other building, those events can be added," said Denny, before the move to Wilkes. "So it's constantly ongoing, not just the history."

"It won't be a dead project," Mel said. "It'll be alive."

There is a range of ways members can contribute to the living history, from sharing photos or a written reminiscence, to recording an audio-clip, to being video-interviewed about the memory. Sometimes just one photo says it all: "a whole story without saying anything," said Denny.

While the team is certain to source member reminiscences of milestones and life events experienced at Etz Chayim, from *britot* (plural of *bris*) and *B'nai Mitzvah* to weddings and funerals, Mel said they also hope for some finer details, like memories of the first time holding a Torah or having an *Aliyah*, as examples.

Many people are volunteering time and energy to the multimedia living history project, said the Hornsteins. Kevin McIntyre is doing photography while Barry Kay (Cherry Tree Productions) is doing videography, with Jodi Gilmore supporting that work. Morissa Granove is interviewing members who want to



Mel and Denny Hornstein

"Hopefully this project will be fluid enough that once we're at the other building, those events can be added."

share memories verbally, and Claudia Griner has been providing materials of interest for the presentation as they are uncovered during the move. For example, said Denny, Claudia found a program from a very special celebration: "When the synagogues merged and there was the first celebration where they walked with the Sifrei Torah from the other two synagogues to Etz Chayim." A photo of that program could be included, she continues, "showing where we came from."

Mel said the process of collecting memories can be heavy with emotion, at times. "I can mark milestones and all kinds of other things in my life that happened right here. To say goodbye to it is kind of unreal."

But he is realistic, and optimistic about the future. "The fact is, we're all making history as we sit here right now. And you have work to do, no matter how nostalgia plays into it and whatever happened before.

"You shouldn't forget it," he concludes, "but you shouldn't live by it." ■

A Good Name

How Etz Chayim Got Its Name

Names are important to people. We put untold time and effort into coming up with names for children, companies, organizations, communities, and congregations. Do you know how Congregation Etz Chayim got its name? Our *shul* came into being along with its name when forbearer synagogues Beth Israel, Bnay Abraham, and Rosh Pina amalgamated into one congregation in August 2002.

A merger is a complicated business. To ensure it went as smoothly and successfully as possible, nine committees were struck, ranging from finance and legal to catering and gift shop, says Merrill Shulman, who was president of Rosh Pina at that time. Then there were two umbrella ‘super’ committees: a steering committee comprised of representatives from each of the preceding committees, one or two from each founding *shul*, and a management committee, to provide strategic direction and act as a clearinghouse with contentious issues, Merrill explains. Also, Jack London (CM, KC) was recruited and he volunteered to oversee and mediate all aspects of the amalgamation.

“Interestingly, the name of the new synagogue wasn’t one of those (merger) committees” established, Merrill says. They did undertake an organized and equitable process for deciding what to call the amalgamated congregation, though. “The name turned out to be the least difficult issue,” he says. “If you had to pick a function of the merger process that had goodwill throughout and without a lot of strife, that was it.”

A democratic approach was taken, with some guiding principles in place: for example, no suggestion containing any part of one of the legacy *shuls*’ names would be considered.

“A merger, by our definition, meant showing ultimate respect for both the history and the interests of each participant (*shul*). And we did not want the name to sound like any of the existing three synagogues,” Merrill says. By that measure, neither Bnay-something nor Beth-anything nor Rosh-something-or-other was an eligible option.



The three legacy *shul* congregations were invited to submit name suggestions to Jack London, who reviewed them with Rabbi Neal Rose (unanimously considered a neutral party). The pair then submitted a list of names to the management committee for a vote: *Shir Chadash* (New Song), *Etz Chaim* (Tree of Life), *Or Tikvah* (Light of Hope), and *Tzur Israel* (Rock of Israel).

While you know the result, that’s not quite the end of the story (nor is that a typo in *Chaim* a few lines back). The management committee voted for Etz Chaim, and the only point of disagreement was how to spell “Chayim,” with or without the *y*, Merrill says. Rabbi Henry Balser was consulted, who advised that the *y* be included. Nonetheless, it was a simple dispute to solve, he says. “We had some contentious issues. This wasn’t one of them.”

Mel Hornstein recalls another point of debate around the name: whether *Kehilla*, (Hebrew for *community*), or *Congregation* should be connected to *Etz Chayim* as the full name. Again, you know the result.

Mel agrees with Merrill: “There wasn’t a measured amount of contention over the name. It was an easy one to grab on to” — fitting, since the *Etz Chayim* part “comes from a phrase that you should grab onto them,” Mel continues, referring to the branches of the tree of life. “It doesn’t say you should put your hand on them. It says you should *grasp* them! *Etz Chayim Hi*.”

“We were driven by finding a name that we could all be comfortable with,” Merrill says. “And I believe we are. It’s served its purpose. It was a good name, and it still is.” ■

ETZ CHAYIM PEOPLE

Member News and Life-Cycle Events

SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

NOVEMBER

Ardith Hensch, Ruth Karasick, Gertie Lipson, Ruth Muscovitch, Maureen Steinfeld

DECEMBER

Jonathan Buchwald, Jerry Cohen, Esther Gardner, Jack Hurtig, Ricki Jacobson, Mark Lander, Lorraine Palatnick, Henry Trachtenberg, Linda Waldman

JANUARY

Jonathan Feldman, Joanne Katz, Kevin McIntyre, Judy Shiffman, Nata Spigelman

FEBRUARY

Michelle Apter, Bonnie Buchalter, Roberta Hurtig, Sonia Kaplan, Julia Osso Margolis, Bert Minuk, Roslind Olin, Elaine Shinfield, Jeffrey Silverstein

MAZEL TOVS

Tara Kozlowich and Paul Shur on the Bat Mitzvah of daughter Bailee Shur, November 11, 2023.

Samantha Lapedus on the Bar Mitzvah of son Rowan Reich, November 18, 2023.

Cal Reich on the Bar Mitzvah of son Rowan Reich.

Fay Reich on the Bar Mitzvah of grandson Rowan Reich.

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

NOVEMBER

Evelyn and Alec Gilman (65)
Jane and Ronald Reider (30)

DECEMBER

Sharon and Benson Labinsky (60)
Joyce and Sid Rosenhek (60)
Paulina and Juan Schwersensky (50)

FEBRUARY

Ruth and Abbot Karasick (70)

IN MEMORIAM

Margaret Binder
Ben Hochman
Adel Kogan
Michael Lerner
Phillip Maltz
Molly Rosenblat
Rachel Sliwowitz



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