

ירשה

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HERITAGE

The Journal of THE JEWISH ARCHIVES & HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF EDMONTON & NORTHERN ALBERTA

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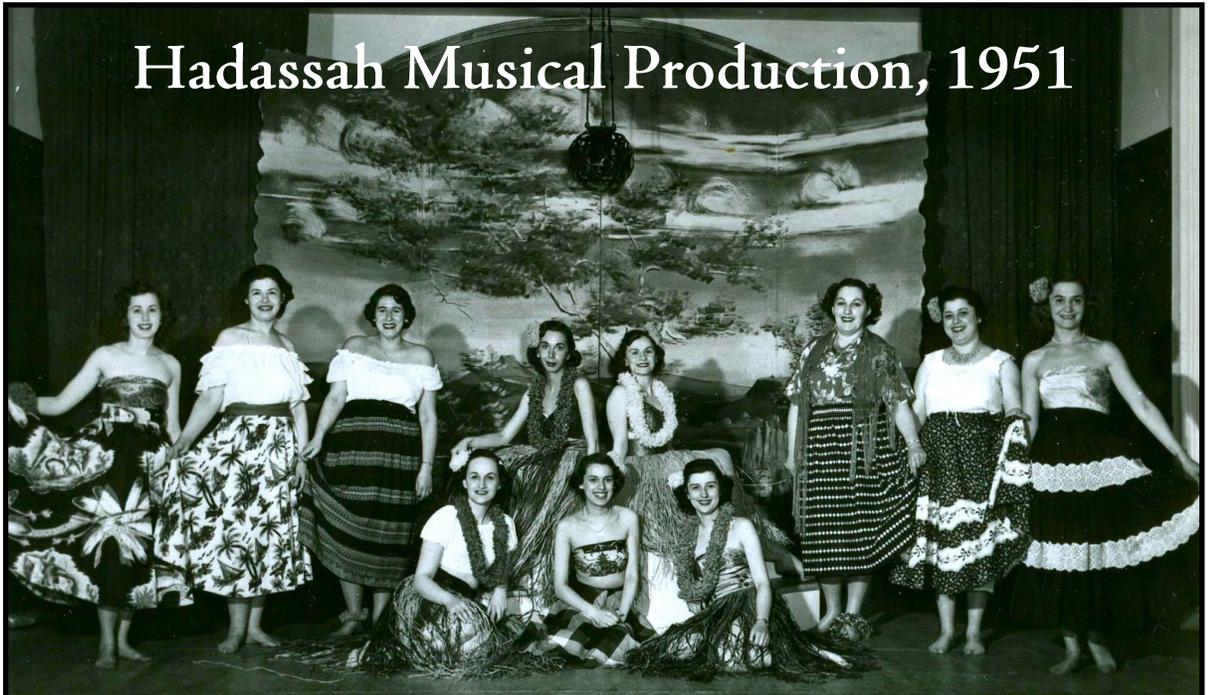
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Hadassah Musical Production, 1951

Cover Photo: Sitting L-R: Dasha Goody, Minnie Emas, Sybil Dlin. Standing L-R Betty Kagna, Anne Eaman, Miriam Lutsky, - Duboff, Norma Nozick, Sadie Goldstein, Della Osten, Sylvia Rosenberg c.1951. Photo courtesy of JAHSENA.



The Jewish Federation
OF EDMONTON

JAHSENA would like to thank the Jewish Federation of Edmonton for the grant that allowed us to hire an employee to work at the H. B. Kline Store at Fort Edmonton this season. We also received a generous grant from the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation that will fund travelling display panels about our organization and explains what the Archives does for the Edmonton Jewish Community.



From your President

GILLIAN HORWITZ

Winter 2022

Well, here we are in the midst of winter...how suddenly it seemed to arrive! But what a fabulous summer we were blessed with, as well as a spectacular fall! Not to be out done, JAHSENA too has had a productive and special year all round.

Rowena Schwartzberg, Chairperson, organized JAHSENA'S first Membership Brunch on Sunday, June 26 at the Fantasyland Hotel. It was wonderful to see so many of our membership attend *IN PERSON*; a highlight, as the pandemic had kept many of us from gatherings for over 2 years.

Dr. Eric Schloss, our guest speaker, gave an in-depth presentation on "The History of the Vilna Ghetto" finishing with the "Memoir of the late Paul Kagan", one of Edmonton's Holocaust Survivors. It was a nice surprise when his son, Dr. Leon Kagan, spontaneously added a personal profile of his dad which was most touching and moving.

It was an honour for me to conclude the program by presenting Eric with a framed certificate saluting him for his significant contributions to JAHSENA throughout the years and ensuring that our history is documented and preserved for future generations. Many thanks to Rowena for organizing this successful event.

On Tuesday, July 5, JAHSENA participated in the Heritage Festival and Open Doors event that Edmonton puts on every July. This year our topic was "Traditions & Rituals surrounding Jewish Weddings".

We used the Mackay Avenue School

for our venue & displayed wedding dresses, ketubahs, wedding photos from several decades, and many other Jewish artifacts. Susan Binnington, Chairperson, led a question/answer period between her and Rabbi Gila Caine discussing the various traditions involved in Jewish weddings. The venue was delightful with the Mackay staff accommodating us most graciously.

'Kudos' to Susan for all the effort she put into chairing this event! Also, to Rabbi Caine for her knowledgeable and informative participation.

As well, this summer, in a Special Edition Heritage publication, Eric Schloss took us on a journey with the focus on the Jewish immigrants that came to this part of Canada in search of a better life. We were left with a vivid description of the trials, tribulations, joys and achievements of the enterprising and brave individuals and families who settled in these areas, who farmed and worked pockets of land in what became known as "The Jewish Farming Colonies". I hope you enjoyed this publication as much as I did.

Eric's research dug deep into this period of our history and left no stone unturned. JAHSENA is more than grateful and indeed indebted to Eric...his love of history and

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Check out page 8 for photos from these events!

HERITAGE

The Journal of the Jewish
Archives & Historical Society
of Edmonton and
Northern Alberta

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Thank You Irv Kipnes!

On behalf of the board of JAHSENA, I would like to thank the major benefactor of Our Parents Home (OPH), Irv Kipnes, for his vision for JAHSENA. Surrounding himself with past and present leadership in the community, he and Len Dolgoy, then President of OPH, coordinated the establishment of various Legacy Fund endowments for the benefit of our Edmonton Jewish Community from the net proceeds following the sale of OPH. Those Legacy Funds include an endowment of \$300,000 earmarked for JAHSENA.

Irv is a true visionary. He sees the future and its possibilities and the value of Edmonton's Jewish archival material – he would like to see (as would we), a permanent home for our collections.

The JAHSENA Legacy Fund was created and funded by OPH with the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF), which administers over \$780 Million in endowed funds on behalf of and in relation to hundreds of charitable purposes and organizations in Edmonton and area, including many other funds endowed in favour of the Edmonton Jewish Community.

Under the provisions of the JAHSENA Legacy Fund Endowment, the Jewish Federation of Edmonton (JFED) and JAHSENA will work together to bring the purposes for which the Fund was established to fruition. This is indeed a true Legacy Fund & the \$300,000 will ultimately be a major factor in realizing a solid future for JAHSENA.

We are eternally grateful & thank Irv and the Board of OPH for making such an important statement about the role and value of JAHSENA in preserving and presenting the stories of the people & institutions who built our local Jewish community in order to inform, invigorate and ensure the vibrant future of our Jewish community in Edmonton & Northern Alberta.

JAHSENA is the recipient of an amazing endowment gift of \$300,000 - Todah Rabah!



Updates to the JAHSENA Board

We are pleased to announce the addition of three new JAHSENA Board members, as well as a new President. Please join us in welcoming these spectacular additions to our leadership team.



New President

Michael Paull comes on board with a background that fits perfectly with JAHSENA.

He was born in Edmonton 65 years ago and both his parents were born in Edmonton as well. Michael is part of the Miller

clan that have made an impact in Edmonton, both on the Jewish and civic side.

In the last 12 months, Mike finished his Board positions as Past President at Fort Edmonton Foundation, EJCCF and Glenora Community. As well, he is done as treasurer at the Sports Medicine Council of Alberta. He remains a member of the Chevra.

It may seem that he comes in as a rookie to JAHSENA but he has been living with the in's and out's for the past eight years through Colleen.

Michael is excited to join the Board and

continue the vital and important work that JAHSENA and its Board provides to the Jewish community.



Netta Phillet

Netta Phillet was born in Edmonton. She attended U of A, where she got a degree in Religious Studies. Since 2006, she has been the Executive Director of the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education & Action after serving as Treasurer and Vice-President.

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BOARD UPDATES*Continued from page 3*

Netta is active in different capacities at Beth Shalom Synagogue and the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, locally and internationally, is a life-member of Hadassah-WIZO and was a founding member of the Phoenix Multifaith Society for Harmony. For 30 years she has been a sister in the Arab/Jewish Women's Peace Coalition. Much of the focus of her volunteer life is inter/intra faith dialogue and the place of women in religious ritual and observance.

Her pre-family working life was spent in independent bookstores, including Mel Hurtig's. For five years she co-owned and managed a newspaper distribution business, bringing the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal to Edmonton for the first time. Netta's love of books continues as she belongs to two book discussion groups, one that has been meeting since 1977. She also writes book reviews every month for the Beth Shalom Newsletter.

**Debby Shoctor**

Debby Shoctor became the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton in May, 2014, retiring seven years later. She formerly served as the Archivist for the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta in 2001. In 2004, she joined the Board of the Archives Society of Alberta before becoming President in 2009, and served for five years. She received her BA in English and Psychology from Victoria College, University of Toronto in 1985, and completed a graduate degree in Journalism at the University of King's College, Dalhousie in 1986. After working in publishing for the Ontario

Government and Prentice-Hall Canada, she came to Edmonton to be the Western Regional Director for B'nai Brith Canada in 1987. Returning to academic life in 1990, she completed her Master's Degree in Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta in 1992. She then worked as an editor for Lone Pine Publishing in Edmonton.

She has been active in many volunteer organizations, including serving on the National Board of Canadian Hadassah-WIZO, as Archives rep for the Association of Canadian Jewish Studies, as President of Edmonton Hadassah-WIZO Council, on the United Jewish Appeal Campaign Team, and as a Vice President of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, and President of the Archives Society of Alberta. She has also been an active participant in Edmonton's vibrant Arts and Heritage community, including volunteering for and/or performing with the Citadel Theatre, Edmonton Opera, Edmonton Musical Theatre, the Lecky School of Dance, the Aviv Dancers, A Joyful Noise Choir and serving on the Board of the Edmonton Heritage Council and the Premier's Council for Arts and Culture.

She is a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal and an Honouree of the Edmonton Historical Board.

**Esther Starkman**

Esther Starkman is a lifelong educator. She was a teacher for over 30 years and was the driving force behind the creation of Edmonton's READ-IN-WEEK in 1989, still a city-wide event.

Esther has contributed to the community as a member of a multitude of community boards and organizations. In addition, she has maintained an involved and lively interest in civic, provincial, and federal politics.

Esther and her husband Howard are Negev dinner honorees, she has an honorary lifetime designation with the HMCS Edmonton, has a K-9 school in Edmonton named after her, and is the recipient of four honorific medals.

Esther is married to Howard Starkman, KC, is the mother of three, grandmother of eight and great grandmother of two children.

Thank You Casino Volunteers

The JAHSENA Board of Directors sincerely appreciates all of you who volunteered your time at the November 1 and 2 casino. Not-for profit organizations such as JAHSENA rely heavily on the proceeds of casinos and, without volunteers like you, we would not be eligible to hold a casino. Your time and energy volunteering enables us to continue our work of collecting and preserving the history of our Edmonton Jewish community.

We are grateful for your continued support of JAHSENA.

CONSEQUENTIAL LOSSES

Based on my Grandfather Solomon Estrin's Odyssey

by Tevian L. Estrin, October 2021

The news was devastating. The worst! After pronouncing his diagnosis, the doctor continued to talk. But the instant Solomon heard the words terminal cancer his brain went numb. He became incapable of processing anything else the doctor might have said.

Solomon, a pious Jew, was committed to the observance of Halacha, the elaborate rabbinically sanctioned rules covering all aspects of living one's life. Each weekday morning, he donned his tallis and t'fillin and recited morning prayers. Every afternoon he recited afternoon and then evening prayers. Sabbath morning would always be spent praying with other worshippers in the synagogue. During the days, he studied scripture. He was observant of all the rules for prohibited activities on the Sabbath and he insisted that his wife keep strictly kosher. During all the years he lived in Canada, he never ate meat, only the chickens that were ritually slaughtered in his presence.

That day, on his two-mile walk from the doctor's office in the Tegler Building in downtown Edmonton, to his modest home in the East End, his mind cleared. He smiled to himself as he indulged in a bit of gallows humor. This coming Yom Kippur, when reciting the netana tokef, a prayer that recognizes God's preordination of who will live, who will die and how they will die in the coming year, there would be no need for him to speculate. Although Solomon still hoped that he might merit a miracle, he knew

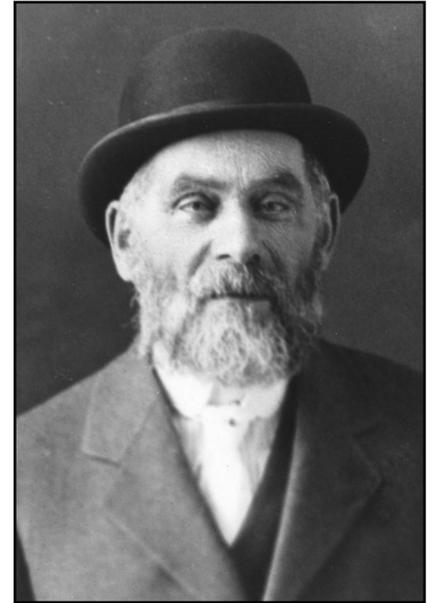
that his fate had already been sealed.

As he continued to walk East along Jasper Avenue, he began to reflect on his life. His had been a difficult one. Even so, he was distressed that it would soon be coming to its end.

Solomon came from a religious family in Belarus. His father and brothers were known for their piety and scholarship. At eighteen, he married a girl from a wealthy family, expecting his father-in-law to support him in his limuday kodesh, or holy studies.

Tragically, within five years his father-in-law died of tuberculosis. Soon the entire family was plunged into penury. Aggravating their precarious financial circumstances, the Russian Government was repressive, and most Christian, fellow Belarusians, were hostile to Jews. Especially worrisome was a series of massacres of Jews, called pogroms, that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The untenable conditions in Russia's Pale of Settlement drove many Jews to apply for emigration to countries in North and South America. In 1911 Solomon resolved to join the exodus.

A Canadian immigration official painted a rosy picture of life in Western Canada, where they would be relocated. He said the climate and topography were similar to that of Belarus. Best of all, Solomon and his four sons would get a homestead grant of an entire square mile of land. It was the eye-popping equivalent of 237



Solomon Estrin c. 1930. Photo from Esther Starkman.

dessiatins in Russian land measure. Ownership of the land would be free and clear if they worked it. In Belarus, an owner of that much land could hire peasants to help his sons work the farm. Solomon could devote his full-time to his studies and his wife would have nothing to do except play with grandchildren and cater to him. It was an offer that seemed too good to be true - but there it was, a genuine offer by an official representative of the Canadian Government. In 1912, Solomon, his wife, four sons and a daughter, departed Belarus forever to start their new lives as farmers in Western Canada.

Western Canada was a shocking disappointment. The winters were significantly colder than winters in Belarus. It

hardly ever rained, and the soil was dry and strewn with rocks. In four years of dry farming, the family had only one successful harvest. They eked out a subsistence living by trading livestock. Pogroms were unlikely in Canada, so they were not in fear for their lives, but their Christian neighbors were more unfriendly than in Belarus. Neighbors and merchants that might otherwise have helped an immigrant family, wanted nothing to do with Yiddish-speaking Jews.

The family had to hunker down in a small, poorly insulated cabin over the long, frigid Alberta winters. In Summer, they worked hard for long hours only to experience another crop failure by Fall. It was disheartening. The free land, that so excited Solomon's imagination, turned out to be more of a burden than a gift.

Solomon lay awake on many nights, bitterly regretting his decision to leave Belarus. He was permanently stuck in this G-d-forsaken place. A land full of cowboys and Indigenous people, with few Jews. A mere 400 Jewish families resided in Calgary, the nearest city. Gamel, the town he left in Belarus had 4,000 Jewish families; and there were several other cities with large Jewish populations within a hundred and fifty miles. Gamel had dozens of synagogues, dozens more small houses of worship and study, many Hebrew schools, and a rich vibrant cultural life. Here in Western Canada, there were few Yiddish speakers, let alone religious ones. Return to his former life in Belarus was impossible. Somehow, he had to endure.

After four miserable, soul-destroying years on the farm, the family moved to Calgary. In his mid-fifties, Solomon had minimal facility with English, and no marketable skills with respect to



Abe & Rebecca Estrin with Phyllis (14) Solomon (7) Tevian (5) Esther (1) c. 1941. Photo from Esther Starkman.

Calgary's economy. He could not get steady employment. However, struggling in a city where there were many other Jewish families was preferable to mind-numbing misery in the isolation of a farm near Compeer; a desolate place that was located miles from nowhere.

After several years of living on the edge in Calgary, Solomon's fortunes finally improved. He got a job as the shammash/gabbai of the Beth Israel Synagogue in Edmonton, a city one hundred and ninety miles north of Calgary. At age fifty-five, it was the first steady job he had held in his life. Unfortunately, better times came too late for his wife. The harsh realities of life in Western Canada took its toll. Mariasha, Solomon's wife, and the mother of his children died a broken woman shortly after their move to Edmonton. She was only forty-eight.

After twenty years of unrelenting struggle to subsist, the last ten years of



NEED CAPTION. Photo from Esther Starkman.

Solomon's life were pleasant. He had a paying job that allowed him ample time for prayer and study. He led morning minyan prayers. And he was respected for his piety



L-R back row: Ike Gofsky, Katie Gofsky, Abraham & Rebecca, Anne & Harry Estrin. L-R front row Esther Gofsky, Anne Gofsky, Jenny Gofsky, Solomon Estrin sittin Herschel Gofsky and Ed Gofsky c. 1925. Photo from Esther Starkman.

and encyclopedic knowledge of Talmud, Torah and Halacha. With the help of the Synagogue's board, Solomon bought a house next to the Synagogue; and he remarried. His youngest son and daughter-in-law came to live with him and Esther, his new wife. Life was good until that fateful day when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Two days after the dreaded diagnosis, Solomon went to a recommended lawyer, who employed a Yiddish speaking translator, to draft his will.

Solomon languished over the next few months, lovingly attended by his wife, Esther, but mainly by his daughter-in-law, Becky. In the winter of 1932, six months after he was diagnosed with cancer, Solomon died at his home in his bed. He was sixty-seven.

A week after Solomon was buried in Edmonton's Jewish Cemetery, his will was read. His heirs were surprised. As

required by Halacha, his oldest son, Louis, inherited twice as much as the others. The others were unhappy with the distribution but accepted it as a venerable Jewish custom. What surprised and infuriated them, however, was that they only got shares of Solomon's meager savings and proceeds from his small life insurance policy. His biggest asset, by far, was the house he lived in, and he bequeathed the house to Esther, his wife.

According to Jewish tradition, widows were generally not included in a will's bequests; because it was expected that grown children would look after their widowed mother's meager needs. Solomon had died in the middle of the depression. Times were hard.

His sons surely wanted his share of the money.

Rather than bringing shame on the Jewish community by suing in public courts, which, in any case would not un-

derstand Jewish ways, the sons decided to take their grievance to a Beit Din, a Rabbinical tribunal.

The Beit Din consisted of three Rabbis: the Edmonton Rabbi and one from Calgary; the third and head arbitrator was a learned, well-respected Rabbi from the much larger Jewish community of Winnipeg.

The sons argued that Solomon had not only disregarded tradition when he willed the house to his widow, but also that the will was witnessed by a gentile notary public, and not by two independent G-d-fearing Jews as required by Jewish law.

In the end, the Beit Din saw no compelling reason to challenge the legal will. The civil courts recognized the contributions of Solomon's wife and daughter-in-law in keeping house and nursing him. They believed that such service should be rewarded. The Bet Din concurred. Moreover, the sons, who were not Esther's sons, would not likely contribute to her support. Without the house she might be destitute. Therefore, Solomon's second wife, Esther, could keep the house. The sons reluctantly accepted the ruling. But it was the end of shalom bayit, harmonious family relations. All but the youngest son, Abraham, became secular, abandoning their traditional religious ways.

A year after Solomon died, Adolph Hitler came to power in Germany. Although Solomon would never know it, for all the misery he had endured in Canada, he succeeded in bequeathing to his children and to their children the most precious gift of all. They would remain in Canada, safe from the horrors of the Holocaust.



Summer Canada Job Student Elizabeth Wood c. 2022



Howard giving Eric Appreciation Certificate June 29, 2022



Jayden Leung at Fort Edmonton - August, 2022



Eric Schloss & Gillian Horwitz - Membership Brunch



Eric & Leon Kagan



Susan Binnington and Rabbi Caine - July 5, 2022

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Continued from page 2

specifically for our heritage, is a gift to JAHSENA as his contributions continue to give life to so many aspects of Jewish life in Edmonton and Northern Alberta. Thank you, Eric!

Another one of our board members, Sam Koplwicz, has taken on the task of revitalizing our Oral Histories Initiative by interviewing people for the Archives. Sam, with the help of Michael Paull, has already conducted four interviews and are currently lining up more, so don't be surprised if they give you a call!

Due to the amazing work already done by Karen Hering, our JAHSENA library is starting to be catalogued with the purpose of being online for members of the public to gain access. When completed, our book list will be available, and the public can make appointments to come in to research and read from our archival collection.

Karen you are a gem! JAHSENA can only benefit and thrive from the hours you put in and your outstanding work.

Both Karen & Colleen commented on what an invaluable help Debby Shector, our 'Archivist Emeritus', has been in the office. Thank you, Debby.

...and so, as the summer continued and in partnership with the Jewish Federation and Canada Summer Jobs, we had the benefit of hiring a summer student, Elizabeth Wood, for six weeks who assisted Colleen with various archival activities. She filed, photocopied, researched, and assisted with our Open Doors program in July and then at the Heritage Festival at Hawrelak Park in August. She was a huge help and was missed at the end of her time

with us.

Luckily for us, with a generous grant from Federation, we were able to hire another student, Jayden Leung, to work in the H.B. Kline Store at Fort Edmonton Park from June to August. Jayden was able to discuss the Kline family, explain the significance of display items and answer the many questions visitors had. We were glad to hear that the Fort Administration was very pleased with Jayden.

As you know our organization relies on donations from our members and their annual fees but more importantly from the monies realized from the proceeds to non profits & volunteer organizations from casinos here in Alberta. Many thanks to Karen Farkas for taking on the mammoth task of arranging for volunteers to work at the recent casino. Boar Members David Marcus, Cory Felber, Jeff Rubin, Howard Davidow, and Sam Koplwicz stepped up to the plate as volunteers. Thank you to EVERY volunteer who gave their time to support JAHSENA at this casino.

And speaking of Board Members, Howard Davidow has been my rock & mentor during my presidency. His guidance has kept me on track & focused... what an amazing Immediate Past President. Thank you, Howard.

Wayne Shur, another valuable member of the Board, has been relentlessly pursuing the idea of placing a plaque where the first Talmud Torah school was housed; don't give up Wayne...it's all about our Heritage.

Sadly, we lost a dear and deeply rooted Board Member in Allan Lyons.

His contributions and grasp of Edmonton's Jewish community came from a place of roots & integrity...he knew it all from the then to the now! Our sincere condolences to his lovely wife Dianne.

And now for a difficult announcement that I have to make. Colleen Paull is leaving us as our Archivist after two years as an Assistant Administrator and then as our Archivist until now.

Colleen has been an outstanding professional and invaluable to JAHSENA. She has at times been overwhelmed with work, but never did she sway under the yolk! Her calm and gentle nature kept our office functioning smoothly and efficiently. What an asset to our organization. She will be sorely missed.

On a personal note... I could not have functioned as your President without her and on behalf of our board, I wish her all the very best for her future. Right now, I know that Colleen, with husband Michael Paull, are focused on their family and their beautiful grandchild, Lilah.

As some of us know, grandchildren are a joy and as Lilah is in Scotland right now, I foresee much travelling in Colleen's future! Safe travels Colleen and Todah Rabah!

Gillian Horwitz, President



BORN IN BERGEN-BELSEN

*The story of how I came to be born in a DP camp in April, 1947,
and my family's arrival in Canada in 1949*

by Samuel J. Koplwicz

Introduction

I recently watched a webinar discussion about Art Spiegelman's amazing and profound two-volume graphic novel, *Maus*, the recipient of a special Pulitzer Prize in 1992. The speaker introduced a concept that I was personally aware of but had never previously seen articulated, as follows: Art's life is "dominated by memories that are not his own," something that has been called not memory, but postmemory. Children of survivors have not had their parents' experiences, but they grow up with their parents' powerful memories until they become akin to their own emotional scars. While I would not say my life has been dominated by my parents' memories, I would agree that they have deeply influenced me and affected me in ways that I was not always aware of.

To begin, I have to admit that for many years I did not openly reveal that I was born in Bergen-Belsen. Often people would ask conversationally "...and where were you born?" and others would answer: Edmonton or Calgary or Winnipeg, or maybe it was Vegreville or a farm in Saskatchewan, and everyone would nod knowingly and the conversation would continue. But if I came out with "Bergen-Belsen" it would immediately stop the conversation and I would be obliged to explain, sometimes in great detail, how that came to be. I became quite uncomfortable drawing so much attention to myself and grew tired of having to explain

so much, especially if those around me knew very little about those special circumstances. However, I have now come to realize that despite my discomfort it is extremely important to give testimony, so these facts should not be forgotten. Incidentally, I have only recently learned that I am now also defined as a "survivor" due to the facts of my birth. I had always thought of myself as Second Generation, not First Generation, in relation to the Holocaust, although since I came to Canada as a toddler, I am also considered a First Generation Immigrant.

Ironically, I did not even become aware of the fact that Bergen-Belsen was

my birthplace until I was twenty years old. Of course, I knew I had been born in a DP (Displaced Persons) camp in Germany after World War II, but the place name on my birth certificate was "Hohne" and I thought it was nothing special, just a refugee camp like many others. In 1967 I was in Montreal for several weeks in June, working at the Young Judea National Office before heading off to run the summer drama program at Camp Soleim in northern Ontario, just outside of Sudbury. I was having Shabbat dinner at the home of the Herzkopfs. My father had been roommates with Mr. Herzkopf in the first months after liberation, along with several



Buchbinder Family. Standing L-R: Rachel Leah, Tovia, Eva (Sam's Mother), Jacob, Shlomo Nathan. Sitting L-R: Frieda & Szmul-Wolf Buchbinder circa 1941. Photo from Sam Koplwicz.

other single men who were receiving training on industrial weaving machines. Some of the others ended up working in the garment industry in Montreal, while my parents came to Edmonton and my father started working in eggs & poultry at the Edmonton Produce Co., Dad had maintained contact with some of them for years. While we were eating, Mr. Herzkopf asked me if I had applied for “the scholarship.”

“What scholarship?” I asked back.

“The one established by the Bronfman Family for children born in Bergen-Belsen to attend university,” he replied.

“What does that have to do with me?”

“Well, of course, you were born in Bergen-Belsen,” he told me, and gave me a few details about that time and place.

Months later, when I next saw Dad, I asked him why he had never told me the truth. He explained that he didn’t want me to grow up with the knowledge that I had been born in such a notorious place, that he felt the trauma might be too much for a tender youngster to carry. It seems that he instinctively understood the dangers of “postmemory.” It turns out that Hohne was (and still is) the sister town next door to Belsen, and that was where the British located the special hospital that was established in the spring or early summer of 1945, when Bergen-Belsen was transformed from a concentration camp into a Displaced Persons camp that eventually held over 50,000 refugees, and remained in operation until late 1951 or early 1952, when it was finally closed down.

But enough about me! This is not really my story. It is the story of how my parents both came to be in Bergen-Belsen

by very different routes, how they happened to meet and get married in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

My Parents’ Story: Eva

I will begin with my mother, Chawa (z”l) or Eva as she was known in English. In 1942 her family, the Buchbinders, along with most other Jews in the town of Bedzin, Poland (known as Bendin in Yiddish) were living in very cramped quarters in the crowded ghetto on the edge of town, having been forced from their homes and businesses not long after the Germans occupied Poland within the first weeks of the invasion in September of 1939. Bedzin is in the southwestern corner of Poland, a suburb of Katowice, a large industrial centre, and incidentally next door to Sosnowiec, where Spiegelman’s father was from.

My mother had been recently married to a young man named Parasol. She was the oldest of eight children of Szmul-Wolf Buchbinder and his wife Frieda. One of the children had died a couple of years earlier of some kind of fever, so there were seven living children in the family. My grandfather was a chocolatier and candy-maker, who ran a successful chocolate factory and retail store in the building where the family had originally been living. I am not sure of the specific dates, as my mother was always very vague about the dates, but I believe I have the chronology correct.

One of Eva’s younger sisters, Rifka (z”l) or Regina in English, had been caught in a roundup of Jewish girls some months prior and taken away to a labor camp. Eva was supposed to have been rounded up as well. She was on “the list” but when the authorities came looking for Eva Buchbinder she was already living as Eva Parasol, and was not in the same apartment as the Buchbinders. They just said she wasn’t



Morris, Eva & Sammy c. 1947. Photo from Sam Kopolowicz.

there, no one knew where she was, and so she wasn’t taken. My grandfather somehow found out where Rifka was sent (it turned out to be in northern Czechoslovakia). It happened that some months later the German Reich desperately needed more workers for the war effort and the announcement was made that anyone who “volunteered” at that time could choose their destination. My grandfather convinced Eva that she needed to go and look after her sister. (Incidentally, this part of the story and the subsequent time Eva spent in the labor camp is very ably documented in a fictionalized book, **Torn Thread**, by Anne Isaacs, published in 2000 by Scholastic Press, New York. Also, Edmontonians will remember my Aunt Regina Winter (z”l), who was married to Leo Winter (z”l), and was the mother of Freda Abugov, as well as Dr. Sam Winter, now of Vancouver.)

So, at some point in the middle of 1942, Eva, age 21, wearing several layers of

warm clothes, carrying a satchel filled with family photos, joined dozens of other girls at the train station in Bedzin for a journey of several days to end up in Parshnitz, in northern Czechoslovakia, at the German-owned Haas complex of textile factories just outside the town known as Porice, where she spent the next two and a half years as a slave laborer working on a linen spinning machine. On the one hand, there is the miracle of her survival, along with her younger sister, and the preservation of her family photos. On the other hand, there is the stark tragedy that all the other remaining members of the family, along with most other Jews of Bedzin, were taken to Auschwitz a few months later and murdered en masse. We do not know the exact date of their deaths, and have therefore observed their collective *yahrzeits* on the first day of Rosh Hashanah ever since.

When Liberation came in April of 1945, the hundreds of girls interred in the factory-turned-barracks in Parshnitz woke up one morning to find that the SS officers and all the guards had abandoned the premises, locked the girls in, and set the building on fire. Partisans who had been monitoring the place from a vantage point in the surrounding hills rushed down to release the prisoners. And that was it. The War was over. Eva told me that she and her sister marched across the street to a small inn owned by a German woman and insisted that they be put up for a few days. Not long after, with the assistance of the Jewish Joint Distribution Agency, they obtained train passage back “home” to Bedzin, where they quickly learned that no one was left alive. Their former servants were now occupying the Buchbinder flat and would not even allow them to enter to look around. Furthermore, they gave them some good advice: better get out of town

before something bad happens. Without further delay the two sisters, along with some others, decided to head west for a refugee camp in now-occupied Germany. In particular they wanted to be sure to get out of the Russian zone, as the Russians had the reputation of treating girls very badly, and so ended up in the newly declared DP camp of Bergen-Belsen. My mother was now 24 years old.

I believe it is appropriate at this point to consider why and how she survived. Was it merely “luck” or was it “the hand of Hashem?” Obviously, no one can ever know for sure, but there were some particular circumstances. For one, the female SS Comandante of the camp took a liking to Eva because her father wrote letters to her in a very fine German, which she admired. Secondly, Eva had certain skills as a candymaker, and the Comandante had a sweet tooth. Thirdly, Eva also had exceptional sewing and darning skills, and was given extra assignments to alter and repair the Comandante’s clothing. Because of this special “affection” her life was spared after she was literally scalped in an industrial accident that tore off a large portion of her hair in a flax spinning machine. She was also allowed to keep her precious collection of family photos as a special favor. No doubt my mother also possessed extraordinary courage, strength and unflagging determination.

My Parents’ Story: Morris

My father, Morris (ז’ל), was never as talkative as my mother, certainly not about his war experiences. In fact, it took me many years to piece together little fragments of information, but since the bits were so precious to me, I have retained most of them, including some that I heard only once 60 or 70 years ago. It was only a



Morris w. weaving machine, Belsen c. 1946.
Photo from Sam Koplwicz.

couple of years before he passed away that he revealed to me that he happened to be liberated in Bergen-Belsen because he had survived a death march into Germany from a labor camp in Poland in the winter of 1944-45. He was 32 years old then, one of about 12,000 starving inmates found by the Allies when they arrived at the gates of Bergen-Belsen in April 1945. He found out about one brother who had actually survived the war but tragically died of typhoid just weeks after being liberated.

Morris had been the youngest of six children of Josef and Chawa Koplwicz. He was born in Baranovich, Poland, now in Belarus, but his father had died relatively young of complications from diabetes, and the family had moved to Bedzin sometime around 1920. He grew up as the darling of his family, with several older brothers and sisters, along with his uncles--the Unger family, who owned a wholesale textile business. He was an avid Zionist, a member of the relatively

militant Betar, and confided proudly that he once met Menachem Begin, who was touring Europe in the 1930s trying to convince Jews to emigrate to Palestine. Dad took extensive “pioneer” training and was packed and ready to go sometime in the late 1930s, but on the day of departure his mother declared that she would throw herself under the train if her little Moishele left. So, he stayed, was subsequently drafted into the Polish Army where he was put in the cavalry because at 5 feet 8 ½ inches he was relatively tall. He said the first thing he remembers is that his horse bit him the first time they were introduced! Luckily, in hindsight, he developed a medical condition that got him discharged, so he was a civilian when the Nazis invaded Poland at the beginning of September, 1939. Bedzin was so close to the border with Germany that it was occupied within days of the outbreak of war, and suffered the usual consequences of having the Great Synagogue burned to the ground, confiscation of all Jewish-owned businesses and, before long, expulsion from homes and confinement to a crowded ghetto on the edge of town.

Again, I do not have any dates or clear chronology of events, but I do know that Morris was married at this time, having married for love, which he said was somewhat unusual in those days, and that he had a baby daughter. After he was taken away to a labor camp, he somehow learned that his daughter got sick and died, and subsequently his wife also died, probably from a combination of illness and grief. I never was able to get a coherent narrative from Dad about those years of forced labor but I did pick up a few isolated anecdotes. He said that he survived one winter because he had an inside job, in a warehouse for German uniforms, and when they re-

ceived a shipment of torn and bloodied uniforms from the Russian front to clean up and re-issue, it was the first time during the war that anyone in his camp had any indication that the German army was not invincible. News of the war’s progress was not something they normally received. Another winter was survived because he had a pair of shoes and therefore less subject to freezing. At one point he worked on a road construction gang, where he was befriended by a French prisoner of war who occasionally snuck him an extra piece of bread or a potato. This French soldier invited Dad to join him in Marseilles if they should both survive the war, but they got separated and never met again. Dad never wanted to speak the name of any of the camps he worked in, but after his passing I learned from his papers, which included a copy of his application for slave-labor reparations, that he worked for Gros Rosen, a complex of numerous forced-labor camps that were scattered all over Poland.

Somehow, he survived three or four years of this brutal treatment and sometime in the winter of 1944-45 found himself in Bergen-Belsen at the end of a “death march” which many around him did not survive. Anyone who faltered or fell was either shot on the spot or left to freeze to death.

Then the War was over and the British Army took over the concentration camp and quickly transformed it into a well-run refugee camp that soon began attracting thousands of desperate, homeless, country-less, individuals from all over occupied Eastern Europe. The wooden structures in the camp were burned due to the outbreak of Typhoid Fever in the population, and many of the inmates were



Sammy & Frieda c. 1953. Photo from Sam Koplłowicz.

initially billeted in the solid brick buildings that had formerly been occupied by the German officers and guards.

This was the environment in which my parents met, after Liberation. They recognized each other as being from the same home town, and that seemed as good a reason as any for getting together. Eva recognized Morris as someone who used to occasionally come into the retail store at the front of the Buchbinders’ chocolate factory to buy chocolates or candies for his family for Shabbat. As the oldest child she often worked in the finishing of chocolates, as well as handling sales at the front counter. They had both lost their original spouses and most of their extended family members and were anxious to resume their lives. They were 32 and 24 years old respectively, and both likeable, attractive people. They were married on December 17th, 1945. So many weddings were taking place at the time that long lines of brides and grooms took turns wearing the same suit and gown

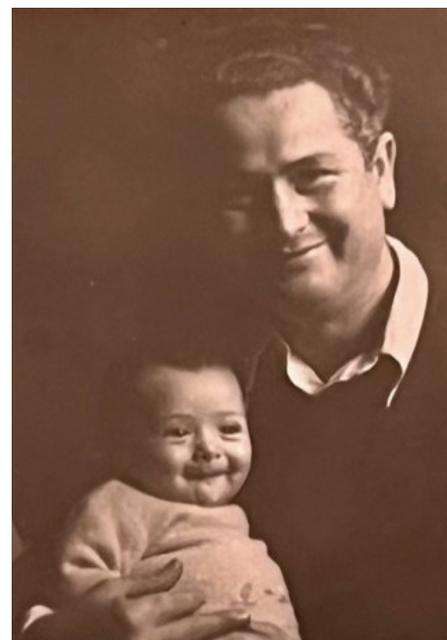
under the chupa before passing them along to the next couple. I was born (prematurely) on April 27th, 1947, in the British hospital in Hohne, in the midst of a proliferation of births. Between 1946 and 1949 Bergen-Belsen was documented as having the highest birthrate per capita in the world.

Next stop: Canada.

I once asked Dad why he didn't opt to try to go to Palestine in 1945, considering his strong Zionist background, or to the United States, which was accepting refugees, and where his one surviving sister ended up, in Springfield, Massachusetts. Or, for that matter, why not Israel, after May 1948? He told me that he had always thought of Canada as an appealing place of pioneering spirit, economic opportunities and democratic values, and wouldn't you know it—Eva and her sister had an uncle who was living in Edmonton, Canada, who was willing to sponsor them and their budding families to come and settle! The only problem was Canada's extremely discriminatory policy throughout the 1930s and 1940s of not allowing any Jewish immigration. ("None is Too Many.") But that problem was eventually solved, primarily due to the strenuous lobbying efforts of the existing Jewish community of Canada, mainly in Toronto, and the policy was finally rescinded in February of 1949. Within a month, my parents had their visas stamped by the British provisional government of West Germany and on April 4th, 1949, I (at age 23 months) and my parents arrived in Halifax. A few days later we arrived via train in Edmonton and were welcomed by my Great Uncle, Simon Russ, and Great Aunt, Mollie, who provided us with our first house, a little wooden shack on 116th Street between 105th

and 106th Avenues, just north of the old CNR tracks. I have one appropriate memory of that house, considering that I must have spent most of my time on the floor: there was a trap-door in the kitchen that let into a dirt cellar, and I can still remember the dank, earthy smell that came out of the chilly basement.

Morris initially got work at Edmonton Produce Company downtown, but within the first year went to work for Eddie Zipperstein at South Edmonton Produce on Whyte Avenue, where he remained for 27 years. Eva initially was employed at GWG as a seamstress, but before long she transferred to the Palace of Sweets, where she could put her knowledge of chocolates to work, but she later worked as a tailor at Hudson's Bay, and as a seamstress at various fancy women's fashion shops. Mom always liked to work and have her own income to supplement what Dad earned. They saved every penny they could and bought their first house after a year or so, a two-story Victorian with a basement suite on 92 Street in Norwood, close to Clarke Stadium and not too far from the original Beth Israel Synagogue on 95th Street. Those early years were not easy, and I remember them saying the winters seemed bitterly cold. I clearly recall as a five-year old being awakened in the middle of the night by my mother's nightmares, and Dad's attempts to quiet and comfort her. But they persevered and gradually life got better and easier. They had family and friends in the immigrant Yiddish-speaking community, (the "Greeners") entirely composed of other Holocaust survivors, who gave them a sense of belonging, and with whom they could share some of their memories of the old country. In 1951 my sister Frieda was born.



Morris & Sammy c. 1947. Photo from Sam Kopolowicz.

Final Days

Morris passed away in December 2015 after a stroke at the age of 92. For most of his long life he was hale and hearty and wonderfully energetic. It was two days after their Sixtieth anniversary. Eva died peacefully in her own suite at Our Parents' Home in December 2017 at the age of 96, just a few weeks short of her 97th birthday. It was 18 Kislev, exactly twelve years to the day on the Hebrew calendar after Morris died. I commemorate their yahrzeits on the same day, of course, struck each year by what is surely some kind of unique eternal bond. I miss them constantly. I remember them both as kind, honest, humble and unassuming, hard-working, generous, respectful and loving. And, despite all the horrors and humiliations and losses they experienced during the Holocaust, they were always eminently sane, for which I will forever thank them.

Introducing

CARLY HEFFNER has been hired and will officially start in the office as Archivist/Administrator on January 2, 2023. Carly is a graduate in Library Science from McGill, and worked at the Jewish Museum of Montreal assisting with oral history events and oral interviews of community members for the museum. She has worked extensively in library positions in the small centers of Yellowhead County and Blackfalds and in the Jewish Public Library in Montreal. She also has a B.Ed and taught at Bialik Hebrew Day School in Toronto. Her family lived in Edmonton when she was young, then moved to Calgary, and now they are back in Edmonton. She went to Camp BB and is looking forward to renewing her Edmonton Jewish connections.



The Board is delighted that she wants to be here at JAHSENA and are looking forward to working with Carly. More to follow about Carly in the next newsletter!

Thanking

HOWARD DAVIDOW has been a part of JAHSENA as far back as anyone can remember, serving as Treasurer and more recently as Co-President from 2016 to 2017, and then President from 2017-2021. Now that he has finished his term as Past President, he has decided to officially retire from the Board.



Howard has been an outstanding leader during his years of service. He has been a part of publishing our most recent book, "From Generation to Generation: Jewish Edmontonians as Heritage Builders", was part of the decision process that led to JAHSENA having an employee in the Fort Edmonton H.B. Kline Store since 2013 (we pay part of the salary), he promoted a meeting with the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, our archival counterpart in Calgary, where members of our Board met with theirs in Red Deer to discuss how to better work together and promote each other, back in 2019 shortly before COVID-19 hit. He has worked every Casino and persevered during lockdowns, outbreaks and zoom meetings during the many months of COVID-19.

It is impossible to list all his initiatives and achievements over his many years of involvement with JAHSENA, but we can attest to his loyalty and to his passion to ensure that the Archives survives and is here to serve the generations to come.

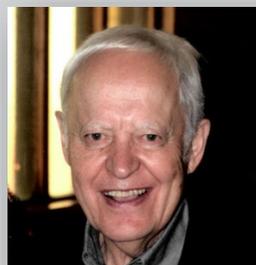
Thank you very much Howard Davidow, Todah Rabah!

Recognizing

RON WOLCH z'l was a JAHSENA Board Member as Treasurer three years between the fall of 2001- fall 2004.

GLORIA AARON z'l, a long-term Board Member, joined the Board in the fall of 2004 as Secretary and served in that role until fall 2011.

The Board and Office send our condolences to the families, may their memories be a blessing.





JAHSENA

JEWISH ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF EDMONTON AND NORTHERN ALBERTA

Preserving our community's heritage from generation to generation

L'Dor V'Dor לדור ודור

Phone 780-489-2809 Fax 780-481-1854 Email jahsena@shaw.ca



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In Memoriam 2022

The following individuals were lost to us this year. We offer our condolences to their families and friends, and hope that their memories will be blessings to us all.

*Gloria Aaron z'l
Dmitry Allman z'l
Alla Ashtor z'l
Naomi Beck z'l
Noman Blayways z'l
Beverly Brezer z'l
Francis Elain Chatrin z'l
Jerold (Jerry) Cooper z'l

Joseph Dvorkin z'l
Maurice (Moe) Furman z'l
Riva Gelfman z'l
Norma Grobman z'l
David Hallis z'l
Daphne Horwitz z'l
Chad Huard z'l
Verne Karasick z'l

Maury Katzin z'l
Maya Khasin z'l
Anna Klebanov z'l
Bruce Koliger z'l
Sarrah Kravets z'l
Lev Kuksin z'l
Valentin Linzer z'l
Yehon Malev z'l

Dr. Robert Margolis z'l
Helen Markovich z'l
Ruth Noam z'l
Sharon Pertman z'l
Fern Robinson z'l
David Tallman z'l
Gary Wener z'l
*Ronald Wolch z'l

Formerly Long-Term Edmonton Residents

Lily Cynamon z'l

Shelley Superstein Alexander z'l

Every effort has been made to identify all those who have passed away last year, but if we have omitted someone, please contact the JAHSENA office.

*Board Member