

SHORESH

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Congregation Etz Chayim
Community News

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**Handmade
Ancient Stories
Present-day Stories**

Through the Wilderness

by Rabbi Kliel Rose

I have a theory about the Passover *Seder* experience. If we can unlock the importance of *Maggid* in the *Haggadah*, comprehend its intrinsic value, we might have a powerful spiritual encounter on this sacred evening.

This is my purpose.

What does *Maggid* mean? The word is related to *Haggadah*, our *Seder* manual. Both words connote “telling.” Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Z”L taught that the word *Haggadah* derives from the verb to bind, join, connect. “The story of the Exodus is more than a recounting (*sippur*/telling) of things that happened long ago. It binds the present to the past and future. It connects one generation to the next. It joins us to our children. Jewish continuity means each successive generation commits itself to continuing the story. Our past lives on in us.”

At the *Seder* we recall our ancestors enslaved in Egypt. We relate to their suffering and later, their liberation. Another dimension embedded in *Maggid*, as we are “binding the present to the past and future,” is our own narrative.

In the Book of Exodus we read, *Ve-higadeta le-vincha bayom hahu...* “You shall inform your child on that day.” This is the very core of the *Seder*, encapsulating the entire *Seder* experience. The word *Ve-higadeta* derives from the verb *le-hagid*. The root, *Nun-Gimmel-Daled*, *neged*, נגד, means “next to.” The *Hey* at the beginning means the word is in the *hiphil* (causative) form. Thus, *le-ha(n)gid* means to cause something or someone to be next to something or someone else. As Jewish history scholar Mitchell First writes, “there was originally an implication of a face-to-face conversation in *Hey-Nun-Gimmel-Daled*.”

We might conclude the *Seder*'s essence is in the dialogue, the requirement to recollect the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt in conversation with others. In effect, at the *Seder* we create a dialogic space, a platform to view the situation from multiple perspectives.

With this exercise we recognize the inherent sacredness of performing the Passover *Seder* rituals. How we untangle the significance of the words *Maggid* and *Haggadah* might impact our personal and communal *Seder* experiences. In the *New American Haggadah*, contemporary thinker Rebecca Newberger Goldstein proposed: “*Haggadah* means narration, and tonight's celebration insists on the moral seriousness of the stories that we tell about ourselves. Stories are easily dismissible as distractions, the make-believe we craved as children, losing ourselves in the sweet enchantment of ‘as if.’ ‘As if’ belongs to the imagination, that wild terrain governed by no obvious rules. But tonight we are asked to take this faculty of the mind, so beloved by children and novelists, extremely seriously. All the adults who have outgrown story time are to



The Discovery of Moses, Edwin Long, 1886

be tutored tonight...Tonight is the night that we sanctify storytelling.”

We are not just recounting a fanciful story about our ancestors. Goldstein relies on and enhances an idea established by the *Haggadah*'s editors, who used the biblical proof text from the Book of Exodus (13:8) as foundation for creating the *Seder* in the first place. The editors teach that all Jews must apply this thought when involving themselves in the Passover *Seder*: “In each and every

generation a person is obligated to see themselves as though they left Egypt. ‘And you shall tell your child that day, saying: It is because of this which Adonai did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.’” (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5). The verse is in first person, requiring each of us to feel as though I/we/you left Egypt. In the Torah, Egypt is not just reference to a geographic location. The Hebrew word, *Mitzrayim*, is also a metaphor for “narrow place.” Recounting our Exodus story is about engaging with the mythological. And while myth may not be empirically factual, we know recounting this pivotal moment in the life of our people conveys some form of truth. Passover is more than a thanksgiving feast; it is an initiatory rite, not centred on a simple dichotomy between the individual and the communal. The *Seder*, a fusion of both elements, is much more sophisticated.

The *Seder* and *Maggid* should be viewed as more than the relaying of a historical tale. We are being implored to see the *Seder* as both historical and ahistorical (true, but not from an empirical standpoint). This opens the possibility of including our personal narrative to answer the question, “What is the Egypt (confined place) I need to exit from?”

How can we share, authentically, the Exodus story, recall what happened to our ancestors and discuss current suffering and aspiration for liberation, to embody the Rabbis' teaching “as if we were there”?

Michael Walzer offers a contemporary opinion in his book *Exodus and Revolution*. He believes the Exodus story in the Torah offers parallels to more recent wars of national liberation, parallels based on political interpretation of the main episodes of the Exodus story. To answer my question from earlier, how can we relate to an ancient story and at the same time experience it “as if we were there”? Walzer says, “We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what it has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form: first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land; and third, that the way to the land is through the wilderness.” ■

Entering the Seder's Maggid Chambers

Ma Nishtana: the Seder song that puts any child at an Ashkenazic Seder on the hotseat for its delivery. At Sephardic and Chasidic Seders, all guests, young and old, recite *Ma Nishtana* together.

At all Seders, the song has a much more vital purpose and broader reach than simply a means of engaging the youngest minds at the Passover Seder with song. *Ma Nishtana* invites all Seder guests to enter the Seder's *Maggid* Chambers. *Ma Nishtana* is like a doorway, a portal to the most important part of the Seder: *Maggid*—the sacred and time-honoured retelling of the story of the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt and our ultimate emancipation by G-d. When we ask ourselves the *Ma Nishtana* questions, we "become the 'other' to whom (we) will relate the story," says Yosef Marcus in "The Four Questions Explained: An anthology of classic and Kabbalistic teachings" (Kehot Publication Society/Chabad.Org).

Asking why we perform four distinct Passover Seder rituals forms the four verses of *Ma Nishtana*: (1) While most nights we eat any bread, on this night we eat only unleavened bread: matzah; (2) while most nights we eat any vegetable, on this night we eat a bitter vegetable, maror; (3) while most nights we do not dip our vegetables once, on this night we dip twice; (4) while on most nights we do not recline while eating, on this night we recline.

Why do we focus on these differences? There are other irregularities, odd rituals we perform at Passover, but rarely if ever on ordinary nights—drinking four cups of wine, washing hands during the meal—why don't these idiosyncrasies get verses in *Ma Nishtana*?

The reason is that *Ma Nishtana* highlights Passover rituals meant to remind us of our freedom and/or that we were once slaves, says



Mark Greenspan in "Why are These Questions Different... *Parshat Tzav*, Leviticus 6:1- 8:36." We remind ourselves we are free as kings by performing lavish behaviours like dipping food twice. Yet we dip in saltwater, recalling our ancestors' tears. We highlight our eating matzah, bread of affliction, food of slaves and labourers, reminding us that without G-d's outstretched arm leading us from Egypt, we might still be there now.

The order of verses in *Ma Nishtana* depends on your Jewish descent. Among Sephardic and Yemenite Jews, the order is "dip," "matzah," "maror," "recline." In the Ashkenazic tradition, after a long, varied history the order settled on "matzah," "maror," "dip," "recline." At one time, *Ma Nishtana* had a fifth verse: *Why on all other nights do we eat meat roasted, marinated, or cooked, but on this night only roasted?* The question referred to the sacrificial lamb offered at the *Beit Hamikdash*, the Holy Temple, on Passover and eaten at the Seder. After the Temple fell the ritual of sacrifice fell out of practice. The fifth verse was considered irrelevant and was eventually dropped. ■

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Handmade: Etz Chayim Makers

What each of these Etz Chayim Makers creates is as distinct and individual as they are. What unites them is their love for making, and their main tools for the job: their hands.

Sweet Success



Cynthia Aisenberg has sweet childhood memories of helping prepare traditional Argentinean pastries.



"I have fond memories of baking with my Bubbe and my mum," she says. "My Bubbe used to invite us for tea, and I would help prepare the sweet treats to bring to the table." The sweetness lingering on her palate eventually led to her small business, Creative Sweets. "These are flavours I enjoyed growing up and I needed to recreate them," says Cynthia, who immigrated to Winnipeg from Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2003.

Cynthia has always loved preparing sweet treats and desserts to share with friends and family. Her friends encouraged her to turn her passion into business, describing the quality of Cynthia's pastries as "better than anything available" locally. She also wanted to recreate *alfajores* (an Argentinean sandwich-cookie-like pastry filled with *dulce de leche*, milk-caramel spread) for her Canadian-born children, who had loved the pastries in Argentina. "Achieving that for them here was another source of inspiration!"

Before Creative Sweets launched in October 2018, Cynthia underwent a long process of researching recipes and techniques, beginning with cookbooks from Argentina. She added ideas from Argentinean chefs, who offered advice via Instagram or posted YouTube videos. She tested the recipes on family and friends; "my best critic is my husband (Javier Gurfinkiel). He is happy to keep testing and tasting," she says.

"The end result is my own set of recipes and style that creates the flavours and textures I was looking for," she says.

Cynthia says baking and creating is her happy place, "where I go to relax, where I truly feel comfortable. It allows me to channel my passion (and) results in so much satisfaction. Receiving compliments from clients fills me with pride and happiness," she says.

"Ultimately, offering these treats is a way of sharing the best of our Argentinean background with the local community." Find Creative Sweets on Facebook and Instagram: @creativesweets. ■

Crackerjack Crocheter



Naomi Bokser and crocheting go way back. They were first introduced when she was 7. "My aunt gifted me this crochet set and taught me the most basic thing you can make, a chain," says Naomi, 12 (11 when interviewed). The hobby didn't stick at 7, though.

Her interest was reignited two years later with a video of a girl crocheting a cardigan. "I want to do that!" she had said to herself. She tried but had forgotten how, she says. Naomi's mom, Sabrina, retaught her the basics; "from there, I went to YouTube and learned myself," she says.

Today, Naomi has a business, Aspensgloops, selling crocheted plushy animals and toys. Named after her real-life plushy (dog), Aspen, Aspensgloops customers are as far away as Israel and Germany, others are in Canada and the US. Plushies include various animals, mushrooms, peanuts, and stress balls.

Naomi doesn't stop at plushies. "I made my Halloween dress—Cinderella, when she was a maid," she says. "That was a few months ago, so it's not my best work, but it's something," she says, adding bucket hats to her crocheted product list.

Naomi creates her own patterns for her crocheted animals. "I saw some videos and learned how people do it. From there, I made my own patterns, what worked for me. I follow my patterns that I keep writing down," she says.

Naomi puts tons of work into each plushy and filling every order. "There are many parts of crocheting. You see the finished product—you don't see the part where I crochet, where I close all the little parts and sew them together. Or the part where I stuff everything and then take photos, and where I pack my orders. People see the finished product. They don't see what goes on behind the scenes."

She says she does run into snags, sometimes, illustrating with an example that had just happened: "I couldn't get it because you have to flip it and it's a whole big deal," she explains. "I had to restart five times to get exactly where I wanted to be. So, I do get frustrated," says the grade 6 Gray Academy student.

But she can usually solve difficulties herself. "I search it up or figure it out. Sometimes I try the next day," she says.

Despite the occasional snags, Naomi says crocheting is relaxing. "I feel calm, it takes me into a different world. I like this world, but I love my crocheting world, where it's just me



and myself." Find Naomi's crocheted animals on Instagram (@aspensgloops) and in her Etsy shop: <https://www.etsy.com/ca/shop/Aspensgloops>. ■

In Stitches

Resa Ostrove keeps a ball of laughter tucked into her knitting bag. "You have to have a sense of humour with



knitting, like playing golf. Things go wrong all the time, they just do. It's never smooth sailing," she says.

When Resa and her sister were young, their mother taught them how to knit. "I didn't have the patience when I was younger," she says.

When Omicron hit last year, "we had to cancel a trip to see our new granddaughter in San Diego for the second time. There was a lot of upset,"

she says. So, her sister brought over some extra wool, "plunked it down on the table and said, 'I'm teaching you how to knit again.'" Resa learned to cast on and consulted YouTube for support. "I've been knitting my little heart away."

Her first scarf went to her grandson, Levi. "He loves his scarf; he would rather wear it than his balaclava. It was gratifying," says Resa. Next came one for her granddaughter in San Diego. "You might think that's ridiculous, but they said it does get cold." Number 3 went to Resa's middle son, who wanted blue and white for the Israeli flag. "I got two balls of yarn that I fought with: I think I spent more time untangling the yarn than knitting." Two more scarves went to a nephew and niece, and she gifted one to a friend for her birthday.

Resa says she sticks with knitting basics and has yet to follow a pattern. But "I've picked up some absolutely stunning yarn, so it doesn't really matter if it's the plain stitch because the colours are so gorgeous you don't really notice there's not much of a pattern—there's a pattern to the yarn," says the retired teacher.

While Resa says her sister is a wizard with knitting needles, "not everybody can be the master crafter. Very often I've had to start over. Sometimes I've wound up with 19 instead of 20 stitches and sometimes with 21 instead of 20, so it looks a little lopsided and I have to undo everything and do it again."

That's when she reaches into her knitting bag and pulls out that ball of chuckles. ■

For the Love of It

Mary Ann Rosenbloom has been creating her whole life, eventually landing on fiber arts and painting. A quilter, she likes this craft for its traditions of practicality and repurposing. "Quilts have always been practical," she says. "They were made out of scraps and clothing, old bedsheets and shirts." Not to mention the practical warmth factor.

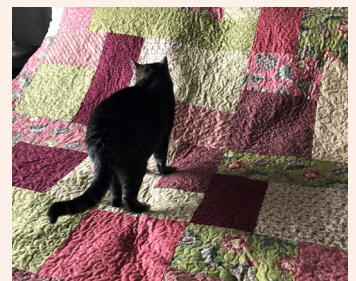
Mary Ann has created around 25 quilts, most of which she has given away. "I recently gave one to a friend undergoing chemo, something to wrap them in love. I've given them as wedding gifts or baby gifts, or just because I care for somebody," says the retired registered nurse.

She says quilting is relaxing; "there's something a little freeing about taking a perfectly good piece of fabric, cutting



it up, and sewing it to another piece. It makes no sense, but it comes out beautifully."

Mary Ann has gifted two pieces of Judaic fiber art to Congregation Etz Chayim: a *challah* cover with an appliqued tree that spells Etz Chayim, and a high holidays *parochet* (the curtain covering the *aron kodesh*) with a shofar on it, for the ark in the *shul* basement.



Recently, Mary Ann has tried *sashiko* and *boro*, both types of Japanese stitching. *Sashiko* is a decorative form of mending and is also used to reinforce fabric. "*Boro* is basically patchwork, scraps of fabric used to patch garments," explains Mary Ann. "A beautiful piece of work to make a patch on clothing to extend its life."

She is impressed by both Japanese traditions. "I love the simplicity and the beauty. It comes from a practical purpose but ends up very artistic, in the end, like quilting," says Mary Ann.

When she's not using a needle to create, Mary Ann picks up a paintbrush. Having abandoned the artform years before, she was reinspired after participating in a fundraiser paint night hosted by the Women's League of Congregation Etz Chayim. Then she took a class at Forum Art Centre and has been painting ever since. Four of her paintings now hang in her home, others she has gifted to friends, and she donated two to a Lighthouse Mission fundraiser.

Mary Ann says she's not a professional artist sitting in the studio all day cranking out paintings for shows and sales. "My quilting and my painting are for the love of it, because I get satisfaction when it turns out well."

"And I get very frustrated when it doesn't," she laughs, describing a painting she'd been "fighting with" for about a year. When painting stopped being fun, she took a break.

Recently, she returned to classes and is revisiting that painting. "I've played with it, trying to correct what I didn't like. I still don't like it but I'm happier with it, and happy because I pushed myself," she says.

We're betting that painting will adorn a wall, soon, too. ■

Uniquely Hand-Lettered

Liat Stitz casts her creative talents towards two separate businesses. Four Hands for Cards, a joint venture with Halley Ritter, is a custom handmade greeting card business. And through Peg City Calligraphy, a custom modern calligraphy service, Liat creates signage and hand-lettered décor for weddings, events, and homes.

Liat is a modern calligrapher and hand letterer. Looking for something new to do in fall of 2020, she signed up for



a calligraphy course. "I found it relaxing and kind of meditative," She also liked that calligraphy was "a skill that had practical use."

"I don't like doing things just to do them. I want there to be a purpose," says Liat, who is working towards her Master of Community Health Sciences. Her sister Dena's wedding had been approaching and Liat was motivated to help with wedding signage and other décor.

Peg City Calligraphy

Today, through Peg City Calligraphy, Liat provides custom hand-lettered wedding and events décor like welcome signs, seating charts, table numbers, bar signage, place cards, keepsake vows booklets, and personalized glasses and wedding hangers (for bridal parties). Recently, she added custom line-art portraits to her product lineup, to which she can add hand-scripted text (like a family name or quote).

Four Hands for Cards

Four Hands for Cards combines Liat's calligraphy and hand-lettering flair with Halley's painting and printmaking talents to create greeting cards with modern calligraphy and hand-painted details for every occasion. Cards can be customized any way a customer wants, explains Liat. "There's a simpler design with hand-painted details; that might include flowers or leaves or abstract shapes." Then there are custom portraits (hand-painted by Halley from a photo) specific to the individual. The calligraphy can be customized by colour, style, or the message inside.

Liat and Halley recently added a new line of printed cards designed by hand digitally. "If someone wants their Bar Mitzvah thank you cards with a photo and painted details, we could do large orders like that," Liat explains. "It's still our own work but we can get more done because we print them instead of making each one at a time."

Liat says while there are many styles of calligraphy, she prefers what she does, modern calligraphy, which is "focused

on individual style—exaggerating parts or stretching strokes, adding embellishments: it's what drew me to it. I don't want to copy someone else's work. I don't want it to be like a font.

"I want it to be unique and uniquely mine." Find Liat's work on Instagram and Facebook: @pegcitycalligraphy and @fourhandsforcards. ■

Knitted Style

Adriana Josebachvili knits with her fingers, not knitting needles. When she discovered the finger-knitting technique,



she was impressed. "It was totally different from what I do," says Adriana, who has an architecture degree from Argentina and works at a Winnipeg engineering consulting firm.

Adriana's mom taught her to knit and crochet as a child, but she hadn't done much since her teen years. Four years ago, she rediscovered knitting as co-chair of the social services committee for the Argentinian Manitoban Association (AMA). "We started a program to make and donate blankets to organizations around the city," says Adriana. "I liked knitting for the community," she says.

While the pandemic shut the AMA program down, Adriana continued knitting for the community and eventually turned her hobby into a small business. Through Milly Blankets and Knits, she sells handmade blankets, bed runners, cushion covers, and neck warmers, all knit with her fingers. She accepts custom orders and hopes to add new products to her line throughout 2022. Milly is a shortened form of Adriana's middle name, Emilia. Representing herself in her business name was "a personal touch I wanted to give to my business," she says.

Adriana uses a very chunky yarn for her knits. "I love this yarn because it's fluffy, warm, cozy, and durable." It is also light and airy, very soft, machine washable, and dries in a gentle quick cycle, she explains.

Initially, customers were friends and family, but once she gained social media presence, new consumers found her. "Social media has been a great tool because I reach many new people from all walks of life. I have had fun experimenting with Facebook and Instagram posts and stories," she says. She has participated in a few local markets where she nearly depleted available stock. "I love these markets, because you get to interact with customers," says Adriana, who has also donated knit blankets to the Simkin Centre and crocheted scarves to initiatives like Care Kits Project and Healthy Start.

Adriana struggles to unravel the basis for her knitting passion. "I cannot explain why, but it makes me feel comfortable, free, creative, and I love it," she says. Find Adriana's work on Instagram and Facebook: @millyblanketsandknits. ■

Acts of Loving kindness Towards Abayudaya Jews

At a time in history when connection feels a bit lacking, at least in some parts of the world, in other parts, tiny rays of sunlight—connections—are being made, to fill our hearts with joy. Some Etz Chayim youth have new pen-pals to correspond with, youth from a community of Abayudaya Jews in Uganda.

The Abayudaya is a small, poor community of Jews in Eastern Uganda. Their modest homes have no running water or electricity, often no doors or windows. When it rains, unpaved roads turn to mud. The people survive mainly by subsistence farming, but recent pandemic lockdowns have made working difficult.

Marc Schaeffer's first thought, when Rabbi Kliel appealed to the congregation for help for the Abayudaya people, last year, was to donate a few dollars to the cause. "But it dawned on me there might be a way to make a larger contribution by donating my time," says Marc, a teacher.

The APPLE Project

Marc launched his two-pronged APPLE project in summer 2021: the letter exchange between Abayudaya and Canadian Jewish youth and a fundraising endeavour. Marc says APPLE is a simple way for youth to take actions that directly impact on this distinctive Jewish community in Uganda. "I hope it gives Jews around the world a unique view into the diversity of the Jewish experience," he says, adding he also hopes the letter exchange might help reduce isolation for some Abayudaya youth.

Marc's ultimate goal is to empower others to take action and find ways to make differences in other people's lives. He wonders what fresh ideas individuals might generate if encouraged, ideas that empowered them to help another community.

"It is powerful to learn that you can create something," Marc states.

Acts of Loving kindness

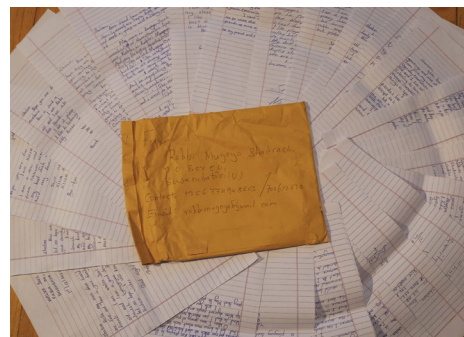
By helping others, we engage in the mitzvah of *gemilut chassadim*, acts of loving-kindness, a foundational social value within Judaism. We express *gemilut chassadim* by conveying goodwill to others without expectation of reciprocation (attending the burial for a deceased individual is said to be the ultimate act of *gemilut chassadim*, since there is no possibility of reciprocation, the recipient being dead). We distinguish between donating money and other tangibles to charity, *t'zedakah*, and giving one's time and energy, *gemilut chassadim*.

Sew What

Abayudaya women handmade and sell colourful *kippot* and *challah* covers as a fundraiser for the community. Income from selling their crafts goes toward food, school fees, and so on. An APPLE-fund-raising target for the community is



Seth Schacter



Letters from Abayudaya youth received by Marc Schaeffer.

an industrial-strength sewing machine for making *tallitot*, clothing, and reusable menstrual pads (which would directly impact girls' ability to attend school regularly).

First Letters

Late in 2021, Marc received the first batch of letters from Abayudaya children age 6 to 15, forwarded by Rabbi Mugoya, a spiritual leader in Uganda. Marc delivered letters to interested Etz Chayim B'nai Mitzvah students as well as to grade 3 students at Gray Academy and B'nai Mitzvah students at Beth Tzedec Congregation in Calgary. By mid-February, Marc had a new package of letters, with which he hoped to expand the pen pal project.

Pen to Paper

Juliet Eskin and Seth Schacter are Etz Chayim B'nai Mitzvah students who have been corresponding with Abayudaya youth.

Juliet exchanged letters with Namukose Esther. "She is 15 years old and lives with her older brother. Her favourite food is sweet potatoes, her favourite colour is lime green," says Juliet, who reciprocated with details about her hobbies "like baking and playing violin. I told her I'm in grade 7 and preparing for my Bat Mitzvah," she adds.

Seth corresponded with 11-year-old Mukama Zeev. "Their favourite colour is blue, and their favourite food is noodles," says Seth, who reciprocated with details about his favourite sport: hockey. "I said, it's cold in Winnipeg because it's winter. They asked how Covid was here, so I said I will be double vaccinated by the time they get the letter," says Seth, also 11.

Gemilut Chassadim

Juliet and Seth both report feeling good about the pen-pal-ship. "I felt happy to be communicating with someone Jewish in Uganda," offers Juliet.

"It makes me feel good because it helps bring joy to others," Seth says. He is referring to *gemilut chassadim*, acts of loving-kindness.

Both Juliet and Seth have received something valuable from the exchange: a new friend, halfway around the world. "It was nice to read a handwritten letter," says Juliet. "She drew a *Magen David* and wrote *shalome* eight times in English and Hebrew. I am excited to receive another letter!"

Seth says this was the first time he had hand-written a letter and feels it is a little more personal, this way. "It's interesting to learn how people live in different places of the world," he points out. A tiny ray of sunlight to fill hearts with joy. ■

A Meaningful Life

His work. His family. His heritage. It is a simple list (of complex entities) that bring meaning into Diego Skladnik's life. Diego was interviewed as part of the Congregation Etz Chayim Our Trees of Life / Passover Maggid (storytelling) initiative to share members' unique stories.

It isn't usually the technical issues that cause Diego Skladnik grief. As a project management and business consultant who leads and administers technology change projects, Diego runs into his share of technological challenges. Most of the projects he works on involve software (not development, he says, but big package implementation, like administering a new suite of software tools). But technology is predictable, states Diego plainly, and humans are not. For any project manager, it is the people involved on any level of the project who will cause them the most grief.

"Computers and software don't have feelings, they don't have egos, they don't have pride, all those emotions that make humans behave the way we behave. We might all claim we are extremely rational and predictable. I don't think we are," he states.

Typically, project managers hire change management agents to help ensure a change is embraced, Diego explains. "I can have the best solution but if people don't want to use it, the project will fail," he says.

"Understanding how people operate is key," he continues. "There is the science: you apply this method. And there is the art: regardless of the method, some people might have more charm, personalities that make others want to change."

"But long story short, that is probably the most complex and difficult component of every project: working with people," says Diego, who has a degree in computer science and a Master of Business Administration.

Healthcare Solutions

Many of the projects Diego manages are large-scale, complex endeavours spanning several years. Manitoba Health has been a regular client for whom Diego helps

implement provincial and enterprise healthcare solutions. He managed implementation of an electronic records system for diagnostic imaging (MRI scans, CT scans, X-rays, and so on) that is accessible provincewide. He also put into operation a system used provincially for hospitals to manage patient records and appointments, including individuals registered as in-patients and those visiting outpatient clinics within the hospital.

A smaller project managed by Diego more recently is implementation of a virtual Covid clinic for patients with Covid symptoms that are not serious enough to require hospitalization. Through the clinic, patients can be monitored remotely and regularly by physicians and nurses and have symptoms and vital signs followed. If the patient health declines, they can be admitted to hospital; if not, they continue to be monitored, he says. About two years ago, Diego founded Brilliant Bunch, the company from which he now delivers his project management expertise.

Come From Away

Diego says his maternal ancestors emigrated from Russia to Argentina in the late 1880s. His paternal ancestors left Poland/Ukraine for Argentina just before the second world war. Diego and his wife, Dafne Orbach, emigrated from Argentina to Winnipeg (with their son, Natan, then 2) in 2003, after a year working in Guatemala. Argentina was undergoing a period of political and economical instability, and word of mouth had spread about Winnipeg as a "hotspot" among Argentinian Jews, thanks to a delegation from the Winnipeg Jewish community promoting our Prairie city, explains, Diego.

While he says they knew no one and virtually nothing about the city they



Diego Skladnik

were moving to, they found a large network of Argentinians moving from Buenos Aires to Winnipeg around the same time, all with similar needs. "We all needed the same things: apartment, job, car, winter jackets, winter boots," Diego says. So, the network of families supported each other and coordinated undertakings like shared rental of shipping containers for transporting furniture and other necessities to their new home in Winnipeg.

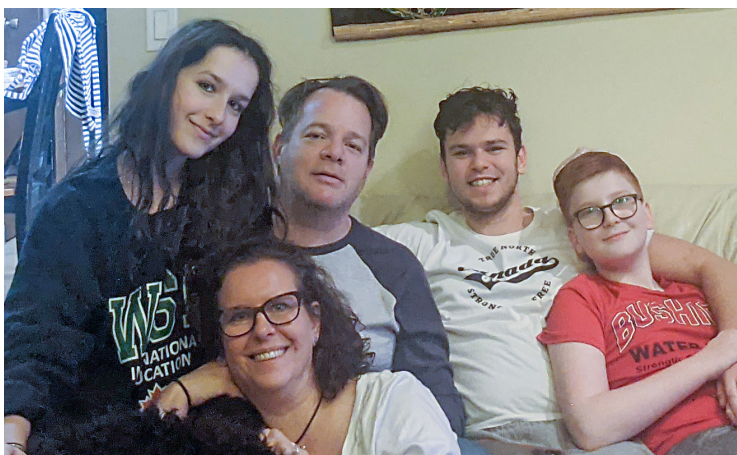
The Importance of Being Jewish

Equally important to their origin story, for Diego and Dafne, is their Jewish identity. "For us, Judaism is very important, and we try to raise our kids (Natan, 20, Naomi, 16, and Yaron 12) with Jewish values. Hopefully, they can keep the flame alive for Judaism to stay around," he says.

"We try to teach them the importance of being Jewish. And we do as much as we can to have them love their identity," he continues. That means giving their kids a Jewish education, keeping kosher at home, honouring Jewish festivals and holidays.

Just as important as Jewish identity is continuity, Diego says. "The desired outcome is that two generations from now our grandchildren are having a conversation and one says, 'yes, I'm Jewish.' How we get there, I don't know," says Diego, who was raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina with a similarly strong Jewish identity, although more from cultural and Zionist standpoints than from a religious one, he says.

Part of that outcome means rejecting assimilation, not a challenge unique



Left to Right: Naomi, Diego, Natan, Yaron, Dafne (front)

to the Jewish community, says Diego, who has had family membership at Etz Chayim since 2011.

"I have nothing against that at a personal level," Diego says, "but I'm a numbers person, I'm very analytical. And when you see the numbers: it's most likely that when people start (adopting) the path of least resistance, over time (they may) start dropping tradition, and things might disappear.

"I just want Jews to be around," he states.

Family Man

Diego is proud of his family and says he enjoys being a father. While a little uncomfortable tooting his own horn, with encouragement he opens up about his role as a father. "I think I'm a good dad. I enjoy being funny and silly with them. (My daughter thinks my jokes are horrible 'dad jokes'. I think they're amazing; she disagrees," he shrugs.) "I also enjoy being a role model and I'm proud of being responsible.

"Seeing them grow and achieving things makes me proud. Am I the perfect dad? probably not, but I do my best."

Diego speaks similarly about his partnership with Dafne. "I have the same style with my wife that I have with my kids. I try to make jokes and I also enjoy being responsible. It's a good relationship," he says.

Diego believes sharing similar values is one of the reasons for his successful marriage. "For us, it's not so much about sharing what we like or dislike because that can be different or can change over time. I might like fishing and Dafne hates fishing. But that's irrelevant because we share values," he says.

Strong commitment to their Jewish identity is one of these values, along with their ethics, "the way we see life, the way we see relationships," he says, adding their shared definition of a meaningful life.

"If someone asks you, 'what is the purpose of life?' many people say happiness, right? And we sometimes say that happiness is temporary. First, we're not always happy—people in general—you can be happy today, unhappy tomorrow. And there's a lot of people who are unhappy for different reasons, whether they have mental health issues or life circumstances. So, we say there has to be something of higher purpose in life."

"For us, meaning is more important than happiness," he says, resorting to project management terminology to explain what he means. "Happiness is a great KPI (key performance indicator) of meaning. But many people can be happy and not have meaning," he says. Building a meaningful life is what he and Dafne strive for together. ■

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Eternal Learner

Dina Granove was also interviewed as part of the Congregation Etz Chayim Our Trees of Life / Passover *Maggid* (storytelling) initiative to share members' unique stories.

Dina Granove has spent a lifetime learning. Long after her years of traditional academics (from Peretz Folk School through to the University of Manitoba, for a Bachelor of Science and a certificate of education), Dina continues to find unique learning opportunities throughout her life.

Students as Teachers

During her teaching career, which spanned more than three decades, Dina's students gave her an education no post-secondary institution could have provided. "I learned so much from them," says the math teacher, who spent most of her career instructing adults at Adult Education. There, Dina gained genuine understanding of not judging a book by its cover.

"There are people I taught who, before that, I would have walked across the street to pass them, they would scare the hell out of me. I was naive and I'd lived a sheltered life, so I was afraid of people that really were ridiculous to be afraid of. I learned to look deeper," she reveals.

Sometimes, a student proffered a nugget of wisdom that resonated deeply for Dina. She recalls a lesson about field of vision from a student who had described for Dina his family adventures, having returned home from two years of sailing around the world with his wife and children. The natural world had become the family's tableau for learning and when the children stepped back into their formal education once home, they hadn't skipped a beat.

The same man had heartening advice for Dina when she was experiencing parenting challenges of her own: "Your job as a parent is to make your child as independent as possible as fast as you can; that's all you need to do," he told her.

"By the time I retired, I had built a lot more confidence in myself, able to speak my voice."

During the course of her career, Dina became acutely aware how huge an impact an educator can have on a student. "You need to be really careful not to damage that. You have to be very supportive," she says. When working with students, particularly adults, she also realized the importance of looking beyond her scope to consider the whole of a person's life. "There were many issues in their lives that took priority over mathematics," she says, citing work, children, even abuse, as examples.

Peer Education

Dina says she also learned from her interactions with other educators, and in her role as an administrator. She spent many years as math department head at Adult Ed and learned "there is no such thing as a subordinate in a situation like that. Everybody should be on one level, whether you're an administrator or a teacher. You need to work together because you're



Dina Granove

working towards the same cause." She also learned to look beyond her own administrative perspective, she says. "I did not think solely about what was beneficial to the math department. I had a global view of the school. When something came down the pike from the bosses upstairs, I would look at it from everybody's perspective," says Dina.

She says she learned to be more assertive over her teaching career, to trust that she had important ideas to share. "By the time I retired, I had built a lot more confidence in myself, able to speak my voice. I used to not speak very quickly—it's hard to notice that now, I'm sure," she jokes. "But I used to not always be confident about what I had to offer," says Dina, who taught math and computer science to high school students for a few years early in her career before moving to adult ed, where she stayed for the rest of her working days—"the career of a lifetime," Dina says.

Parents, Children

Both Dina's parents and her daughter contributed to Dina's lifelong education. "I had very smart parents," she says. Holocaust survivors, they immigrated to Israel from Romania with Dina's older sister, Mimi, then a toddler. Dina was born in Israel and the family immigrated to Canada that year, when she was a baby.

"They had extreme respect for people, so I picked that up," Dina says. "I think respect is one of the most important things one should have." That worked well in Dina's classroom: "I demanded respect, but I gave it, too. I had high standards. I expected them to do their best and I think for the most part they gave it to me, so I am proud of that." She held her adult students in high esteem for the struggle many endured to return to school. "It overwhelmed me," Dina says.

Her parents were very generous and good people, she says, and she believes that helped shape the person she is today. Dina learned about *menschlichkeit*, being a person of honour and integrity, from her father.

"My father used to say, all the education in the world doesn't make you a *mensch*. *Menschlichkeit* is always number one in my world, too," she says. Dina's parents had high regard for learning, nonetheless. "Education was important to them, because they never got a chance."

So when her own daughter decided not to go to university, Dina was devastated, at first. Today, Morissa is one of Dina's best teachers.

"I'm a teacher, so I always thought the worst thing that could happen is that my child wasn't going to be a student. But it's the best thing that ever happened," Dina says. "She is an amazing person who I learn from every day, and when I have a problem, I go to her. She did a lot of work on

herself, and she has really travelled the path." Morissa is a Reiki specialist and life coach. Together with her wife, Morissa also runs the retail work boot store that her father, Dina's husband, Bruce, once ran.

We're the best of friends and I've learned so much from her. She's become my life coach. We can talk about anything, two hours at a time, and it's really good. She's really something special."

Strong Jewish Roots

When Dina was a young girl, her father was cantor at the Chevra Mishnayes synagogue. "That's where a lot of my upbringing was, and before that, at one of the old *shuls* in the north end." Dina's father was very active at the *shul*, her mother equally engaged in the sisterhood. "Their religiosity was pretty strong and as I grew older that surprised me, because I know a lot of people turned away from religion after the horror and trauma they'd endured," she says, referring to the Holocaust. "They felt completely abandoned by G-d." But her parents had remained devoted to their faith.

Dina and Bruce became synagogue members themselves at Beth Israel in the early '90s, and at Etz Chayim when this congregation was born. Dina spent a while on the Congregation Etz Chayim board and was president from 2012 to 2014.

Today, she and Bruce attend weekly Shabbat morning services, holiday services, and one or two weekly weekday minyan services (during Covid, she says, she and Bruce attended weekday minyan more frequently, showing up to most virtual services).

The enormity of Dina's Jewish pride is apparent when she reflects on her Bat Mitzvah at Etz Chayim, in 2015. "Oh, wow, wow, was I happy," she begins, her face beaming. "We didn't do that when I was growing up, girls

didn't have B'nai Mitzvah. This was my step into equality."

Dina became a student of Cantor Tracy for the adult B'nai Mitzvah class, together with Kim Hirt and Carla Frost, who called themselves the "B'nai Mitzvah *Shvesters*."

"And Tracy, dear Tracy, how she had to deal with us," Dina laughs. "We're all vocal and there were times we just wanted to *yachneh* (be talking)—no topic was off limits. And she'd say, 'I guess we're not learning anything this class.' We had some very good times."

The *shvesters* had a triple Bat Mitzvah the morning of May 23, 2015, for which they conducted the full service themselves. "It was wonderful, beautifully choreographed. It was so much fun and I was so proud to be able to do that," says Dina.

Powerful Connections

Dina and Bruce had dedicated a Torah mantle in memory of Dina's mother to Beth Israel, which is now part of the Etz Chayim collection. The day before Dina's great niece Annie Levene's Bat Mitzvah, the family was at the *shul* for a rehearsal; photos were also being taken, some with a Torah. Dina's sister Mimi—Annie's baba—asked if the Torah mantle dedicated to their mother could be brought out. "I just couldn't contain myself," Dina says, "because my mother was there. And I'm so, so happy about that."

"I'm in such connection to them all the time," she continues. "And when the mantle is used, 'I feel what I feel when Tracy opens her mouth and davens. It's my father. So, when I see that mantle, when I hear... it's tangible,' she says.

"They're not only here with me (she touches her head) they're *here* with me." ■

Photo: Evan Swigart



Kosher Catering Service

Congregation Etz Chayim Catering is open for business, still offering a variety of Kosher takeout options such as Shabbat dinners and weekly specials. We also still cater home events, office meetings, shiva meals, and more. Let us know how we can help you: (204) 589-6305.



How We Pray

To help us live as good Jews, we have guidelines for pretty much everything, including what parts from which of our sacred texts to chant each day, and even how we should chant these parts. You may have noticed repeated melodies throughout a synagogue service. This universal musical structure underlying the Jewish liturgical service is *nusach*. It is a formula for Jewish prayer, *matbeah shel tefillah*, that helps shape the service.

Nusach is Predictable

Nusach changes according to time of day, day of the week, and on certain Jewish holidays. "Shabbat morning has its melodies and construct, a weekday morning has a different one. Shabbat afternoon has a different one, closely related to weekday mornings, and the three festivals (Sukkot/Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah; Pesach; and Shavuot) have their own separate *nusach*," explains Cantor Tracy Kasner.

The intention for our weekday morning prayer is to say the words but not elongate the service, Cantor Tracy says. "It's quick, to the point, a faster melody. We all have to go to work, things to do." Shabbat morning is different, she says: that service is "more melodic, filled with musical flourishes and opportunities for people to join together in song."

While most services contain the same parts, we sing them differently depending on the time of day and day of the week/year, she explains. "For example, we have an *Amidah* in each service and even though it has a lot of the same words, you sing them differently" on different days, she says. The differences help arouse feelings within us depending on the time and day, she says.

"It's built into our practice and observance because it inspires us to think differently based on the time of year, which is pretty neat," she adds. In this way, we can viscerally differentiate between services by the distinct feelings some tunes evoke.

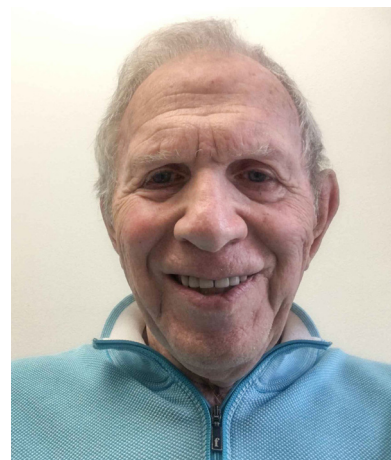
"You feel the change in how you pray," she says.

Chanting Torah and Haftarah

When Jews read from the Torah we are also guided by trope: a language of musical notation for correct intonation, or emphasis, of each word, every syllable chanted, to ensure we convey the right meaning. Trope is also intended to beautify the text which we consider the words of God, says Cantor Tracy. Chanting a *Haftarah* on Shabbat from the book of Prophets (*Nevi'im*) comes with its own trope.



Barbara Hirt



Jerry Cohen

Barbara Hirt learned to chant Torah and *Haftarah* several years ago. Synagogue had been a big part of her life in the early 2000s, she says, where she connected weekly with her father for Shabbat morning services. "I enjoyed reading and learning from the Torah and was curious about the tunes and choreography of the service," she continues. When an opportunity to learn to chant Torah and *Haftarah* and learn about Shabbat rituals and Jewish history was offered at Etz Chayim, she signed up. She knew the classes could ultimately lead to a Bat Mitzvah.

Barbara says when she was young, it was rare for a girl to have a Bat Mitzvah. "My parents were observant Jews. I don't remember a girl having a Bat Mitzvah being a topic in our family," she says.

On June 10, 2006, Barbara chanted *Parashat Naso* as part of a B'nai Mitzvah at Congregation Etz Chayim. She also learned and sang all *Shacharit* prayers. Today, Barbara says she still recognizes differences between weekday tunes and Shabbat ones, as well as the differences on holidays.

Second Bar Mitzvah

For his first Bar Mitzvah many years ago, at 13, Jerry Cohen didn't learn trope, he says. "I just memorized the *Haftarah* that whoever taught me had recorded," he says. Many decades later, at 83, Jerry is preparing for his second Bar Mitzvah. He decided it was also "time I learned how to do *Haftarah*." With Cantor Tracy's guidance, Jerry learned the language of *Haftarah* trope and chanted a *Haftarah* on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, last year. He chanted a second *Haftarah* at a regular Shabbat morning service.

Because he had a written list of *Haftarah* trope and a corresponding audio-recording of how each trope sounds, Jerry felt confident to begin learning his Bar Mitzvah *Haftarah* himself. "I said to Tracy, how about I take a shot at learning my *Haftarah*; you'll fill in when I get stuck." Last December over Zoom, Jerry chanted for Tracy what he had learned himself over a few months. "I was able to master 80 to 90 percent on my own. I can now pretty much learn any *Haftarah* on my own, with time and practice," says Jerry, adding that Cantor Tracy has been an inspiration towards reaching his goal.

"She's not only a great cantor but a great teacher and we've both enjoyed that she was once my student and now I'm hers."

Jerry is pleased to be stepping up to the *Bimah* again to chant a *Haftarah*, this time for his upcoming Bar Mitzvah. "It will be a meaningful religious experience for me and an opportunity to share that with family and friends," he says. ■

ETZ CHAYIM PEOPLE

Member News and Life-Cycle Events

SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

FEBRUARY

Eugene Baron, Persio Cherman Chuster, Hadass Eviatar, Lainie Filkow, Carol Litman, Miriam Maltz, Audra Roitenberg, Feiga Stern, Hymie Weinstein

MARCH

Jack Offman, Mary Ann Rosenbloom, Claretta Shefrin, Diego Skladnik

APRIL

Jodi Gilmore, Dina Granove, Gary Jacobson, Lenore Kagan, Philip Maltz, Arnold Permut, Betty Searle, Jerry Shrom, Wayne Singer, Jackie Winestock

MAY

Mark Binder, Maxine Diamond, Kenneth Goldstein, Miriam Kohn,

Matthew Lazar, Michael Lazar, Bernard Lofchick, Elaine Lofchick, Steven Mintz, Norman Roseman, Sybil Steele, Gordon Steindel, Denah Weinfeld

IN MEMORIAM

Doreen Davidow
Sarah Martin
Roy Paisner
Sally Rosenbloom
Gertie Schwartz
Jack Wolk

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

MAY

Carlos Benesdra and Silvana Fux (20); Ed and Linda Calnitsky (45); Alan and Andrea Slusky (35)

MAZEL TOVS

Candace Buchalter and Jonathan Hyman on

daughter Shiloh's Bat Mitzvah on February 19
Tara Margolis and Aaron Calvo on daughter Emma's Bat Mitzvah on May 7

Jennifer and Ian Dimerman on son Jacob's Bar Mitzvah on April 9
Sandy and Murray Hyman on granddaughter Shiloh's Bat Mitzvah

Tracy Kasner on son Aaron's Bar Mitzvah on February 28

Margaret Kasner on grandson Aaron's Bar Mitzvah

Gary Margolis on granddaughter Emma's Bat Mitzvah

Rabbi Kliel Rose and Dorit Kosmin on daughter Dia's Bat Mitzvah on May 23

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