

# SHORESH

שורש

Congregation Etz Chayim  
Community News

JANUARY 2019

שבט תשע"ט | SHEVAT 5779



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gladassfanny  
Inset: Manuel Sousa

Guests of the Congregation Etz Chayim Chanukah dinner were treated to chef Bogie's famous turkey roll and luscious latkes followed by entertainment by funny-man/magician/ventriloquist Mr. Richards and Shireinu Choir (a combined initiative of Congregation Etz Chayim and Jewish Child and Family Service).



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# Kids Like These

*Over the next four pages is a collection of youth we think are pretty great. As ambassadors to the next decade, it's kids like these who just might save the world, one day.*



Photo: Prestige Portraits

**I didn't start any of these things myself. I'm someone who helps. I like doing the background work.**

## Acting on the Next Level

**L**aia Shpeller believes in doing her part. Then, she finds ways to do it even better. "We're all capable of showing up to volunteer," says the 18-year-old daughter of Alan Shpeller and Karen Yamron-Shpeller. "It's the next level that people don't necessarily act upon; once you're there, noticing a need, and finding a way to fill it."

Take, as example, Laia's work for Operation Ezra, a Winnipeg Jewish Community initiative to rescue and resettle Yazidi refugees. She first became involved three years ago, along with her mom and sister, Shayna, in a backpack drive.

"You got paired with a Yazidi refugee who was already here, and you prepared a backpack of school supplies for them for the school year," she says. Laia and Shayna were matched with Yazidi twins, and after preparing the backpacks, they were invited along for the delivery.

"It was a day that changed my life," says Laia.

## Creating Bonds

Laia wasn't done working with Operation Ezra. Soon, she was working with Yazidi teens at their weekly English as an additional language (ELA) class. She quickly discovered she knew instinctively how best to support these teens.

"It began with formal lessons, teaching them words. Although that was helpful, I found when I just talked to them, we'd get a lot more out of it." She offers as example a conversation about what they were wearing one day, even discussing different fabrics.

"I was always the most informal, and I created really good bonds with some of the girls." She would ask herself, "what can I do as a fellow teen girl? It created that relationship."

Laia knew, intuitively, there was still more she could do. Approaching Michel Aziza, who leads Operation Ezra, she asked if she could take the teens off site. Soon, "rather than sitting in the room where the kids and adults were learning, we would go out. When we walked to McDonalds, it was the first time some of them ever had French fries," she says.

The Yazidi teens ate up more than the fries, responding well to "the experience of Canadian culture, learning to be Canadian teens, allowing them to experience the world."

## Making an Impact

Laia supported the Yazidi teens in other ways, like finding employment: she helped one girl find a volunteer position at the Manitoba Museum and another find work at the Rady JCC day camp.

"We'd meet at Starbucks after school, go through their applications, and I'd send them home to work on it, and they'd come back a few days later."

"I enjoyed spending time with them, and it was a bonus that I could also help them in the ways I did. Knowing I could make an impact was the coolest part," she adds.

And when one of the Yazidi twins from the backpack drive reached back out to her, Laia set in motion an action plan to help find the freezer the Yazidi family needed.

Smart, warm, funny, and effervescent, you might fault Laia only for being too humble at times.

"I don't want to take credit for it all," she says. "I didn't do it by myself."

## Northern Connections

Laia's community work extends beyond Operation Ezra. After volunteering in Churchill, Manitoba for a group called ISAMR (International Student Led Arctic Monitoring and Research) doing non-invasive polar bear research, Laia realized the endangered polar bears weren't the only ones who needed her up north; there was further support she could offer. Churchill had been without rail service since May 2017, when flooding had washed out parts of the tracks.

"Because the trains were down, there weren't the provisions they needed, and things were super expensive," she says.

So, with some friends, Laia organized a fundraising drive at her school in October 2017. (Ever modest, she credits one of her teachers for the idea).

"We spent a week going to every class multiple times, doing a toonie drive. We knew people go around schools asking for money 24-7, and it's really frustrating. We just said, 'Give us your change. I don't need a five-dollar bill; give us your ten cents and your loonies if you have them,'" she says.



After about four days, they had raised around \$1500. With that money, they purchased fresh food for a struggling breakfast program at the Churchill school, for kids who don't get breakfast at home.

"This was something I took on and made happen really fast. That's one of the things I'm most proud of," Laia says.

## Building Trust

Laia also spent three years volunteering at the Rady Centre Fun and Fitness program for kids and young adults with special needs.

"It required a lot of improvisation, learning to think on your feet, and patience," she says, adding, "and building bonds with the people, getting them to trust you."

Again, Laia won't take more credit than is rightfully hers.

"I didn't start any of these things myself. I'm someone who helps. I like doing the background work," she says.

Today, Laia is in year one of a biomedical engineering program at University of British Columbia. She's also part of an undergrad student design team called BEST (biomedical engineering student team). The group is designing a respiratory heartrate monitor—a cheap, simple device for use in less developed countries. Worn over the heart of a patient in a waiting room (where hooking them up to a sophisticated machine isn't an option), this device will be able to monitor the person's heartrate.

So, stay tuned: Laia will undoubtedly find a way to better her work on this project too—or the next project—notice another need, and find a way to fill it.

"It's important to look for opportunities to volunteer," she says. "But when you're there, when you're involved in a community, it's also important to take note of the needs and reach out to others around you, to make it into something even greater," she says. ■

## Profile Potential?

Is there someone you think should be profiled in an upcoming issue of *Shoresh*? Please let us know! Email the editor at <Lesliemalkin@LofC.ca>.

## ETZ CHAYIM YOUTH

## Learning to Give Back



L-R: Elissa with Claudia, Ben, Alex with Hannah. Photo: Carrie Ekosky

**B**en and Claudia Singer are just six years old, and their sister Hannah is three. But humanitarianism has no age restriction, and the Singers are living proof.

Every Halloween, each Singer child donates half their candy to St. Amant Centre, begins their mom, Elissa Abrams. And "they have come with us to donate their older toys and clothes to Flavie-Laurent Centre" (which distributes clothing and other necessities to the needy). The kids have participated in the Jewish Child and Family Service Passover hamper drop-off program and the Combined Jewish Appeal Budding Philanthropists program; Ben and Claudia have participated in Run for the Cure three times, Hannah twice. Each year, they donate half their birthday money to a cause of their choice: Claudia picked the Humane Society last year while Ben chose Magen David Adom (Israel's national emergency medical, disaster, ambulance, and blood bank service). And on some nights of Chanukah, they choose a charity to support instead of presents.

Elissa and husband Alex Singer say they are trying to instill in their kids the value of appreciating what you have.

"There is responsibility that comes with being fortunate," Elissa says. "Part of having is being generous and giving back." As well, Ben, Claudia, and Hannah are gaining first-hand experience with the certain pleasure of giving.

"We are trying to teach them that one of life's joys is contributing back to the community; that it provides a sense of fulfillment and purpose to be a contributor to the community at large," she continues.

To encourage benevolent actions in their kids, Alex and Elissa regularly discuss the importance of community contribution.

"We talk about *tzedakah*," says Elissa, "and about what it means to contribute to the broader community. We discuss what it would be like to not be as fortunate as they are, and what their giving back contributes to the community."

And despite their young age, the Singer kids are getting the hang of it.

"We have had our kids point out, when they receive something, that part of receiving is then giving something back," Elissa says. "It is a great joy as a parent to feel they are learning values that will serve them, and their community, well, as they get older." ■

## A Run for Her Money

**I used to tell people, it's not just for my mom or my family; it's for your friends, your friend's mom, your cousin's mom, anybody you know who's diagnosed with breast cancer.**



Maya (centre) with dad Sean (left) and sister Leah (right).  
Photo courtesy Run for the Cure

**W**hen life throws a curveball, you want Maya Shore on your team. This kid puts her heart, her soul, her backbone, and her voice into her response, that's why.

Maya's mom, Kara-Anne Yaren, was diagnosed with breast cancer last May. Motivated to help her mom, when Maya discovered the CIBC Run for the Cure, she picked up the ball and ran with it.

Run for the Cure is an annual event held to raise awareness and money for the breast cancer cause. Maya set a fundraising goal for herself—\$5000—and then hit that goal right out of the ballpark by more than quadrupling it.

"I think it ended up being \$22,000," says Maya, 12, who

contributed \$1,000 of her own money to the campaign and was named top online fundraiser for Run for the Cure in Winnipeg by early September of last year.

The money raised means "that much more research, that much more medicine, that much more money towards radiation for people who need it," she offers.

Run for the Cure annually brings together a community of people who have personal connection to breast cancer, for a 5-kilometre or 1-kilometre walk or run.

That's where Maya's voice came in. Fundraising for Team Maya meant talking to many people about breast cancer, raising awareness.

"I think I've made people more aware," she says with confidence. "I feel that they want to engage more in the study of breast cancer... in the study of any cancer." You got that she's 12, right?

Maya says she's not only doing this for her mom, but for other people who need her, too.

"I used to tell people, you should donate because it's not just for my mom or my family, it's for the people around you too, your friends, your friend's mom, your cousin's mom, anybody you know who's diagnosed with breast cancer."

Maya, in grade 7 at Gray Academy, learned something about community with this experience.

"I feel like everybody who has breast cancer is kind of like a community. And they can share their experience."

"They can talk about what they experienced, they can talk about how their family dealt with it. That's really nice to me," continues Maya, who also enjoys doing jazz dance, tap, and swimming.

Run for the Cure happened last September 30. Maya walked the full 5 kilometres and says it went well.

"Part of my school came and walked with me, which was really fun," she says.

Maya is just as generous with the credit she receives for her efforts as she is with the money she fundraised.

"A bunch of other people raised money too; all that money that we raised together is going to people who would like to have a cure and need chemotherapy and surgery and radiation. It didn't just go to my mom."

So, would she do it again?

"In a heartbeat," Maya says. In fact, she plans to participate again next year. We kind of figured that. And it's why you want Maya on your team. ■

### MEMBER NEWS & LIFE-CYCLE EVENTS

#### SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

##### NOVEMBER

Ruth Karasick, Gertie Lipson

##### DECEMBER

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

#### JANUARY

Debra Baker, Carol Braha, Ruth Charach, Shawna Cogan, Doreen Davidow, Brenda Kass, Linda Minuk, Shirley Pearlman, Lyla Solomon, Phyllis Spigelman, Frank Steele

#### FEBRUARY

Zvi Dil, Elaine Grosney, Harvey Litman, Mark Newman, Craig Pasternak, Sylvia Pitch, Herb Singer, Leslie Singer

#### SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

##### NOVEMBER

Evelyn and Alec Gillman (60); Jane and Ronald Reider (25)

##### DECEMBER

Sharon and Benson Labinsky (55); Joyce and Sid Rosenhek (55)

##### JANUARY

Elaine and Bernard Lofchick (65)

#### FEBRUARY

Sheila and Mark Lander (35)

#### MAZEL TOVS

Sharon and Benson Labinsky on the Bar Mitzvah of their grandson Joshua Marcus

Jorden Farber on receiving the Philanthropy Award from The Manitoba Vigor Awards

Debbie and Norm Yusim on the marriage of their son Daniel to Rachel Floom

Carla Rubinfeld on the birth of grandson George Nathan Schor

Andrea Leibl Hochman and Sid Hochman on the birth of grandson Noam Sniderman

Max Hochman on the birth of great grandson Noam Sniderman



## Heart in the Right Place



Photo: Manuel Sousa

**B**ecoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah brings new accountabilities for a young Jew. According to Jewish law, the youth is now required to perform *mitzvot* (commandments) like learning the Torah and giving to charity. Last November, Ethan Levene's Bar Mitzvah was celebration of a kid who has already taken these responsibilities to heart.

Ethan volunteers for Winnipeg Harvest, which he enjoys doing with friends. With his first visit, he realized how far a little effort goes.

"A group of my friends and I went to volunteer for part of the day. During our short time, we sorted approximately 10,000 pounds of food."

He says he and his friends want to continue helping out at Harvest.

"I lead a fortunate life and I enjoy volunteering for people who don't have the things I do," he says.

Ethan participated in the *Yad Vashem* Twinning program, which matches a Bar or Bat Mitzvah with a child who perished in the Holocaust and was unable to celebrate their own mitzvah, he says.

"This is to honour them," adds Ethan, 12 (when interviewed; he will be 13 at press time).

Ethan's *parasha* (Torah portion) at his Bar Mitzvah was *Chayah Sarah*, which begins with the death of Sarah. Learning about his portion while participating in the twinning program gave Ethan new wisdom about the value of life, all lives, and death.

"As I learned from my *parasha*, even in the happiest of celebrations, there is always a moment to remember the other parts of life."

For the twinning program, "I was paired with a boy named Louis Michel Simon Levin," he continues. "I found out some information about him and how he lived before the war."

A star debater, Ethan has taken part in several tournaments, which "helped me develop my public speaking skills. This also helped me in my *d'var Torah* (his discussion of the *parasha* at his Bar Mitzvah), as I had already gained the experience of speech writing and public speaking," says the grade 8 student at Gray Academy, who is also busy with student council, the school musical, ultimate frisbee, and basketball.

It's a certain warm-heartedness that seems to make Ethan, Ethan, though.

"From a young age, we heard from teachers and other parents how kind

he is, a true mensch," say parents Marla and Adam, proudly.

"He has a very kind heart," agrees Cantor Tracy Kasner Greaves, who worked with Ethan to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah.

And it's certainly in the right place. ■

### ASK THE CLERGY



Photo: Lawrie Cate

## Can You Put Notes Over the Torah Scroll?

**In this new section of *Shoresh*, your questions about Halachic rules and other details of Jewish ritual, tradition, and law will be answered by Rabbi Kliel or Cantor Tracy. Send your questions to the editor: <Lesliemalkin@LofC.ca>.**

**"**I am often asked by Etz Chayim members if they can put their own note page of their Torah reading on top of the Torah. The answer is no," says Cantor Tracy Kasner Greaves.

"The *mitzvah* is actually to read the words directly from the Torah," she explains. "This is an opportunity to see the words written on the scroll and to read those exact words. The reader recites the holy words from the Torah itself, for the public to hear properly and as intended."

This needn't instill fear in the reader, however. Although reading the Torah correctly is an important virtue of Judaism, mistakes are not discouraged, they are simply corrected.

"It's accepting that it means more to have the intention to try to read from the Torah than it does to make a mistake; a mistake is simply corrected, and then we move on," she says. ■

Gina and Bernie Chodirker on the birth of granddaughter Lyla Bowyers  
Howard Kideckel on the birth of grandson Harrison Reid.

Dr. Alex Singer for being named one of CBC Manitoba's top 40 under 40

### IN MEMORIAM

Leon Berger  
Kalla Daien  
Brenda Gail Drabinsky  
Rachel (Rae) Margolis  
Elaine Paul  
Marcie Raber  
Shom Roitenberg  
Bert Shuckett

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By Dr. Elissa Abrams

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**RKR:** Rabbi Klief Rose,  
CEC Rabbi since  
August 2018  
**CTKG:** Cantor Tracy  
Kasner Greaves, CEC  
Cantor since 2004  
**CB:** Carlos Benesdra,  
CEC Board Member  
since November 2018  
**CG:** Claudia Griner,  
CEC Program Director  
since September 2018

## Small Changes Can Make a Difference

**A more contemporary tradition at Tu B'Shevat is to renew personal commitments to sustainability and environmental stewardship in our relationship with the Earth (see page 11).**

**Shoresh:** Aside from recycling, what is something you/your family do that is environmentally responsible?



**RKR:** My wife and I are raising five children and developmentally, they're at different stages. One of the messages we're trying to hone-in on is let's be more mindful of what we're doing as far as it affects the environment. A small example: reusing paper. For my five-year-old: use paper from something else that's around the house, for drawing. We want to encourage that artistic expression but starting with a brand-new piece of paper isn't the only way.



**CTKG:** We constantly give away clothes and small household items to either Big Brothers Big Sisters or Diabetes Canada. This is a great way to support these charities, to reuse unwanted items, and declutter my house on a continual basis.



**CB:** As much as possible I try to avoid the use of plastic. Usually I don't use a lid when ordering coffee, or a straw for my soft drinks. People don't realize but these small changes can make a difference. Also, I try to promote respect for animals and the environment they live in.



**CG:** We don't have a microwave oven; it has been two years without it and we are doing pretty well. Another thing, to save some trees, we don't buy paper towels, we have fabric napkins and dishcloths.

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# For Anyone Who Asks

**A member of the Etz Chayim Bikur Cholim team will pay a visit to any member who asks for the service.**



**A** newly trained team of volunteers is poised to revive a *bikur cholim* program at Congregation Etz Chayim. Navigating some red tape and some traditional attitudes may be necessary first, though.

Considered an act of *gemilut chasadim*, generosity and compassion, *bikur cholim* is the mitzvah of visiting and supporting the sick.

"It's a critical mitzvah, an important commandment," says Rabbi Kliel Rose. "Each of us is obligated to meet the needs of those who are marginalized, such as people who are not well. They need care and attention."

Mary Ann Rosenbloom, a retired registered nurse, spiritual care provider, and certified congregational nurse (trained to attend to both physical and spiritual needs of congregants) agrees.

"It's reaching out to people. We have a lot of congregants who don't get to synagogue; it's a way of providing a link."

## Respite for Clergy

A *bikur cholim* committee also provides relief to the clergy, Mary Ann points out, particularly for visits to members with chronic illness.

"If someone is in an acute stage of illness, the rabbi or cantor would go," she says. But for longer-term, repeated visits, another volunteer could go instead.

Last May, Mary Ann and Cantor Tracy Kasner Greaves delivered a three-part training workshop to three Etz Chayim members interested in becoming *bikur cholim* volunteers. Training covered topics like confidentiality, listening skills, general propriety, and etiquette for hospital and home visits, says Mary Ann.

But a committee of four willing volunteers to support the clergy doesn't quite mean the *bikur cholim* program is up and running, for two reasons:

## Recent Complexity

Firstly, Canadian privacy laws add a recent complexity, because they also mean less transparency in most situations, explains Rabbi Kliel.

"Once upon a time, a rabbi could call a hospital and say, 'Can you give me all the Jewish folks' names,' so the rabbi would know whom to visit. I don't have that information at my disposal now, so that's a challenge," he says.

"We can't just go," Mary Ann clarifies. "Privacy laws limit our ability to just call and say, 'Would you feel up to a visit from somebody from the congregation?' Unless *they* request it, you cannot."

So, one goal for Congregation Etz Chayim is to communicate this message widely and frequently: that the *bikur cholim* program exists, and trained, compassionate, willing volunteers are standing by, ready to make it happen—for anyone who asks for the service.

"We need to get that buy-in, get people to acknowledge they want a visitor," says Mary Ann.

## Not Clergy Exclusive

Furthermore, "it doesn't always have to be the rabbi or the cantor," says Mary Ann, identifying the second reason an impending *bikur cholim* program isn't booked to capacity yet.

"Many people equate the idea of the synagogue caring with the rabbi or cantor showing up," agrees Rabbi Kliel.

"But what makes a synagogue truly warm and welcoming," he counters, "is one where not only the rabbi and cantor are making those visits, living out Jewishly; where those deeply important Jewish values are penetrated to the rest of the congregation so that they're involved in acts of lovingkindness too."

A second goal, then, for the *shul*, is to continue strategizing about how to build-in more of this essential part of religion, known as relational Judaism, he says.

"*Bikur cholim* is a way to respond to one of the deepest existential needs we all have—that somebody knows who I am." We're all looking for someone to show care and interest in our wellbeing, he says.

"When somebody is ill and feeling most uncertain about their ties to others, this is a way to counter that sense of isolation and loneliness." And it doesn't take clergy to do that—anyone can.

"It's reaching out into the community, our own community," Mary Ann says. ■



A night of tribute to beloved Canadian songster and poet Leonard Cohen, with Tracy Kasner Greaves, Len Udow, Jesse Havey, Nathaniel Good, and Bruce Sarbit, Saturday, October 20, 2018, Congregation Etz Chayim.





Photo: Rob Routledge, Sault College, Bugwood.org

## Seeing the Forest for the Trees

### Celebrating Tu B'Shevat in a Prairie January

**Y**ou're not alone if it feels like a stretch to celebrate trees at a time of year when the majestic oaks are frozen and bare, and the evergreens sag under the weight of ten weeks of snow.

But celebrate we do on Tu B'Shevat, a Jewish festival honouring the birthday or new year for the trees. On Tu B'Shevat we eat and bless fruit in celebration of trees, particularly carob (St.-John's-bread) and bounty from among the seven species—quintessential trees and produce of Israel: olive, grape, wheat, barley, date, pomegranate, and fig. Some people host Tu B'Shevat seders, a tradition begun by 16th-century kabbalist Jews.

But Tu B'Shevat is considerably older than that, with roots in the early Middle Ages as an agricultural holiday for calculating the age of trees for tithing. When the state of Israel was named the Promised Land for Jews in 1948, and as more and more Jews migrated there, the tradition of planting trees in Israel took hold, a practice that endures today. Worldwide, Jews in the diaspora are still encouraged to plant trees on Tu B'Shevat or donate money for planting trees in Israel. Some people celebrate the festival as a second Earth Day, renewing personal commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship in their relationship to Earth.

### Prairie Dreams

Tu B'Shevat is on the 15th day of Shevat on the Jewish calendar, coinciding with the beginning of spring in Israel. But on this side of the world, it can be difficult to whistle a spring tune when everything around us is deeply blanketed in snow and ice. This year, Tu B'Shevat begins at sundown on January 20 and ends at sundown the following day. Planting anything on the Prairies is but a wisp of an idea on some far-off island in a sea of hopes and dreams. This can make it harder to get into the Tu B'Shevat spirit.

But Rabbi Kliel Rose encourages us to look a little deeper than our frozen soil.

"We Jews in the diaspora, outside the land of Israel, are afforded a real opportunity," he begins. "We get to be more thoughtful and mindful in terms of how we're going to address our relationship with the Earth" going forward.

## Contemplation for Our Nation

Moreover, allowing thought to precede action often produces better, more fruitful outcomes. "I really buy into that traditional Jewish way of approaching things, which is through text," says Rabbi Kliel. "Text leads to contemplation; contemplation leads, ideally, to action."

"We're lucky we have time to think about what it means to be connected to the Earth here in this country."

If you're still not convinced, or you find action more motivating than contemplation, try a few of these tree-hugging gestures to germinate positive Tu B'Shevat vibes:

## Celebrate Trees by...

- Bundling up and visiting Assiniboine Forest, Beaudry Park, or your favourite Winnipeg green space.
- Trying a new fruit (how about fresh dates or figs? Be adventurous!)
- Donating to the Jewish National Fund Plant a Tree campaign (see <<https://jnf.ca/>>)
- Planting an indoor tree. Root several lemon or orange seeds, or an avocado pit. Once roots have sprouted, plant in small pot(s), and set near a sunny window (not too close to the cold glass).
- Having a Tu B'shevat Seder. Google DIY Tu B'Shevat seder—you'll find tons of ideas online.
- Beginning a home compost. Do the Google DIY thing again—you can begin by simply finding and cleaning a larger, well-sealing tin or container, such as a big coffee tin with plastic lid.
- Reading *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*, by Peter Wohlleben.
- Learning about protecting Manitoba forests. Visit the Manitoba Forestry Association website: <[www.thinktrees.org/about/about-mfa](http://www.thinktrees.org/about/about-mfa)> and the Manitoba Wildlands site: <[http://manitobawildlands.org/forests\\_boreal.htm](http://manitobawildlands.org/forests_boreal.htm)>.



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If you are interested in purchasing your funeral package prior to April 1, 2019, please contact Shelley Sklover, Funeral Coordinator at 204-589-6305 or email [ssklover@etzchayim.ca](mailto:ssklover@etzchayim.ca).





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