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# Hebrew Watchman

#### **SERVING THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1925**

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# **MJCC Breaks Ground on Outdoor Renovation Project**



Howard Silver, Steve Libby, Lisa Frisch, Judy Bookman, Corey Trotz, Robin Orgel, Jacob Samuels, Jenny Herman, Jonathan Epstein, Larry Skolnick, Karen Franklin, Jerry Siegler, Janson Teal (GTG rep)

Last week the Memphis Jewish Community Center broke ground on the first phase of its outdoor renovation, made possible through a generous \$3 million gift from the Plough Foundation.

Members of the MJCC Board were on site Tuesday, August 16 with pickleball

paddles, hard hats and shovels to commemorate construction beginning on a permanent outdoor pickleball facility, complete with eight courts and shaded seating.

CEO Larry Skolnick stated, "The MJCC is so excited to kick off this incredible expansion of our outdoor space and all that it will offer to our members. With the quick rise in popularity of pickleball we are thrilled to be able to provide this state-of-the-art facility as a benefit of membership here at the J!"

The pickleball courts are the first in a multi-phased project that will span the next 12-18 months, resulting in a full redevelopment of the outdoor space at the MJCC. This redevelopment will expand the features and programs the J has to offer its members with phase one expected to wrap up later this fall. As more players in the community are drawn to the sport of pickleball, the outdoor facility will provide players a dedicated space for play, practice, lessons, tournaments and more.

Later phases of the project will include a 4-foot asphalt walking/running track that will surround the entire outdoor space, construction of a multi-purpose building in the campground area, a ropes course and new drainage systems to address usability of the outdoor field space at the MJCC. **HW** 

# The Temple Israel Museum to Open an Exhibit Honoring Rabbi James A. Wax and His Dedication to Social Justice



"Righteous Among Men: Rabbi James A. Wax, A Life Dedicated to Social Justice" will chronicle the career and conscience of Rabbi Wax, Temple Israel's Senior Rabbi from 1954-1978

The Temple Israel Museum is pleased to announce the creation of a multi-dimensional exhibit featuring the religious, spiritual, and social conscience of Rabbi James A. Wax, who led Temple Israel from 1954-1978. – a commitment that defined his life, paving the way for his pivotal role in the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike and his visionary leadership as an advocate for those with mental illness

Made possible by the generosity of sponsors from Temple Israel and others throughout the community, "Righteous Among Men: Rabbi James A. Wax, A Life Dedicated to Social Justice," will open on Sunday, September 18. The exhibit will showcase Rabbi Wax's commitment to Judaism and social justice

"The legacy of Rabbi Wax is felt in the mission of Temple Israel and the fabric of the greater Memphis community to this day," said Rabbi Micah Greenstein. "Social justice has always been Reform Judaism's crown jewel, and no leader was more committed to

(See Wax Page 2)



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### MY BBYO Israel Experience



By Sarah Hochman

My experience on BBYO's International Leadership Seminar in Israel (ILSI) was the journey of a lifetime, my first-ever visit to Israel. Over the three weeks that we spent in Israel, we were able to see and learn more than I had ever imagined to be possible. From hiking Masada, seeing Ben Gurion's kibbutz home in the Negev, surfing in Tel Aviv, praying at the Kotel and exploring a Jerusalem shuk before Shabbat, every day provided me with a new experience. Each of these experiences deepened my connection to Israel and to the Jewish people, strengthening a bond I know will never be broken.

When I arrived on the trip, I knew almost no one. Yet in the blink of an eve, I was surrounded by friends who I talk to every day and have changed



my life. Being on a trip with 160 other Jewish teens from a plethora of different countries was absolutely incredible; it helped me to realize how much we have in common with one another even though we live completely different lives in completely different places. It also was a prime and inspiring example that Judaism thrives today in so many communities all over the world.

Our various guest speakers, staff members, and tour guides affirmed this, giving us perspectives from all of their unique stories and connections to Israel. They gave us learning opportunities we would never get from school or even a family Israel trip, and that knowledge will forever remain a great asset. If nothing else, everyone (including myself) learned: there is nowhere quite like Israel. HW



#### Wax...

(Continued From Page 1)

the vision of the Hebrew prophets to end injustice than Rabbi Wax. We each have a lesson to learn from both Rabbi Wax's words and his actions."

The dynamic exhibit explores how the son of immigrants and only Jewish family of Herculaneum, Missouri, was lured to the religious pulpit and, in particular, to Temple Israel in Memphis in 1946. Temple Israel is the oldest and largest Jewish congregation in Tennessee, founded in 1853, with only eight senior rabbis serving its 170-year history.

As president of the Memphis Ministers Association in 1968, Rabbi Wax led the march of hundreds of ministers to City Hall the day following Dr. Martin Luther King's death, and confronted Mayor Henry Loeb on national television when he said, "There are laws far greater than the laws of Memphis and Tennessee, and these are the laws of God, human decency and dignity." When Rabbi Wax passed away in 1989, the newspaper called him "the moral conscience of the community."

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#### **Established September, 1925** By Leo I. Goldberger (1902-1989)

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. August 26, 2022 / 29 Av, 5782	7:17 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. August 27, 2022 / 30 Av, 5782	8:13 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Re'Eh

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"This exhibit is important not only to our Jewish community, but also to the entire faith community, civic organizations and school groups," said Rabbi Greenstein. "The conversations created from this exhibit will be indispensable hands-on learning tools, and we will make it widely available to all who need it. It is our hope that by reflecting on the past, we can inspire the positive social change Rabbi Wax emulated."

The Temple Israel Museum is grateful to the following Presenting Sponsors for their support: The Herbert Shainberg Foundation, O. Mason and Ann B. Hawkins, and members of the James A. Wax family: James A. Wax Jr., Jonathan I. Wax and James R. Wax.

The exhibit will open with a community reception at Temple Israel on Sunday, September 18, from 3-5 p.m. It will remain free and open to the entire community. RSVP and learn more at timemphis.org/rabbiwax.

**Temple Israel Museum Hours:** 1376 East Massey Road, Memphis, TN 38120 Tuesday-Thursday, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Sunday, 10 a.m. - Noon First Friday of each month, 5-6 p.m. (before Shabbat services) HW



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# Bornblum Welcomes New Faculty, Staff Members for 2022-2023 Year

To accommodate a growing student body, new faculty members – six teachers, a teacher assistant and a guidance counselor – joined Bornblum Jewish Community School for the 2022-2023 school year.

Bornblum added a new kindergarten and second grade class to allow teachers to evenly split their instruction between students.

"This year, we are excited to have the largest enrollment in over a decade," said Head of School Daniel R. Weiss, Ed.D. "We now have two sections of kindergarten and second grade, which allows us to maximize our student-to-teacher ratio, so students get the individualized attention they deserve."

The new Bornblum teachers include Aviva Zucker (kindergarten Jewish Studies teacher), Sarah Schulman (kindergarten teacher), Rinat Kremer (second grade Jewish Studies and Hebrew teacher), Kayla Buchanan (second grade teacher), Christa Jolly (third grade teacher), Mary Beth Beeber (middle school Science and Design Thinking teacher), and Terry NeSmith (first grade teacher assistant).

Along with new faculty members, a middle school coordinator position was created, filled by Charna Schubert, who also teaches middle school math.

Bornblum's Director of Curriculum

and Instruction, Jill Cross, said the new faculty brings fresh energy and perspectives to enhance the education experience for the students of Bornblum.

"This year as our school focuses on sparking new stories, I am grateful for the introduction of this group of educators into the narrative of our school," Cross said. "Each brings unique passions and expertise that will contribute to the dynamic learning environment at Bornblum."

Two new staff members joined the Bornblum team: Danielle Zelig as director of admissions and parent engagement and Zack Orsborn as director of marketing and communications.

Over the course of the last several months, Bornblum worked in coordination with Margolin Hebrew Academy, Jewish Community Partners and Fogelman Jewish Family Services to address both schools' desire to continue offering a school-based guidance counselor.

The guidance counselor position – filled by Lauren Wingate – was made possible by a grant from the Memphis Jewish Federation Annual Community Campaign, an anonymous donor and funds from Bornblum and Margolin Hebrew Academy.

To learn more about Bornblum Jewish Community School's current and new faculty and staff members, visit www.bornblum.org. **HW** 

NEW DEADLINE FOR STORIES AND ADS TUESDAYS AT 5PM WE ARE HAPPY TO ACCEPT YOUR STORIES IN ADVANCE.

# The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

Lunch is Monday–Friday at 11:30 a.m. All programs start at 12:15 p.m. There has been a change in this week's programs. Please see below!

#### Tuesday, August 30

Join us for a repeat of our Ice Cream Social!

Non-Dairy Ice Cream in a multitude of flavors, plus toppings sure to please!

Sprinkles, chocolate sauce and nondairy whipped cream. Whatever you choose.

Come for lunch or just the ice cream desert! Reservations are required. Call MJCC Front desk at 901.761.0810. Conversation is included also!

#### Thursday, September 1 First of September Super Bingo!

Join us for special prizes PLUS free lunches with each prize!! Everyone loves this favorite Game. No reservations required. Tuesday, September 6 Field Trip to the Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art

In talking about this incredible Museum, Mr. Jack Belz said, "our planet is home to a marvelous diversity of cultures with rich artistic and historic legacies. The intricate creations of Chinese artists rank among the most inspiring. These artworks are frequently crafted of rare and precious materials, which reveal an enormous patience and painstaking execution. Please make your reservation by calling the MJCC Front desk.

#### **Thursday September 8**

Ask the Rabbi: Featuring Rabbi Levi Klein

Rabbi Klein of Chabad of Tennessee always engages his audience with thoughtful answers and a few questions of his own! Please join us for this interesting question and answer period!

Please join us from Monday through Friday for a delicious Kosher lunch from the Kitchens at the Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required the day before by 1 p.m. by contacting Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator, at 901-259-9220, at stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org or calling the front desk at 901-761-0810. **HW** 

### British Archaeologist Awarded Honorary Medal for Excavation Work at Treblinka

(JNS) – A British archaeologist was awarded an honorary medal on Aug. 4 by the Treblinka Museum for her work investigating Nazi crimes that took place at the concentration camp in Poland. Caroline Sturdy Colls, a professor of

"I remain committed to uncovering the evidence that the Nazis tried to hide at the camps and to trying to uncover the stories of the people they tried to erase," said British professor Caroline Sturdy Colls.

conflict archaeology and genocide investigation with a specialization in Holocaust studies at Staffordshire University in England, was presented with the award by the director of the Treblinka Museum Edward Kopówka.

The ceremony was also attended by 94-year-old Holocaust survivor Ike Alterman, whose mother and sister were murdered in the camp.

The professor, who was previously awarded the European Archaeological Heritage Prize, was thanked for her "extensive efforts to honor the victims who were murdered in the camps and to educate future generations," reported the *BBC*.

It is the second medal ever awarded

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by the Treblinka Museum.

The professor's findings formed the basis for the museum's permanent exhibition titled, "Finding Treblinka." During a 2013 excavation led by Sturdy Colls, more than 300 items were found, including ceramic tiles that were used to line gas chambers at the concentration camp.

It is far from the first time her work has been recognized. Sturdy Colls earned the European Archaeological Heritage Prize in 2016. She has authored five books and other related chapters, and numerous papers on archaeology and the Holocaust.

"I remain committed to uncovering the evidence that the Nazis tried to hide at the camps and to trying to uncover the stories of the people they tried to erase," she said, according to the *BBC*.

As many as 800,000 people were killed at the Treblinka concentration camp between 1942 and 1943, according to the Treblinka Museum. **HW** 

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# Why Conspiracy Theorists Keep Turning to Jewish Mysticism – from Early Nazis to Modern-Day MAGA

A viral clip of a Trump supporter blissfully misunderstanding Jewish mystic numerology raised old questions about how Kabbalah is understood by the public



Gematria, a form of mystic numerology, is one of several forms of Jewish mysticism that's fascinated conspiracy theorists throughout history. Credit: Vitaliia Hryshchenko/iStock by Getty Images

#### By Mira Fox

This article originally appeared on Forward. Reprinted with permission.

Are Trump's most rabid supporters getting into Jewish mysticism?

If a new viral clip from "The Daily Show" is any indication, the answer appears to be yes.

In the clip, a woman in a flower crown at a MAGA rally in Wisconsin tells "Daily Show" correspondent Jordan Klepper that she is learning gematria – or "jematria," as she pronounces it – to decode the world around her.

Gematria, as it's traditionally understood, is a form of mystic numerology most often used in Kabbalah. Each letter in a word is assigned a number; to understand the mystic connotations behind a word, those numbers are added together. The resulting sums are used to interpret the deeper meanings in words, phrases or texts.

For example, parallels might be drawn between words or phrases that add up to the same sums, or certain numbers might be considered lucky – such as the number 18, which is the gematria value of "chai," the Hebrew word for life.

How does gematria work, per Klepper's subject? The basics are the same – kind of. As the woman explains, Trump's numerological value is 88 as is "J. Kennedy." Klepper asks if that means that JFK and Trump are the same person. "I don't know," the woman replies, with a sly smile. "That's what the gematria says." (Mind you, this parallel only works for the exact spellings "Trump" and "J. Kennedy" – a bit of a stretch.)

At Klepper's urging, she types a few more phrases into her mystical all-seeing gematria calculator phone app. The phrase "America is in a bad place," she finds, yields the same gematria value as "Let's go Brandon," a now-famous coded catchphrase used to decry President Joe Biden. She grins triumphantly. "Do you have goosebumps yet?" she asks. Klepper looks incredulous: Clearly, for his subject, there's only one possible meaning to the numbers, but it's not at all obvious to him.

When I tried to recreate the woman's numbers, I discovered that the traditional Hebrew gematria system did not give the same results as the unnamed app. One clear reason why: Her calculator was using English, not Hebrew - already a mistake - and, in her second example, the number of ways to translate "Let's go Brandon" into Hebrew is so various that assigning it any single numerical value is, well, kind of impossible. Plus, there are several systems used to assign values in Hebrew gematria, only one of the reasons that it's generally a mistake to trust the interpretations of casual adherents.

A gematria calculator site I found that did give the same numbers reported in the video called its system "simple gematria," assigning values to each letter of the English alphabet based on its order – one for A, two for B, and so on.

It was one of many gematria systems that the calculator site offered, also including "Jewish Gematria" – which it still, somehow, explained in English letters.

Numerology or arithmancy is not a uniquely Jewish concept. Cultures throughout history have ascribed numbers to words or letters and used mathematics to attempt to divine the future or understand the present. But I've never before heard the term "gematria" used to refer to a non-Jewish numerological system.

Yet it turns out that of the wealth of gematria sites in the wide world of the internet, few pay much, if any, attention to Judaism, Hebrew or Kabbalah. Some even claim, bafflingly, that gematria isn't specifically Jewish.

It shouldn't necessarily be surprising that there's a broad set of spiritualists, mystics and conspiracy theorists deeply into gematria who have no interest in, or knowledge of, its roots. Many far right groups, such as QAnon, have adopted or appropriated a mishmash of shamanic, New Age and mystic practices to further confirm their belief in various conspiracy theories – be they that Michael Jackson is alive, as the woman in the video clip also claims, or that Trump is a socalled "lightworker."

These types of mystic practices are attractive to conspiracy theorists because they are unfamiliar enough to feel mysterious, exotic and ancient – and therefore spiritually authoritative. Just like a conspiracy theory, they give the sense of being in touch with a powerful but secret world few are aware of.

Researcher Charlotte Ward dubbed the phenomenon "conspirituality" in a paper published in 2011, but it's nothing new. Even Hitler was briefly into pagan mysticism, and other Nazi leaders such as Himmler were practitioners of Western occultism.

When traditions and ideas are absorbed piecemeal, it's easy to divorce them from their roots, and even incorporate a practice into an ideology that is prejudiced against the source of that mystic tradition. That's how you find a woman at a MAGA rally – where it's safe to assume that some attendees might believe antisemitic conspiracies about, say, secret cabals ruled by George Soros – deeply entrenched in gematria. Or how you find Kabbalah in the roots of the Germanic Volk movement that preceded, and helped birth, Nazism.

The real appeal of these co-opted mystic practices is that, misused in the right way, they reinforce whatever beliefs someone is looking to confirm. There are hundreds of ways to calculate and recalculate any word or phrase, or draw parallels through doubling or halving values to relate words.

After all, according to one gematria calculator, the word "gematria" has the same value as "foolish" – but also "messiah." And "horse." It's totally obvious what that means. **HW** 

# The Judge Who Signed the FBI's Mar-A-Lago Warrant is Facing Violent Antisemitic Threats

#### **By Madeline Fixler**

(JTA) – Bruce Reinhart, the federal judge in Florida who signed the warrant allowing the FBI to raid former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago property last Tuesday, has been hit with a wave of antisemitic threats online.

The outburst has appeared on rightwing social media platforms and message boards, where users have published the judge's name, address and personal information. Threats have been directed at his children and supposed family

#### members as well.

Reinhart, who appears to be a member of the board of Temple Beth David in Palm Beach Gardens, has been a magistrate judge for the Southern District of Florida since 2018.

Calls for violence have accompanied antisemitic slurs and conspiracy theories, many referencing how Reinhart represented former employees of Jeffrey Epstein during a case involving the late convicted sex trafficker in 2008. Prior to the Epstein case, Reinhart worked as a federal prosecutor and then in a private practice until 2018.

One user on 4chan, an online message board known for racist activity, wrote: "About that Judge that signed the search Warrant...Bruce Reinhart once quit his job as a U.S. Attorney to work for Jeffrey Epstein." Another responded writing, "That is a k\*\*\*. And a pedophile ... He should be tried for treason and executed." "I see a rope around his neck," wrote a user on the separate pro-Trump message board formerly called TheDonald, according to Vice News.

The Mar-a-Lago raid concerned confidential documents that Trump allegedly removed from the White House when he left in 2021. Subsequent right-wing outrage from many of his supporters has included calls for civil war and abolishment of the FBI and IRS. **HW** 

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#### **THE HEBREW WATCHMAN** Serving the Memphis community for 96 Years



# Johnny Depp, **Fresh off His** Defamation Trial, is **Directing** a **Film About** Jewish Italian Painter Modigliani

#### **By Andrew Lapin**

(JTA) - Riding a wave of tabloid notoriety after winning his highly publicized defamation lawsuit against exwife Amber Heard, Johnny Depp is planning to direct a biopic about a different troubled figure: the Jewish Italian painter Amedeo Modigliani.

The "Pirates of the Caribbean" star is partnering with Oscar-winning actor Al Pacino to produce the film, which will be adapted from the 1979 play "Modigliani" by Dennis McIntyre. It will chronicle the life of the artist whose portraits and sculptures of Parisian women (often in the nude, with elongated faces and limbs) posthumously made him the toast of the art world in the early 20th century.

"The saga of Mr. Modigliani's life is one that I'm incredibly honored, and truly humbled, to bring to the screen," Depp said in a statement. "It was a life of great hardship, but eventual triumph - a universally human story all viewers can identify with."

The production was first reported by the Hollywood Reporter. No casting announcements were made yet, but given that the artist died at 35 from tuberculosis, it's hard to imagine either Depp, 59, or Pacino, 82, would play him.

Born to a Sephardic Jewish family in Livorno in 1884, "Modi" lived a short life marked by constant illness, drug and alcohol abuse and a large number of lovers (including the painter Jeanne Hébuterne, who, eight months pregnant with his child, committed suicide the day after he died). Though he completed hundreds of paintings and sculptures, Modigliani wouldn't find recognition until years after his death in 1920.

Modigliani very occasionally explored Jewish themes in his art, including in a famous 1908 painting, "The Jewess," but he was always conscious of his Jewish identity, according to his biographers. That identity was explored in a 2017 exhibit at New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage. Depp's film would be the fourth Modigliani biopic. A 2004 effort starring Andy Garcia was trashed by critics, with The New York Times calling it "catastrophic." Along with an already announced role as King Louis XV in an upcoming biopic of the royal mistress Jeanne du Barry, Depp is hoping to use the Modigliani film to mount a Hollywood comeback after a closely scrutinized trial that divided the entertainment industry. During the trial, Heard and her attorneys painted a vivid picture of Depp as a serial abuser, while he and his team aimed to depict her as a manipulative liar. The ugliness of the trial spilled onto social media, where armies of Depp fans (many of whom were later revealed to be bots) mobilized against Heard. The jury ruled all but one count in Depp's favor and the remaining one in Heard's; both sides have appealed the case. HW



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# Hollywood Star Marlee Matlin to Kick Off Series at MJCC: Let's Talk...More!



Marlee Matlin Credit: Meagan Shuptar

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On November 13, 2022, in the Belz Theater of the Orgel Family Performing Arts Center at the Memphis Jewish Community Center, Oscar Award winning actress and NY Times Best Selling Author, Marlee Matlin will kick off the MJCC's Let's Talk...More! Series. This exciting inaugural event will also be the grand reopening of the Belz Theater, unveiling major renovations that have enhanced the space into a state-of-the-art venue for films, speakers and performances.

What sparked this program? Well, of course we all know that we are living in a time of extreme divisiveness. Some have chosen to avoid tough conversations with friends and foes, some are unfortunately losing relationships over opposing opinions, others make impulsive judgments and many no longer seek to understand. It's a time in which some enter debates and conversations perhaps only attempting to be "right" and to change everyone's minds because there must be only one answer.

"Let's Talk...More!" focuses on getting back to the basics, to lean on the age-old Jewish tradition of healthy debate and conversation in a respectful and constructive way. We will be focusing on critical communication skills, the importance of understanding one's past experiences and how they shape a person's beliefs, and that it's crucial for us to question but not judge. Most importantly, we must invest in each other. We must invest the time to get to know each other more than just what we see on the surface. We must understand that there are at least two sides to every conversation, and we must find middle ground for us to move forward in a positive way.

We are thrilled to have Marlee Matlin launching this series as our keynote speaker. For this first in-person presentation, Matlin plans to take attendees through the highs and lows of her Hollywood career, journeys as an activist and struggles and victories as a deaf person. She boldly challenges audiences to advocate for equity, inclusion, acceptance and access for all people to endeavor to live a life without judgment of others.

Marlee Matlin received worldwide critical acclaim for her film debut in Paramount Pictures' "Children of a Lesser G-d," for which she received the Academy Award for Best Actress. At age 21, she became the youngest recipient of the Best Actress Oscar and only one of four actresses to receive the honor for her film debut. In addition to the Oscar, Marlee received the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress in a Drama. In 2021, Marlee was nominated once again as Executive Producer for the Live Action Short, "Feeling Through." And in 2022, her Apple TV+ film "CODA" swept every category it was nominated in at the 2022 Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

The MJCC invites you to join us for this inspiring kickoff event for our "Let's Talk...More!" series. Follow up events will be geared towards learning about ourselves and each other and will have participants engaging in conversations with each other to better understand additional perspectives. Dates for the follow up events are November 20 at 4 p.m., December 1 at 7 p.m., and December 11 at 4 p.m. Each of these events will open with a speaker from among the leaders of our community including our own Director of the Center for Jewish Life and Learning at the MJCC Rabbi Abe Schacter-Gampel. More information regarding the other speakers will be announced soon.

Please join us in working toward changing the culture of our debates and conversations, so we reach mutually beneficial solutions together. For more information, visit www.jccmemphis.org or call 901-761-0810. **HW** 

# Birth Announcement

#### Harvey Machin Cooper

Proud parents Elliott and Jonathan Cooper joyfully welcome Harvey Machin Cooper, Shefa ben Yonatan v'Eliana, who was born on August 5, 2022. Proud grandparents are Mary Anne and Jim Machin, Steve Cooper and Diane Boswell Cooper. Welcoming him home is big brother Benjamin. "We are so blessed and grateful for our new family of four," says Jonathan. **HW** 

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### 'Rushdie's Attacker had Direct Contact with Iran's Revolutionary Guards'



Salman Rushdie at Le Livre sur la Place in 2018. Credit: ActuaLitté via Wikimedia Commons.

#### By Neta Bar

(Israel Hayom via JNS) – Hadi Matar, who attempted to murder writer Salman Rushdie last week, is believed to have had direct contact with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps via social media, Vice World News reported last Sunday.

A Mideast intelligence source told the outlet that it was "clear" that at some point before the attack, Matar – who was born in the United States to Lebanese parents – had been in contact with "people either directly involved with or adjacent to the" IRGC's elite Quds Force. The extent of the IRGC's involvement in the attack remained unclear, however, the source added.

In an interview with Daily Mail, Matar's mother said that her son had become radicalized following a monthlong trip to Lebanon in 2018. Silvana Fardos expected her son to return "motivated," but instead he became "a moody introvert" and refused to socialize with family and friends.

Matar, 24, appeared in court last Sat-

urday, pleading not guilty to charges of attempted murder and assault.

He attacked Rushdie, who has long been targeted by the Iranian regime over a book he authored that offers a critical view of Islam, in western New York last Friday, stabbing him three times in the neck and four times in the stomach.

Following hours of surgery, the Indian-born writer was on a ventilator and unable to speak as of last Friday evening, according to his agent, Andrew Wylie, but a day later had regained the ability to breathe on his own. The novelist was likely to lose an eye and had nerve damage in his arm and wounds to his liver, Wylie said in an email.

The attack comes more than 30 years after Iran's late leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini called for his death in response to Rushdie's book "The Satanic Verses," causing Rushdie to require round-the-clock security at various points in his life.

This article first appeared in Israel Hayom.

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# **Tech Sector Turmoil and the Bear Market**

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com fa.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael-stein

During the intensely volatile first 100 trading days of 2022, the stocks of companies in the S&P 500 index delivered their worst performance since 1970.<sup>1</sup> The S&P 500 continued to tumble, and the benchmark index descended into a bear market – typically defined as a sustained drop in stock prices of at least 20% – on June 13, 2022. When the market closed, the S&P 500 had dropped 21.8% from its January 3 peak, and the tech-heavy NASDAQ, already in bear territory, had plunged 32.7% from its November 19, 2021, peak.<sup>2</sup>

Some investors who are nervous about the future and their portfolios seem to have taken a defensive stance by selling riskier assets, including investments in growth-oriented technology stocks.

What's Triggering Market Volatility? Throughout 2021, U.S. businesses dealt with unpredictable demand shifts and supply shocks related to the pandemic, but near-zero interest rates and trillions of dollars in pandemic relief supported consumer spending, boosted economic growth, and drove record corporate profits. Companies in the S&P 500 posted profits in 2021 that were 70% higher than in 2020 and 33% higher than in 2019, which helped fuel a stock market total return of nearly 29%.<sup>3-4</sup>

But in the first months of 2022, investors began to worry that tighter monetary policies by the Federal Reserve - intended to cool down stubbornly high inflation - would stifle economic growth and cause a recession. Prices began rising in the spring of 2021 due to high demand, supply-chain issues, and a labor shortage that pushed up wages. Inflation picked up speed in early 2022 when China's COVID-19 lockdowns dented the supply of goods, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent global food and fuel prices through the roof. In May 2022, the Consumer Price Index rose at an annual rate of 8.6%, a 40-year high.5

The relentless acceleration of price increases puts pressure on the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) to act aggressively to tame inflation. At the June meeting, the FOMC raised the benchmark federal funds rate by 0.75% (to a range of 1.50%–1.75%). This was the largest increase since 1994, and according to Fed Chair Jerome Powell, another 0.50% or 0.75% hike could follow in July.<sup>6</sup>

Rising interest rates push up bond yields, and the opportunity for higher

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Mike Stein Managing Director - Investments returns from lower-risk bonds makes higher-risk stocks less attractive. Moreover, stock investors are buying a portion of a company's future cash flows, which become less valuable in an inflationary environment. Higher borrowing costs can also crimp consumers' spending power and cut into the profits of companies that rely on debt.

#### The Downside of Domination

Stocks in the S&P Information Technology Sector Index, which fell 29.2% from a January 3 high, have been hit harder than the S&P 500 as a whole. Plus, like many benchmark indexes, the S&P 500 is weighted by market capitalization (the value of a company's outstanding shares). This gives the largest companies, most of which are in the tech sector, an outsized role in index performance. As of May 31, the information technology sector still accounted for 27.1% of the market cap of the S&P 500, compared with weightings of 14.4% for health care and 11.2% for financials, the next-largest sectors. Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, and Amazon, respectively, are the four most valuable companies in the index; Nvidia is ranked ninth and Meta has fallen to number 11.7

Tech stock gains drove the market to new heights, but when their share values began to fall, they dragged the broader indexes down with them. A Wall Street Journal analysis of market data through May 17 found that just eight of the largest U.S. companies – the six previously mentioned, plus Netflix and Tesla (in the consumer discretionary sector) – were responsible for an astounding 46% of the S&P 500's 2022 losses (on a total return basis).<sup>8</sup>

#### **Takeaways for Investors**

Spreading investments among the 11 sectors of the S&P 500 is a way to diversify stock holdings. But over time, a stock portfolio that was once diversified can become overconcentrated in a sector that has outperformed. Tech sector stocks notched huge total returns of about 50% in 2019, 44% in 2020, and 35% 2021, so you may want to rebalance your portfolio if you find yourself overexposed to this highly volatile sector. (Rebalancing involves selling some investments in order to buy others. Selling investments in a taxable account could result in a tax liability.)<sup>9</sup>

Some market analysts view this year's price declines as a painful but overdue repricing of stocks with valuations that had grown excessive. The forward price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio of companies in the S&P 500 fell from 23.3 at the end of 2021 to 17.8 in May 2022, much closer to the 10-year average of 16.9.<sup>10-11</sup> fast-rising inflation and higher borrowing costs – and the stock market is no fan of uncertainty. Disappointing economic data and company earnings reports could continue to spark volatility.

It's not easy to take troubling headlines in stride, but if you have a sufficiently diversified, all-weather investment strategy, sticking to it is often the wisest course of action. If you flee the market during a downturn, you won't be in a position to benefit from upward swings on its better days. And if you continue investing regularly for a longterm goal such as retirement, a down market may be an opportunity to buy more shares at lower prices.

The return and principal value of stocks fluctuate with changes in market conditions. Shares, when sold, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Diversification is a method used to help manage risk. It does not guarantee a profit or protect against investment loss. The S&P 500 is an unmanaged group of securities that is considered representative of the U.S. stock market in general. The performance of an unmanaged index is not indicative of the performance of any specific investment. Individuals cannot invest directly in an index. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. Actual results will vary. Dollar-cost averaging involves continuous investments in securities regardless of fluctuating prices, and it does not ensure a profit or prevent a loss. Consider your financial ability to continue making purchases during periods of low and high price levels.

- 1) SIFMA, 2022
- 2) Yahoo! Finance, 2022
- 3) The New York Times, May 31, 2022
  4, 7, 9–10) S&P Dow Jones Indices, 2022
  5) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022
  6) The Wall Street Journal, June 15, 2022
  8) The Wall Street Journal, May 19, 2022
  11) FactSet, 2022

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#### **OBITUARIES**



#### Jack Norman Bisno

Jack Norman Bisno, 91, of Memphis, died peacefully at home on August 4, 2022. Dr. Bisno was a loving son, father, uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend. He was a member of Baron Hirsch Synagogue and the Memphis Jewish Community Center.

Dr. Bisno was born and raised in Memphis where he went to Snowden Elementary and Junior High and Central High School. He attended Vanderbilt University and then University of Tennessee College of Dentistry. Following dental school, Dr. Bisno served in the Air Force at Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City, Louisiana. He was a member of Zeta Beta Tau Fraternity, The American Dental Association, Tennessee Dental Association, Memphis Dental Society, American Endodontic Society and Alpha Omega Dental Society. He was a professor of Endodontics at the University for several years. He served on the board of Baron Hirsch Synagogue for many years.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Ralph and Rosella Katz Bisno, his wife, Beryl Shainberg Bisno, and his brother, Dr. Alan L. Bisno. He is survived by his children, Eileen (Irv) Cherny, Edward (Jayne Jamison) Bisno and Diane (Michael) Kaplan, 11 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren and 4 great-granddogs.

Dr. Bisno practiced dentistry for more than 55 years and was one of the first endodontists in Memphis. He treated three generations of many Mid-south families and created wonderful smiles for his patients, friends and family with his talents and personality. All patients were immediately comfortable in his presence.

A lifelong fitness enthusiast long before it was popular, Dr. Bisno managed to fit multiple swimming and weight workouts into his busy schedule each week. He swam over 1000 miles in his lifetime.

His funeral was held on August 8, 2022, at Baron Hirsch Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, the family requests memorials be made to the Baron Hirsch Synagogue Sally Kaplan Fund or the charity of your choice. **HW** 

### '*My Unorthodox Life' Family Wins* \$25,000 for Anti-Child Marriage Group on 'Celebrity Family Feud'

#### By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) – On Netflix's "My Unorthodox Life," both Julia Haart and her older daughter, Batsheva, said they regretted getting married as teenagers, the norm in their Orthodox Jewish community.

So, when the family landed a spot on "Celebrity Family Feud," the star-studded version of the classic TV game show, they said anything they won would go to a group dedicated to opposing child marriage.

On the episode that aired last Sunday night, the Haarts prevailed over a set of personalities from the Bravo reality-TV show "Summer House" and sent \$25,000 to VOW for Girls, a nonprofit that aims to eliminate the 12 million marriages a year that take place globally involving girls younger than 18.

"My daughter, Batsheva, and I were married off as teenagers," Julia Haart wrote in an Instagram post promoting the family's appearance. "That is not something that any teenager should have to do." (Both women were married at 19.)

Three of Julia Haart's four children – Batsheva, Shlomo and recent Birthright Israel traveler Miriam – joined her in competing on the show, along with Robert Brotherton, her assistant-turned-business-partner whose own family drama was a prominent storyline in the first season of "My Unorthodox Life." They volunteered answers to questions about what makes a kiss bad – "No passion," Shlomo Haart suggested – and what parents do after their kids leave home, among others, ultimately eking out a victory over the "Summer House" crew.

The apparently close-knit family has undergone some major life changes since the Netflix show focused on Julia Haart's departure from Orthodoxy and subsequent career in fashion in a first season that aired last summer. Both Julia and Batsheva went through divorces, with Batsheva and Ben Weinstein citing their marriage at a young age as a reason for strain.

Julia Haart's acrimonious divorce from Silvio Scaglia cost her her role at Elite World Group, the fashion company where they were co-CEOs. Her firing reportedly took place as cameras rolled for taping a second season of "My Unorthodox Life." But while Julia Haart announced the second season on "The Ellen Degeneres Show" last year, Netflix has not yet set a release date. **HW** 

### Polio Detected in NYC Wastewater as Data Reveals Heavily Orthodox Williamsburg is Vulnerable

#### **By Jacob Henry**

(New York Jewish Week) – Polio has been detected in New York City wastewater, three weeks after a Jewish man in Rockland County was diagnosed with the first polio case in the U.S. in 10 years.

The announcement suggests that the potentially deadly virus is circulating in the city, officials say.

New York City and State health officials made the joint announcement last Friday. Traces of polio had previously been found in wastewater samples from Rockland and Orange Counties, north of the city.

"The risk to New Yorkers is real but the defense is so simple – get vaccinated against polio," New York City Health Commissioner Ashwin Vasan said in a statement. "Polio is entirely preventable, and its reappearance should be a call to action for all of us."

After the Rockland man was identified as an Orthodox Jew, attention turned to the Orthodox Jewish communities in suburban New York and Brooklyn, where there are pockets of people resistant to getting vaccines. Williamsburg, Brooklyn - home to one of the largest Orthodox Jewish populations in the state – has the city's lowest rate of polio vaccination, with a 56.3% of children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years having had three doses of the vaccine, according to the New York Citywide Immunization Registry. The press release said that "of particular concern are neighborhoods where coverage of children aged six-months to five-years-old with three doses of polio vaccine is less than 70%, putting these children at risk of contracting polio."

City health officials held a conference call with leaders of Brooklyn's haredi Orthodox community. During the call, officials from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene urged the leaders to encourage members of the city's large haredi and Hasidic communities to get the polio vaccine.

The United Jewish Organization of Williamsburg, which represents the Satmar Hasidic community in Brooklyn, urged the community to get vaccinated in a press release sent out almost two weeks ago.

When the New York Jewish Week reported on the conference call on Aug. 3, Rabbi David Niederman, the organization's executive director, said, "people are vaccinated here" in Williamsburg.

"Polio is something that when people hear about it, they shiver," Niederman said. "Everybody is concerned."

After Williamsburg, Battery Park City is the second-least vaccinated New York neighborhood against polio at 58%, followed by Bedford-Stuyvesant/ Ocean Hill/Brownsville with 58.4%, Bedford-Stuyvesant/Clinton Hill/Fort Greene with 62.5% and East Williamsburg with 65.4%. In a press release, State Health Commissioner Mary T. Basset said that the detection of polio in the city is "alarming, but not surprising." vaccinated to get vaccinated to protect themselves. For more information on

polio vaccinations, visit health.ny.gov/ polio HW

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Citywide, 86.2% of children have been vaccinated against polio.

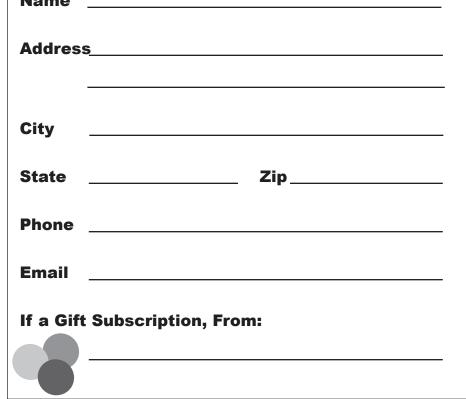
The New York State Department of Health said that Rockland County, which also has a sizable Orthodox population, currently has a polio vaccination rate of 60.5% among 2-year-olds, compared to the statewide average of 79.1%.

Shortly after the Rockland polio patient was announced July 21, New York "For every one case of paralytic polio identified, hundreds more may be undetected," Basset said.

She added that the State Health Department is "responding urgently, continuing case investigation and aggressively assessing spread."

As of press time, the Rockland county man – described by a source wishing to remain anonymous as a "young adult, in a wheelchair" who "got married recently" – is the only known case of polio. According to the source, he is home from the hospital and reportedly living at his parents' home with his wife.

Officials are urging anyone who is un-



# Love's Old, Sweet Song



Editor's note: This story is being reprinted in memory of Ted Roberts in appreciation of his longtime service as a newspaper columnist.

#### **By Ted Roberts**

It wasn't intended as a long visit. We'd drop by the Senior Golden Community Complex – not the "old folk's home," as we used to call it. I'd visit for an hour or so with a much-beloved relative who had lost both her zest and strength for independent living. By tomorrow she would have forgotten our visit and maybe my name. But somewhere, deep down, she'd know we came, we cared.

But as we pushed through the front door of the foyer, we saw we were intruding on one of their frequent programs. The foyer was crowded with residents – some in wheelchairs, some on walkers, others seated expectantly. Of all their foes, Alzheimer's was their strongest Nemesis.

The senior citizens (no, no, not old folks) surrounded a performer at the piano who played and sang those plaintive songs of the 30's through the 60's. She

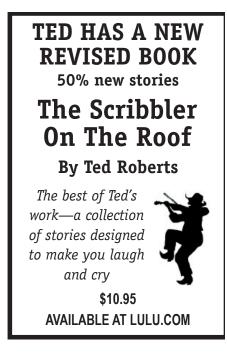
brought the talented ghosts of Gershwin, Porter, Harry Warren and Gus Kahn into that foyer. They came with their music. Like chapters of a dusty book that lay on a shelf. Music that was wrapped around the heartstrings of these seniors. Now, heartstrings were the strongest organ of their body and soul; the part of them that was most resilient, living on yesterday's nectar and strengthened by years of dreaming when they romantically loved and were loved. And it didn't take long to see it still thrived amongst bodies that battled the years. The music rang a bell that summoned the life that was - from its mist of memories. We all live on dreams, either yesterday's or tomorrow's.

We entered quietly and slid into a position behind my relative. With a kiss and a few words of greeting, I stood behind her; my hands on her shoulder, which I'm sure communicated 60 years of sweet memories through my fingertips. She looked up at us in recognition.

The singer was skillful and a master of mental aerobics. To energize her audience, she'd first sound a few piano notes – not many, only a bar usually – and then ask, "OK, folks, which one is that?" I thought for a few moments. But my relative and several others hesitated not a beat. "My Sweet Embraceable You," they shouted. The next quiz was still cycling around my memory when half the group hollered, "Those Foolish Things Remind Me Of You." I did no better on Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust," which brought strong shouts of recognition. They glowed at "The Memory Of Love's Refrain." And they knew the lyrics – they sang along with zest, which provoked me to mumble under my breath my phone number, address, computer password, and daughter's middle name. "Just checking," I told my wife later. She said I got most of them right.

Though they all joined in, each showed a different reaction. My relative sang lustily, perhaps inspired by her visitors. (Was she showing off?) The lady across from us closed her eyes and moved her lips in mute recognition of the words, probably thinking of her first prom – her first kiss. Others simply smiled and rhythmically nodded as though to say they had been there and done that – never mind they now sat in wheelchairs. Some only swayed to the music as best they could and held back tears. It was obvious they had a crush on yesterday.

To them the music wasn't notes on a lined page or even the plinkplank of the piano. It was the life that was. Being of



the human species, and still moderately mobile and intellectually effective, I felt it, too, but not with the fervor of my fellow listeners. And I thought of the friends, lovers, and companions of yesterday who invisibly crowded the room and made us all huddle a little closer. "Memories Are Made Of This" as the old Dean Martin song says.

The syndicated humor of Ted, the Scribbler on the roof, has appeared in newspapers around the U.S., on National Public Radio, and numerous websites. **HW** 

# Insights From Israel Revitalize a Legacy, Reverse a Trend

#### **By Howard Weisband**

The incoming co-chairs of the National Young Leadership Cabinet (YLC) of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) published an opinion piece in the Jerusalem Post on August 14, titled "Young Jewish Leadership in Divisive Times." As one who has always admired and supported the work of the YLC going back to the years when it was a key part of the National United Jewish Appeal (UJA), I read the column with great interest... and now with some concern.

My concern is generated with the extent to which Israel is not a focal point on the YLC agenda and of today's young Jewish leaders.

To quote the co-chairs: "As a collective of nearly 300 young leaders at our Annual Retreat this past week, we announced three major initiatives: a global Jewish fellowship program, a campaign to boost the values of JEDI (Jewish Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) in Jewish communities across the continent and a political advocacy training to deepen relationships with elected officials on a wide range of humanitarian issues that are relevant both to the Jewish commurity and to the health of our demogram." fers to "the resurgence of antisemitism and anti-Zionism worldwide," and later among other issues "Israel's safety and security" is mentioned. But the former is a global matter drawing the attention of multiple organizations and governments, and the latter is in the control of the Israeli Government and its security agencies.

So, what and to whom should be the Israel focus of the JFNA YLC? The Cabinet includes 450 men and women, ages 30 to 45, young leaders representing "65 Jewish communities across North America, who are collectively creating a powerful platform for change that is aligned with our core Jewish values."

It is precisely this age cohort that requires today a significant reinforcement of their attachment to Israel. This factor is reflected in a comparison of the two most recent PEW Research Center studies of the American Jewish community.

In 2013, 61% of American Jews ages 30-49, were very attached or somewhat attached to Israel. 39% were not very or not at all attached to Israel.

In 2021, 52% of the same age group were very attached or somewhat attached to Israel. 47% were not very or not at all attached. felt Israel to be an essential or important part of their being Jewish, with an upward swing in 2021 of those who felt Israel not to be an important part of their being Jewish.

The PEW research has been analyzed to a much greater extent than space allows here. The trend, simply stated, is of great concern.

The most talented of the Federations' young leaders as reflected in the YLC should be projecting their own Israel attachment as a top priority, and then working to increase the same across North America.

To do so, however, there must be a correct understanding of your own organizational history and purpose.

The co-chairs opinion piece closes in part with: "Our founder, Rabbi Herb Friedman, delivered a stirring Rosh Hashanah sermon in 1942, when the world also appeared to be coming apart at the seams. He insisted that despite violence and degradation, "human beings have the power to make over the world in accordance with the principles of peace and justice," and he identified a zestful "new spirit abroad in the world today... the spirit of group cooperation and united willingness to assume the responsibilities for world improvement." young, newly ordained rabbi from HUC serving in a pulpit. In 1947, after leaving the pulpit and serving as a U.S. Army Chaplain in WWII and then collaborating with Ben-Gurion and the Hagana, he became executive vice chairman of the UJA, wherein one of his creative gems was the establishment of the National YLC. In his 1999 memoir "Roots of the Future," he states: "Raising people by strengthening their individual Jewish identities, linking their hearts and souls to the land of Israel and the worldwide people of Israel, influencing their children's attitudes in the same direction, is the central purpose of the Young Leadership Cabinet.... the future is imperiled by present trends of assimilation and large-scale ignorance of Judaism."

The co-chairs should revitalize the legacy of Herb Friedman, z"l, and reverse the downward trend of American Jewish attachment to Israel.

Howard Weisband served as Assistant Executive Director (1975-77) and Executive Director (1977-84) of the Memphis Jewish Federation. Following Aliyah with his family in 1986, he served as Secretary General of the Jewish Agency for Israel through 1997, and then in other senior professional positions in Israel. Now retired, he and Kayla live in Jerusalem. He can be reached at hweisband@gmail.com **HW** 

nity and to the health of our democracy."

That's all admirable, but where is an initiative that specifically has an Israel focus, which historically was the raison d'tre of the YLC?

To be fair, the initial paragraph re-

A similar downward trend line in 2021 is exposed in PEW when examining those in that same age cohort who

That is an important message of universalism. In 1942 Friedman was a

# Eastern Jerusalem Resident Dies After Being Shot While Attacking Police

(Israel Hayom and JNS staff via JNS) – An eastern Jerusalem resident died last Monday morning after being shot by undercover police officers while attempting to stab them, according to the Israel Police.

The officers were conducting a search for illegal weapons in Muhammad Shaham's home when he suddenly attacked, a police spokesman said.

Shaham was treated at the scene before being evacuated to a hospital, where he later died of his wounds.

Israeli security forces arrested 19 wanted individuals throughout Judea and

Samaria overnight last Sunday as part of "Operation Breakwater," which began in March in response to a series of deadly terrorist attacks in major Israeli cities.

Several vehicles, as well as combat gear and weapons, were confiscated, according to the IDF.

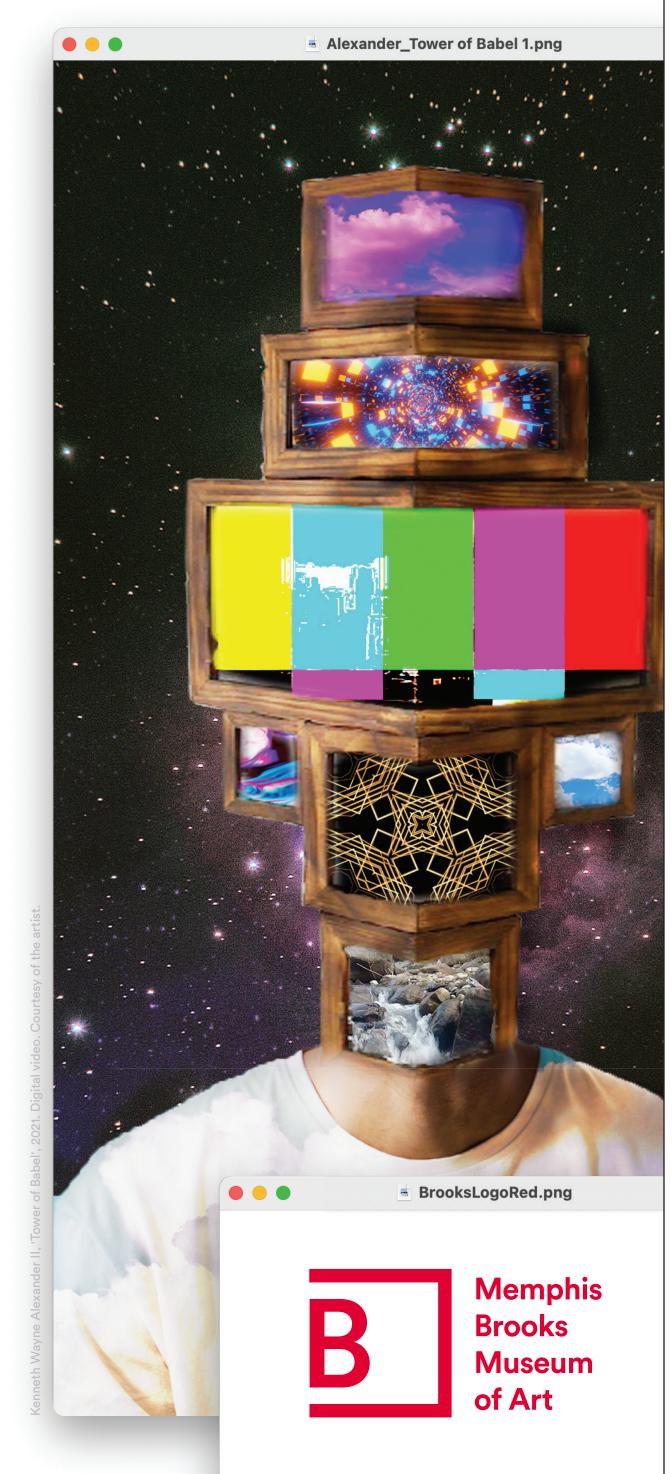
Israeli forces came under fire during operations in the village of Kabatia just south of Jenin in northern Samaria, according to the Israel Defense Forces. The troops returned fire, and also deployed riot dispersal tools, the IDF said in a statement.

No Israeli casualties were reported. HW



An Israeli soldier participates in a counter-terror operation in Judea and Samaria as part of the Israel Defense Forces' "Operation Breakwater," launched in March 2022 in response to a wave of deadly terror attacks. Credit: Israel Defense Forces.





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# Texas School District Orders Librarians to Remove a Version of Anne Frank's Diary From Shelves

#### By Andrew Lapin

(JTA) – A school district in suburban Fort Worth, Texas, has ordered its librarians to remove an illustrated adaptation of "The Diary of Anne Frank" from their shelves and digital libraries, along with the Bible and dozens of other books that were challenged by parents last year.

The book purge at the Keller Independent School District in Keller, Texas, was requested last Tuesday by a district executive in an email, a copy of which was obtained by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. A copy of the email also circulated on social media.

"By the end of today, I need all books pulled from the library and classrooms," wrote Jennifer Price, Keller ISD's executive director of curriculum and instruction.

It was the latest in a string of book removals being implemented at schools at the behest of conservative activist parents and school board members who are challenging a slew of texts on grounds ranging from their LGBT-friendly content to their supposed connections to "critical race theory." Some of these challenges have ensnared books with Jewish themes in the past.

"It's disgusting. It's devastating. It's legitimate book banning, there's no way around it," Laney Hawes, a parent of four children in the Keller district, told JTA about the order. "I feel bad for the teachers and the librarians."

"Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic

Adaptation," by Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman and illustrator David Polonsky, is a 2019 illustrated adaptation of the bestselling diary by the teenage Holocaust victim. The New York Times called the book "so engaging and effective that it's easy to imagine it replacing the [original] 'Diary' in classrooms and among younger readers."

The parental challenge against the book came in February, and the district initially dismissed it, Hawes said. Hawes, who is not Jewish, is on a list of parents who can be called in to serve on a committee to review book challenges.

"When we got 'The Diary of Anne Frank,' we thought, 'This is a joke.' But it wasn't," Hawes said, adding that the complaint was that "the book shouldn't be read without parent supervision."

She suspected that the parent may have objected to the unabridged diary's references to female genitalia, samesex attraction and other sexual matters, which have been deemed "pornographic" by parental challenges in the past. But she couldn't be sure because the parent who challenged the book didn't show up to the meeting.

Hawes' committee reinstated the book and thought that would be the end of the saga. But following school board elections in May, right-wing activists backed by campaign funds from a PAC affiliated with conservative cell phone company Patriot Mobile gained a majority on the board. They are now rewriting the guidelines for responding to parental book challenges and have ordered all challenged books from last year to be removed from school libraries in the meantime.

"Right now, Keller ISD's administration is asking our campus staff and librarians to review books that were challenged last year to determine if they meet the requirements of the new policy," the district said in a statement to JTA when reached for comment. "Books that meet the new guidelines will be returned to the libraries as soon as it is confirmed they comply with the new policy."

The district's statement made no mention of Anne Frank, nor of the Bible, which was one of last year's other challenged books in the district and thus will presumably also be removed from school shelves. Other books which will presumably now be removed include Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," Alison Bechdel's "Fun Home" and Jon Ronson's "So You've Been Publicly Shamed."

The district has not shared any timeline for when the new review policy will be implemented. Under the current policy, any district parent, employee or "District resident" may challenge any book in the district "on the basis of appropriateness."

The literary free-speech organization

PEN America condemned the district's actions.

"The sweeping attempt to remove these titles from classrooms and libraries on the eve of a new school year is an appalling affront to students' First Amendment rights," Jonathan Friedman, the organization's director of free expression and education programs, said in a statement. "It is virtually impossible to run a school or a library that purges books in response to any complaint from any corner."

The Keller district was the subject of a 2021 investigation by the Texas Education Agency, during which Republican Gov. Greg Abbott alleged the district was making "sexually explicit" books available to children.

"This group of people elected to our board, and the crazy parents behind them, decided that the committees must be rigged," Hawes said, describing parents who would attend school board meetings alleging "conspiracies to take over our public schools," wearing shirts reading "Alex Jones Was Right."

Hawes, who said she had become an unofficial activist for district teachers and librarians who felt unsafe speaking out about such policies, said she had been contacted by more than a dozen educators the morning the email went out.

One teacher called her in tears. "She said it: 'I can't even let them read 'The Diary of Anne Frank." **HW** 



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