

SHORESH

שורש

**Congregation Etz Chayim
Community News**

DECEMBER 2017

כסלו תשע"ח | Kislev 5778

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Traditions, and Cuisine**

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The Art of Engagement

How do we keep a synagogue community like Congregation Etz Chayim alive, thriving, and growing?

The answer may boil down to two simple equations: **explanation + education = engagement** and **engagement = a future**.

Take a look at the second equation first: **engagement = a future**. Hadass Eviatar, Torah reader for Congregation Etz Chayim, refers to a common concern among religious institutions: “Young people don’t want to come, people aren’t interested.”

Two-Pronged Approach

Congregation Etz Chayim is taking a two-pronged approach to addressing the concern: engagement and intention. We become engaged in something—an institution, a worldview—when we can find meaning in it.

“People are looking for meaning,” Hadass says, mentioning her own kids, ranging in age from 15 to 21—a generation concerned with contribution, *tikun olam* (repair of the world), and *meaning*.

“If we can engage them, help them feel this is something that has meaning for *them*, then we have a future.”

But it’s not *just* about the kids, she adds.

“Those of us who are their parents need to be engaged and see it as important for ourselves, too.”

So: If meaning, then engagement. But where do we find meaning? Look back to that first equation now: Explanation + Education = Engagement.

At Shabbat services “we are focusing on the *why*, to develop *kavanah* through meaning,” Hadass says. *Kavanah* is intention—directing one’s mind to the *meaning* of words voiced or rituals performed. Intention, to jog your memory, is the second ‘prong’ of Etz Chayim’s two-pronged approach to addressing concerns of fading interest.

And here’s where education and explanation come in. We develop *kavanah* “by educating people, so they have intention with what they’re doing. Hebrew’s an old language,” Hadass says, “a lot of people don’t understand it. So, you’re standing there, mouthing words you don’t understand, and it’s not very meaningful.”

“The idea is to enhance intentionality through education. If you say a *Kaddish* but you don’t know why it’s there, it’s meaningless.”

Exploring Explanation

Staying with that example, we recite the *Kaddish* more than once during a morning Shabbat service at what might seem like random places, Hadass

says. But random they are not—we recite the *Kaddish* at *transitions* in the service.

“The *Kaddish* is like a bookmark, a signpost that tells you you’ve moved from one part of the service to another. So, we’ve been explaining things like that during the service,” she describes. “I’ll say, ‘We turn to page...and we rise for the *Hatzi Kaddish*, marking the transition into....’”

Hadass believes the Etz Chayim congregation is very interested in knowledge, learning, and understanding.

“People want meaning,” she states. “If you say, this is a transition, this is what it means, and this is why we’re saying it, it helps people pay attention.”

Attention, Intention

Hadass uses other techniques to help keep the congregation in the service, bring their attention and intention to what they’re doing. For instance, when reading *B’raisheet*, Genesis, “and we get to the part that’s in the *Kiddush* recited every Friday night, *Yom hashishi*, I might stop and say, ‘Who wants to sing with me?’ Then I’d go into the tune of the *Kiddush*,” which is different from the trope Hadass usually uses but more familiar to the congregation. It’s an opportunity for the congregation to participate, and she opens that door whenever she can.

“The *Kiddush* is the last part of the creation story in *B’raisheet*,” Hadass says, “and Shabbat is remembrance of creation. Every Friday night when we make the *Kiddush*, if we don’t pay attention, we’re just chanting meaningless words. People don’t realize what they’re singing is from the Torah.”

She also cites the blessing that follows the Sh’ma (“*Ba’ruch shem k’vod mal’chu to l’olam va’ed*”), which Cantor Tracy Kasner Greaves sings in a trope familiar to the congregation.

“So, when I get to that part in the Torah, instead of doing it the way I normally would, I say, ‘everybody sing with me,’ and we sing it the way Tracy sings it. And they all sing. And they’re paying attention, they’re not chatting or drifting off.”

With prayers and rituals so familiar to us, it’s human nature to fall occasionally into mindless rote, sometimes becoming unintentionally indifferent. But understanding fosters engagement, bringing ritual and prayer to life, rich with intention and meaning—and fertile ground for growth. ■

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On Wednesday, the Rabbi Was Undecided

If you're old enough, you may get the reference in the headline of this article (if not, see footnote below).¹ But younger or elderly, north ender or south, if you're a member of Congregation Etz Chayim, there's likely a weighty question occupying your mind: *What's happening in the search for a new rabbi for the synagogue?* The good news: *Shoresh* dug up some answers! Happy Chanukah!

A rabbi search committee was formed last May, including members of varying demographics, professions, and experience working on previous search committees: Nola Lazar (co-chair), Sean Shore (co-chair), Elissa Abrams, Shira Cohen, Walter Griner, Gerald Levin; Ex Officio Jonathan Buchwald (executive director), Avrom Charach (ritual committee chair), Tracy Kasner Greaves (cantor), and Marvin Samphir (president). *Shoresh* spoke to search committee Co-Chairs Nola Lazar (as NL below) and Sean Shore (as SS below):

Shoresh: What is the target date for having a new Rabbi in place?

NL & SS: Ideally, we would like to have someone in place before High Holidays 2018, but our priority is to have the right person, not the right date.

Shoresh: How many applicants have there been so far? Were you pleased with the quality of applicants?

NL & SS: We have had about 20 applicants, and we were absolutely pleased with the quality! Many would be decent, if not perfect matches for our congregation.

Shoresh: What qualities are being sought in a rabbi, and how were these qualities ascertained?

NL & SS: Our committee spent a long time reviewing the synagogue's strategic plan and the responses to the congregational questionnaire. Using these tools, we identified many qualities that we would like the ideal candidate to have. Some of the most important to us are: appropriate *smicha* (rabbinical certification), from the Jewish Theological Seminary or similar; willingness to work as a team with the board of directors to implement the strategic plan; a strong



teacher who can communicate well with the congregation, guide and explain services; and a leader who will take us through many changes as our congregation grows and develops.

Shoresh: How does the interview process work?

NL & SS: After reviewing the resumes and doing as much research as possible, if we feel an applicant warrants an interview, we contact them to set up a phone interview. For the interview, we have the candidate begin with a short *d'var Torah*, to give us a sense of their style. We have a list of questions to guide the interview, but once we get started, the conversation generally goes in different directions and is very free flowing. Sometimes new questions arise. Sometimes we get through all the questions with the applicant, other times we don't.

Shoresh: Will the congregation have an opportunity to meet any candidates on the short list?

NL & SS: We will bring in at least one candidate both for the congregation to meet and for more in-depth dialogue with the board of directors. This could take many possible forms, and will depend on both the synagogue's schedule and the candidate's. We would also like to give the candidate a tour of Winnipeg and the Jewish community to ensure that the fit is a good one. As plans take shape we will provide additional feedback to the congregation. ■

¹Harry Kemelman's 'Rabbi' mystery series is referred to in the headline (*Friday the Rabbi Slept Late* [1964], *Sunday, the Rabbi Stayed Home* [1969], and so on). Ironically, the last two books in the series are *The Day the Rabbi Resigned* [1992] and *That Day the Rabbi Left Town* [1996].

MEMBER NEWS & LIFE-CYCLE EVENTS

SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

NOVEMBER

Sharron Dudeck
Sheila Gordon
Dafne Orbach
Sandra Plosker
Fay Rykiss
Debra Yusim

DECEMBER

Evelyn Gillman
Freda Glow
Fivie Gunn
Hartley Hyman
Joel Kay
Sylvia Lavitt
Sarah Martin
Mickey L. Rosenberg
Joyce Rosenhek
Rachela Sector
Leonard Spiller

JANUARY

Norm Adelberg
Audrey Agasi
Joanne Katz
Nata Spigelman

FEBRUARY

Michelle Apter
Bonnie Buchalter
Allan Elfenbein
Roberta Hurtig
Rochelle Litman
Robert Michaw

Reaching Out for Social Justice

The world's most critical problems are, by definition, so enormous that making a dent can be hard to fathom. But if two simple hands, yours, could help fill the empty belly of just one person for even a single meal—wouldn't that be something?

About once a month, a small group of Congregation Etz Chayim members volunteer their time at Winnipeg Harvest, a not-for-profit, community-based organization that provides food to people struggling to feed themselves and their families, and raises public awareness of hunger.

Two Hands, Two Mitzvot

As the Harvest volunteers complete tasks like sorting food and repackaging it into food kits for distribution, they are carrying out two *mitzvot*: *gemilut hassadim*, acts of lovingkindness, and *tikkun olam*, repair of the world.

"I believe in *tikkun olam* and in investing yourself," says Sandy Hyman, who was instrumental in the initiation of the Harvest-Etz Chayim relationship. A social worker, now retired, Sandy knew former Harvest Executive Director David Northcott and understood the context of the services provided by Winnipeg Harvest, which facilitated the initial connection a dozen years ago.

"I thought this would be a good way for our shul to participate in that. So, we have grandchildren coming with grandparents, and there are young people and families—it's multigenerational," Sandy says.

Gord Steindel has spent a decade volunteering for Winnipeg Harvest with Congregation Etz Chayim. His wife,

son, daughter, and grandson have also participated in the work, which Gord says is a hands-on way to support the broader community. And "it helps stem the sense that difficult situations are simply unfortunate facts of life that need to be tolerated," he adds.

Gord, an information technology consultant approaching retirement, says he finds it particularly rewarding when "from time to time, we are sorting through items that are below presentation standards for mainstream food suppliers and might otherwise simply be discarded. We end up retaining a large proportion of food that is still nutritious and can be used to feed people who are in need."

Merrill Shulman has been volunteering with his wife, Shayna, since the beginning of the Harvest relationship with Etz Chayim. His reasoning is simple—it's the right thing to do. "You could make it philosophically more complicated, but it isn't," he says.

"We're lucky not to have these kinds of worries ourselves, and the amount of time and energy it takes to help out is so trivial compared to the value being derived by the people receiving the food."

Harvest Liaison

Part of Sandy's work for Harvest involves facilitating volunteer dates for the other Etz Chayim volunteers—acting like the footpath to the bridge, connecting the people who want to help to the army that extends to the people in need.

"It's part of me," Sandy says, "reaching out to others and helping those who want to be a part of the group, to make it happen."



L-R: Arnie and Jenny Schachter, Gordon, Maury, and Aaron (front) Steindel.

Doing this type of work to help others is acting on a fundamental Jewish value, Merrill says. And he'd like to see Etz Chayim involved in more similar acts of *gemilut hassadim* and *tikkun olam*.

"There are other organizations which provide services to people in need, whether it be food, clothing, housing, health planning..." says the retired entrepreneur, whose most recent business endeavour was telecommunications and information processing company Integrated Messaging Inc. (IMI). "I would like to see our shul expanding what we loosely call social justice into other areas." But that would require more bodies.

"We have a small, dedicated group, but we always want more people," says Sandy about the Harvest arrangement.

Etz Chayim Harvest dates through June 2018 are all Mondays: January 8, February 5, March 5, April 9, May 7, and June 4. Mark your calendar, and let the synagogue know when you can make it.

"It's an opportunity to do the right thing, presented by the synagogue, because Winnipeg Harvest makes it so easy," says Merrill. "My question is, why don't more people spend their time this way?" ■

Bert Minuk

Roslind Olin

Elaine Shinfield

Jeffrey Silverstein

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

NOVEMBER

Susan and Howard

Tennenhouse (35)

Diego Skladnik and Dafne

Orbach (20)

DECEMBER

Edna and Herman

Keller (60)

Carol and Gino Braha (45)

Resa and Sheldon

Ostrove (40)

JANUARY

Gail and Ted Hechter (55)

Linda and David

Minuk (45)

FEBRUARY

Ruth and Abbot

Karasick (65)

Diane and Leonard

Harris (55)

MAZEL TOVS

Tracy Kasner Greaves and

David Greaves on the bat

mitzvah of their daughter

Nesya on November 4th

Faigie Greaves on the

bat mitzvah of her

granddaughter Nesya

Margaret Kasner on

the bat mitzvah of her

granddaughter Nesya

Naama Ukashi and Joel

Samphir on the bar

mitzvah of their son Eytan

on November 18th

Esther and Marvin Samphir

on the bar mitzvah of their

grandson Eytan

IN MEMORIAM

Lillian Bercusson

Sylvia Bronstein

Bernie Goldstein

Norma Goltsman

Marvin Muscovitch

Phyllis Newman

Sandra Pecker

Irwine (Ike) Permut

Barbara Sucharov

Fred Weinstein

Shining Some Light on the Meaning of Chanukah

More than just the Jewish answer to Christmas, several important themes come to light from the Chanukah legend, giving the festival meaning and significance by its own right!

You won't find the story of Chanukah in the bible. Chronicled in a later collection of writings called the *Apocrypha* (Maccabees I and II), the familiar legend of Chanukah is rich with miracle and wonder: a small resistance movement, the Maccabees, rose up against the Syrian-Greeks, who were attempting to Hellenize the Jews. The first miracle of Chanukah is this: against all odds, the small band of resistance was successful. The Maccabees defeated the Greeks, reclaiming their holy temple, which had been desecrated by the enemy. Chanukah means "dedication," and our Festival of Lights celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Upon re-entering the reclaimed temple, the Maccabees found but one vessel of oil to light the temple menorah—enough to last just one day. And herein lies the second miracle of Chanukah: the oil burned for eight full days.

Resilient Light Glowing Brightly

A number of themes underlie the Chanukah story, bringing a modern relevance to our celebration more than 21 centuries after the events are said to have occurred. There is the theme of light: Each night of Chanukah, we light another candle on the *Chanukkiah*, in remembrance of the miracle of the oil and the light that lasted for eight days. And we celebrate the miracle of light in our lives, with knowledge and faith that this radiance has persisted far longer than just those eight days—in spite of two millennia of religious persecution, the light of Judaism continues to glow brightly. The Jews' resilience and enduring fight for religious freedom is a second theme arising from the Chanukah story.

Resisting Assimilation

The theme of resilience connects to another message of Chanukah as relevant today as it was to our Maccabee heroes. While some Jews submitted to assimilation into Hellenistic culture, the anti-assimilation movement was powerful, and ultimately successful. Like the Israelites from our Chanukah story, modern-day Jews continue to struggle to preserve our Jewish identity within a much larger non-Jewish society. And while our larger society strives toward virtuous goals of tolerance and acceptance for *all* people (not just Jews), a parallel struggle to protect our Jewish identity is ever present, and internal conflict can leave us burdened with questions: are Christmukah and Chanukah bushes a constructive move

forward or a step backward towards assimilation? There are no easy answers.

Home, Family and Giving

Unlike many other Jewish holidays, Chanukah is home- and family-centred. We light the *Chanukkiah* at home, where we gather with family to rejoice with *suffganiot* (jam busters) and oil-laden potato latkes, songs of Chanukah modern and traditional, gifts and gelt for one another, and dreidel games to remind us a *big miracle happened there*. At Chanukah, we celebrate the gift of family as we honour gifts of light and religious freedom. And we celebrate at home, which we understand as a place where God dwells.

Our custom at Chanukah is an exchange of gifts. Traditionally, parents gave their children Chanukah *gelt*, or money, to encourage scholarship. Today, many prefer more tangible presents, but the longstanding Jewish custom of gift-giving, though paralleling the Christmas tradition, is unrelated to it. As well, some Jews extend this practice of giving at Chanukah to a devotion of time towards community and charitable endeavours.

Chanukah is unique among the Jewish holidays, with no *Halacha* (Jewish law) to guide our celebration, and only one *mitzvah*, the lighting of the menorah. In spite of this and Chanukah's absence in the Torah, our Festival of Lights is not without meaning and relevance, to strengthen the significance of a celebration popular among Jews of all movements. ■



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Changing Up the Chanukah Menu

No one is questioning your usual onion-braised beef brisket, nor the latkes your family knows and loves. Still... this brisket will make your mouth water (besides, who wouldn't like a good excuse to buy a bottle of port?) And the latkes might be reason to reconsider if the applesauce/sour cream debate requires potatoes at all. You will certainly wonder if a variation on tradition might not be just as scrumptious as the tried and true.

Beef Brisket With Port¹

Ingredients

1 beef brisket (3.5-4 lb./1.6-1.8 kg) trimmed of fat
1 tsp (5 mL) olive oil
1 c (250 mL) shredded leek
1 Tbsp (15 mL) minced garlic
1 c (250 mL) finely chopped carrot
1 c (250 mL) finely chopped onion
1-1/4 c (315 mL) finely chopped celery
4 c (1 L) low-salt beef broth (not potassium salt)
1 c (250 mL) ruby port (do not use regular wine)
Bouquet garni: 1 sprig thyme, 1 bay leaf, 4 sprigs parsley, tied together
1 c (250 mL) dried apricots
1 c (250 mL) dried prunes
1 c (250 mL) dried pears
1 c (250 mL) dried black mission figs
1/2 c (125 mL) minced fresh Italian parsley
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Method

1. Preheat oven to 325 F/165 C. Place brisket in large, roasting pan. **2.** In large, heavy skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add leek, garlic, carrot, onion, and celery, and sauté, stirring 4-5 min., until golden. **3.** Transfer vegetables to roasting pan with brisket. Add 3 c (750 mL) beef broth, 1/2 c (125 mL) water, port, and bouquet garni. Bring liquid to boil, cover tightly with foil, and transfer to oven. Cook 1-1/2 hours. **4.** Remove brisket from pan and slice thinly across the grain. Return to roasting pan, add dried fruit. Cover tightly with foil and bake 1-1/2 hours or until meat is tender. Add remaining broth or water if necessary to keep sauce from drying up; meat and fruit should remain moist. **5.** To serve, arrange meat on platter; use slotted spoon to arrange fruit around; garnish with parsley. Remove fat from pan juices, season with salt and pepper, and serve as gravy. Serves 8.

¹Brisket recipe was shared with CEC chef Boguslaw Stras several years ago, with original source unknown. The recipe is also found on the ucook website, which may be the original source (www.ucook.com).

²From Simply Recipes website, Elise Bauer <www.simplyrecipes.com> (with slight edits for brevity or clarity).

Zucchini Fritters²

Ingredients

1 lb zucchini (about 3 medium), coarsely grated
1 tsp (5 mL) kosher salt
1/2 c (125 mL) sour cream (or plain Greek yogurt*)
1 clove garlic, minced, about 1 tsp (5 mL)
1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) lemon zest
1 tsp (5 mL) lemon juice
Pinch of salt
1 large egg
1/2 c (125 mL) all-purpose flour
3 green onions, minced
1 tsp (5 mL) minced fresh thyme**
1 tsp (5 mL) minced fresh basil**
1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) lemon zest
1-1/2 tsp (7.5 mL) kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon (1.25 mL) black pepper
1/2 c (125 mL) olive, grapeseed, or canola oil

*Substitute dairy-free yogurt, like So Delicious, to serve the fritters with the brisket.

**If fresh herbs are not available, substitute a half teaspoon (2.5 mL) or so of dried herbs

Method

1. Place grated zucchini in colander over bowl. Add 1 tsp salt. Let sit 10 min. Press down with wooden spoon to push out more water. Use paper towels to absorb liquid. **2.** Whisk together sour cream, garlic, lemon zest, lemon juice, and a pinch of salt into medium bowl for dipping sauce. Set aside. **3.** Whisk egg in large bowl. Add grated zucchini, flour, green onions, thyme, basil, lemon zest, salt, pepper. Mix to combine. **4.** Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat until hot. Test by flicking a little flour into oil. If flour sizzles, oil is ready. Cook fritters in batches, dropping heaping tablespoons of batter into skillet. Flatten slightly with back of spoon or spatula. Cook, turning once, until browned, 4-6 min. each side. Transfer to paper towel-lined plate, sprinkle with salt. Serve immediately, with sour cream dipping sauce. Reheat on sheet pan under broiler 1-2 min. Serves 4.

**Kosher Catering
Service**

Congregation Etz Chayim Catering offers a variety of Kosher Shabbat, Kiddush, dinner, and party menus. We also cater home events, office meetings, shiva meals, and more. Let us know how we can help you: (204) 589-6305.

A Community Way of Life

Adam Levene is likely to oblige anyone who needs a few moments of his time. Just be prepared to get up at the crack of dawn, or to dialogue with him en route to his next commitment.



Adam Levene

This or That With Adam

Introvert or extrovert?

Everybody would say I'm an extrovert, but I would say I'm an introvert. I consider myself fundamentally shy.

Night owl or early riser?

Early riser-5:30 AM.

Modern or vintage/ antique?

Modern

Double-double or black?

Black

Sneakers or dress shoes?

I'd like to say sneakers but it's probably more dress shoes. But not because I want to.

Well-done or rare?

Rare

Salty snack or sweet?

Probably everything. I work out, so I can eat.

Foosball or Ping-Pong?

Ping pong, for sure.

"We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community....Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own."

—Cesar Chavez, 20th-century civil rights and labour activist

You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who lives by these words of Cesar Chavez more genuinely than Adam Levene.

A partner at MLT Aikins LLP and a member of its Executive Board, Adam is a tax and corporate and commercial lawyer; his practice covers tax planning advice and taxation dispute resolution, corporate and business reorganizations, including merger and acquisition planning and preparation, and succession planning and estate administration—to name but a few of his specialties.

For Adam, being community-minded begins in the workplace, where he mentors and teaches beginning lawyers.

"I think I'm viewed as an expert in my field," he says, citing his greatest career achievement—the success he's most proud of—as having the opportunity to guide budding and less experienced lawyers, and pass on his expertise.

But the reach of Adam's leadership extends far beyond his workplace into the general Winnipeg community, having served as chair, director, member, or trustee on an extensive array of boards, councils, federations, committees, foundations, and associations. Most recently, he is outgoing President, Jewish Federation of Winnipeg/Combined Jewish Appeal (2015–17), Board Member, Jewish Federations of Canada–United Israel Appeal (2015–17), and he sat on the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Federations of North America (2016).

"I grew up in a home where my parents were able to provide a strong Jewish upbringing for my sister and me, and Marla (Adam's wife) and I are fortunate enough to be able to do that for our kids as well. So giving back is very important to me.

"Having a strong community means helping everybody and being involved, and making sure we're strong together," adds Adam, who has also shared his time, energy, and expertise on a variety of boards, councils, and committees with organizations and institutions like Habitat for Humanity (past president), the Estate Planning Council, the Scholarship and Bursary Fund, University of

Manitoba Student Union, and the Asper Jewish Community Campus.

Adam and Marla, also a lawyer and partner at MLT Aikins LLP, have two children, Ethan (11) and Annie (9), and Adam is clear that work and family are his top priorities.

"I don't have a lot of free time," he admits (indeed, having agreed to a telephone interview, which happened via speaker phone from his car, en route to his next appointment).

When uncommitted moments do arise, "my first priority is doing anything I can with my wife and kids," says Adam, who has coached many of the sports teams on which his kids have played, and who gets up before the sun to hit the gym or play golf before work.

Adam grew up a member, with his family, of the Rosh Pina synagogue and Marla at Beth Israel, so "our families have been members of Etz Chayim essentially forever."

He says he and Marla are deeply committed to their community, to their families, and to growing and raising their own Jewish family with strong Jewish values as part of Congregation Etz Chayim, and this is reflected in the volunteer and leadership work they both do.

"That's how we spend our time," he says.

"I believe in a well-balanced life, and in a community way of life, and that's why we're committed to the synagogue too," he continues. "To have a strong Jewish community you need strong synagogues. And we believe strongly in doing what we can to help keep the Jewish community vibrant and thriving in perpetuity, not only in planning for this generation but for the future as well." ■

Shoresh Needs Your Voice

Within these few pages of Shoresh, hopefully you've found content that is thought-provoking, meaningful, and relevant to you, as a member of Congregation Etz Chayim, as a Winnipeg Jew, or both. If not... **Shoresh has not heard from you!** Please share your **feedback**, details of your **writing talents**, **photos** of Etz Chayim people or shul events, **article ideas**, and **other content** you'd love to see covered in *Shoresh*: LeslieMalkin@LofC.ca.

Something to Write About Home



Méira Cook

I was writing my way out to a place I now call home, and I had to find my way there through writing.

Méira Cook had to find her own way home first. Once the author had carved out a comfortable place for herself within the Canadian context, the characters of her novels joined her in Canada too.

Born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa, Méira and her former husband immigrated to Canada for his medical practice in 1991, settling in Ashern, Manitoba, a small town northwest of Winnipeg. They lived there for two years, and Méira describes the culture shock she felt at that time.

"I was a journalist in South Africa, very involved in an urban lifestyle and excited by the visual art and theatre and movies that were coming out of South Africa during this time of enormous suppression, the apartheid years.

"So then we moved to a small town in Canada, and I couldn't be a journalist anymore, and I think I was in a state of fugue and shock. And I'd never been so cold, never seen snow!"

Eventually moving to Winnipeg to study Canadian literature and do a PhD, Méira says exploring Canadian writing was her way of trying to enter Canadian culture.

"My way into a culture is through reading. And the culture was alien to me. Not even understanding the language—I couldn't understand what people were saying," says Méira, who speaks with what born-and-raised Canadians might hear as a thick South African accent. She says she'd thought studying the works of Canadian writers might make her more knowledgeable about Canadians in a general way, "which is a very upside-down way of doing it," she laughs, adding, "it's a shy and bookish way."

Once More With Feeling is Méira's third novel, released this past September. A story of how the experiences of one family ripple through their larger community, it paints a picture of how we intersect with one another in one city. And while her first two novels (*The House on Sugarbush Road*, 2012, which won the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award, and *Nightwatching*, 2015, which won the Margaret Laurence Award for Fiction) are set in South Africa, Méira situates *Once More With Feeling* in Winnipeg—although not explicitly; she explains that she didn't want to "reduce it to one place," which she felt naming it would do. "But it is Winnipeg, and in the acknowledgments, I thank Winnipeg," says

Méira, who has also written five books of poetry, and has won both the CBC Literary Award and the Walrus Prize for poetry.

And so, it seems Méira's book characters have joined her here in Canada, at last.

"I guess I was writing my way out to a place I now call home, and I had to find my way there through writing," she says.

Noting she had been closer to the experience of Johannesburg while writing her first novel, Méira says she still had an intimate sense-memory of the city that had been home, at that time. Happily, some 26 years after leaving Johannesburg, she says her inspiration for *Once More With Feeling* was a sense of genuine feeling-at-homeness in Canada.

"I was feeling, finally, very connected, and a sudden joy in being part of the community," says the mother of three (Shoshana, 18, Misha, 15, and Shai, also 15), identifying the Winnipeg Jewish community, the Congregation Etz Chayim community, and other 'pocket' communities to which she now belonged—like the neighbourhood she lives in, and the soccer moms-and-dads community. "It was just fun, and I was enjoying being in the world, being part of these intersecting and not intersecting communities. My world had expanded in ways I wouldn't have expected, and I was enjoying it, finding it funny, enjoying the humour in it."

Méira grew up in an orthodox Jewish home in Johannesburg, where there was no Conservative Judaism movement. She says it was harder to embrace that religious community.

"I always felt very removed, I couldn't take part in it," she says. "But now, we belong to a conservative synagogue (Méira, husband Mark Libin, and their three children have been CEC members since 2010), and my daughter had a bat mitzvah," she continues, reminiscing about the 'bar/bat mitzvah year' from the perspective of a parent—that year when not only your own child, but all the children who grew up alongside yours, are called to the Torah. She enthuses about an "overwhelming feeling that I was part of it. That is the time that I felt most part of the community."

Home, we know, is where the heart is—that place where we feel a warm sense of belonging, of being in the right place. And "writing is a way of discovering where you are," says the author. Welcome home, Méira. ■

**JB: Jonathan
Buchwald, CEC**
Executive Director
since 2004

**CTKG: Cantor Tracy
Kasner Greaves, CEC**
Cantor since 2004

MS: Marvin Samphir,
CEC Board President
since 2014, board
member since 2011

LW: Linda Waldman,
CEC Administrative
Assistant since 1997

Family Traditions for the Festival of Lights

To shed some light on family customs,
Shoresh asks a tetrad of Congregation Etz
Chayim people a question about personal
Chanukah traditions.

Shoresh: What is a special family Chanukah tradition that you remember from your childhood, or one that you do now with your own family?

JB: Growing up, my sister and I always received one present each night, the last night a bigger, more special gift. Today, my wife Susan and I do the same with our kids. Also, my birthday usually falls on or around Chanukah, so when I was a kid my mom always baked a cake in the shape of a dreidel, with the four Hebrew letters.

CTKG: We give a small gift every night and sing songs by the light of the candles. We have a tradition of guessing which candle will last the longest, and this has us sitting all together in the living room while they burn and flicker. This half hour of togetherness is the modern miracle of Chanukah in our home, and it lasts eight days. Time is the biggest gift of Chanukah; it was then, and it is now.

MS: Our Chanukah celebrations are a blend of our childhood traditions and how we celebrated with our own children. Our grandchildren receive Chanukah gelt, Esther makes delicious latkes (and everyone comments how their smell permeates our home), there's a dreidel cake (which the kids sometimes help decorate) and Chanukah cookies. The grandchildren sing Chanukah songs, play dreidel, and each light their own *Chanukiah*, making it the true festival of lights that it is.

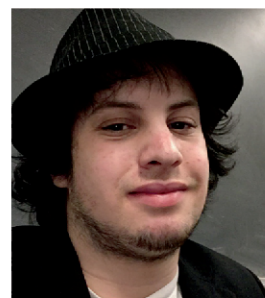
LW: My earliest memory of Chanukah is parties at my grandparents' house. There were 16 cousins, so it was wild and crazy. We got presents and gelt, and we ate wonderful pastry, and of course latkes. When my children were young, we celebrated Chanukah at my home, with some friends and their children. Now, we celebrate with my grandchildren that live in Winnipeg. I buy a gift for each child, and we have dinner together, usually pizza and latkes. We also try to attend the Chanukah celebration at Etz Chayim. ■

Strengthening Jewish Connection From the Ground Up

The Etz Chayim Junior
Congregation Program



**It's our
home
away
from
home,
and
the
door is
always
open.**



Top to bottom:
Anna Binder,
Rhianna Cohen,
Ari Houlst

The kids tend to disappear for a couple hours during Saturday morning Shabbat services at Congregation Etz Chayim. The haven they head to is Junior Congregation (JC), where the *parashat hashavuah* (weekly Torah portion) or an approaching Jewish holiday is the springboard for learning, discussion, and kids' activities. Three JC levels ensure programming is age appropriate and engaging for participants.

Success of the program depends largely on talented and capable Junior Congregation leaders, who have histories as JC participants, volunteers, and helpers. Shoresh connected with three of the super-leaders to learn about their roles, and what JC has

Funeral and Cemetery Services

Congregation Etz Chayim provides funeral services at the synagogue, graveside, or at Chesed Shel Emes community funeral chapel.

Etz Chayim also operates three cemeteries: Bnay Abraham, Hebrew Sick Benefit, and Rosh Pina Memorial Park.

For help or information, please contact Etz Chayim Funeral Director Shelley Sklover at (204) 589-6305 ext. 214 or ssklover@etzchayim.ca.

given them. Anna Binder, in second year theatre at University of Winnipeg, has been a Junior Congregation leader for several years. Rhianna Cohen, in grade 12 at Seven Oaks Met School, became a JC leader two years ago. And Ari Hoult, in his first year of university at U of W, is also in his first year as a JC leader.

The Role of the JC Leader

Anna: We create programs relevant to the *parasha* of the week, and we help each other come up with discussions to get our kids engaged. We're always coming up with new things to add to Junior Congregation and asking each other how we can keep growing.

Rhianna: I work in the young children's room, and I teach the kids about the weekly Torah portion through arts and crafts.

Ari: We perform an activity that relates to the *parashat hashavuah*. We discuss the *parasha* and get the kids to really think about it. Then we bring the kids upstairs to the bimah to sing *Ein Keloheinu* and *Aleinu* for the congregation.

Why JC Is A Great Place for Jewish Kids to Hang Out

Anna: Junior Congregation is where you connect with Judaism on a personal level and a social level. You meet friends you'll have your whole life, and it's a safe place to connect without fear of judgement. It's our home away from home, and the door is always open.

Rhianna: The community and friendships you make through JC are incredible. We have a ton of fun each Saturday: we make learning fun, and there is never a dull day.

Ari: JC is a place to learn and have fun with leaders who truly care and love what they do, and to strengthen Jewish connection through Torah learning.

What's in It for the JC Leader

Anna: My goal is to give back and help young people feel as loved and encouraged here as I do. I want kids to grow up to be curious young people, and I hope that we're giving them the resources to be critical thinkers. I want them to see shul as a place for learning, but also a place for fun and friendship.

Rhianna: JC gives me the opportunity to pursue my passion for teaching. I love teaching and working with young kids.

Ari: Junior Congregation is a place for me to learn vital leadership skills and put them to use, work with my fellow leaders, and have a good time imparting Torah wisdom to those younger than me. ■

The Gift of the Shomer

When a Jewish person dies, it is tradition for a *shomer* to watch over the body until the funeral, after which burial can occur. This is a *mitzvah* that shows respect, honour, and care for the deceased.

S*homer* means guard or watchperson. A beautiful Judaic tradition, the *mitzvah* of the *shomer* might be thought of as a last gift to the departing soul of a loved one.

When someone is passing from life on Earth to eternal life in the hereafter, and there is little more that can be done for them on Earth, "we can still honour the life of the person by being with them as their *shomer*, to comfort and to help bring peace to them and their families," says Tracy Kasner Greaves, Cantor for Congregation Etz Chayim.

According to Jewish tradition, once a person dies, the body must not be left alone before the funeral. The honour due to the deceased, *kavod haMet*, is to have a *shomer* appointed to watch over their body until burial. The *shomer* remains awake through the night and recites from the book of Psalms, to protect the deceased from harm.

"We stay with the deceased as a sign of compassion, and respect for the soul, which tradition tells us is with the body and in a state of transition," says Rena Boroditsky, Executive Director of Chesed Shel Emes, Winnipeg's community *Chevra Kadisha* (Jewish Burial Society).

"That builds community, when we are compassionate," Rena adds.

Prevalent commentary suggests that traditionally, the role of the *shomer* (*shomeret* for a female) was to keep rodents, other animals, and thieves away from the body, protecting it from desecration until it could be properly buried. Today, the ritual is still practised as a gesture of protection, respect, and care for the deceased and their family.

"When a person passes away, the heaviness can be spiritually lightened for families by the knowledge, the guarantee that a member of the community will accompany the physical body—the structure that housed the soul—while in waiting for its final resting place."

The *shomer* burns a candle near the deceased and reads from the Book of Psalms, often Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd...") and Psalm 91 ("He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High...").

"The reading of the *Tehillim* (Psalms) connects the life of the deceased with generations of Jews who have lived and died. We all come into the world and leave the world in the same way," says Cantor Tracy.

Both men and women may act as *shomer* (*shomeret*), but it is customary for the *shomer* to be the same gender as the deceased, if possible. Often a family member or friend fulfills the role of *shomer*; more than one person can also share the honour, taking turns keeping watch throughout the night, or passing the hours of *shmira* together.

"It is a beautiful sign of caring and comfort for the family, and an opportunity for quiet contemplation," Rena says.

A *shomer* must not eat, drink, or smoke in the *shmira* room. When a *shomer* isn't available, the service may be provided by a Jewish funeral home or synagogue volunteers. Chesed Shel Emes has staff who sit in shifts to perform *shmira*. Family and friends of the deceased are also encouraged to come to perform *shmira* alongside the staff, Rena says. ■



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