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# CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

# the Hebrew Watchman

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## Bearing Witness Across Memphis: Holocaust Survivor Mark Schonwetter's Journey of Survival



Mark Schonwetter and his daughter, Isabella Fiske.

By Shoshana Cenker

At the beginning of February, Holocaust Survivor Mark Schonwetter and his daughter, Isabella Fiske, braved the still-icy roads throughout Memphis to embark on a powerful three-day speaking tour.

The Tennessee Holocaust Commission (THC) brought the Schonwettters to town, invited THC's teacher fellows and commissioners to dinner with them, and sponsored the speaking events, which were geared toward students and others, and included stops at MUS, Temple Israel and University High School (UHS) at the University of Memphis.

MUS' program – Building Bridges Across Generations in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day – was held on the evening of Feb. 3. Headmaster Pete Sanders welcomed the crowd of 350, noting how “Holocaust education is a vital part of MUS' curric-

ulum.” Mentioning the recent attacks in Sydney and Jackson, Tenn, he reminded us that hate and violence are “combated through teaching and knowledge.”

MUS History Department Chair Dr. Jonathan Jones then gave a meaningful overview of the Tennessee Holocaust Commission and shared that as a teacher, he serves “as an advocate for Holocaust education in the community,” dedicating the event to the memory of “those lost in the Shoah and in honor of those who survived.”

In a moving ceremony, students Jack Shanker, Isaac Cowen, Meredith Epstein, Maggie Olswanger and Grant Kruewitz lit five candles against antisemitism, racism, hate and in honor of those in the ghettos, camps, children, all who suffered, while Mr. Schonwetter lit the sixth candle in honor of his family – all representing the 6 million Jews who



Mark Schonwetter and Isabella Fiske with MUS Headmaster Pete Sanders and History Department Chair Jonathan Jones.

perished. After the students recited the Kel Maleh Rachamim prayer in English, the feeling of connection was palpable in the auditorium.

The room fell silent as 92-year-old Mark Schonwetter began sharing his remarkable “journey of survival.”

Just 5 years old at the start of World War II, Mr. Schonwetter lived in Brzostek, Poland, when Germany invaded. Before then, his family had a nice life on their farm, with his dad, Israel, serving as the head of the 500-strong Jewish community. Soon after seeing tanks, trucks and soldiers come through the village, Jews were forced to wear yellow Magen Dovid patches and kids weren't allowed to attend public school. When his dad was taken by the Gestapo, the local police chief's wife secretly warned Schonwetter's mother, Sala, that the village Jews were about to be taken,

and they should flee immediately.

Over the next three years, Mr. Schonwetter, his 2½-year-old sister, Zosia, and mother narrowly avoided death at every turn, surviving by constantly moving between attics, barns, forests and farms, evading capture.

While hiding with close friends – the Pilat family – the Gestapo came searching for the Schonwettters. When asked how many siblings the eldest Pilat daughter had, she quickly gave them a number that included Mark, sparing his life. “I was the luckiest kid in the world,” Mr. Schonwetter remembered, “because she was smart enough to include me in the count.”

From there, the Schonwettters walked 15 miles to the Dembica Ghetto, desperately trying to find a spot to stay. Starv-

(See Schonwetter Page 5)

## “A Purim Celebration, New Orleans Style” as Chabad's Annual Purim Around the World Dinner



Seeing Rabbi Klein balance a bottle on his head is just one of the many excitements of Purim at Chabad – and you won't want to miss it!

Chabad will be hosting its annual “Purim Around the World” Dinner on

Tuesday, March 3 at the Chabad Center for Jewish Life, 2570 Kirby Parkway.

This year's celebration will transport guests straight to the French Quarter with “A Purim Celebration, New Orleans Style.”

The evening will begin with the Multi-Media Megillah Reading at 5 p.m., followed by a festive “French Quarter Feast: A Purim Buffet Dinner” at 5:30 p.m., featuring a delicious spread and festive desserts.

Participants will enjoy a vibrant Purim Dinner with authentic New Orleans flair as the Chabad Center is transformed with lively décor and a spirited atmosphere. Adults can raise a glass at the Bourbon Street Bar with festive L'Chaims, while live jazz music fills the room, bringing the energy and soul of New Orleans to Memphis.

The celebration will be fun for the entire family. Highlights include Face Painting Fun, a Balloon Artist, a Purim

Mask Crafting Station and “Masquerade Magic” to capture the spirit of both Purim and the French Quarter. Guests are encouraged to come dressed in Purim or masquerade-themed costumes to add to the festive atmosphere.

“In keeping with Chabad's track record of unforgettable Purim celebrations, this year's New Orleans-style Purim promises to be lively, elegant, and full of joy,” said Rivky Klein, coordinator of the event. “We look forward to welcoming the community for an evening of celebration, unity and true Purim spirit.”

Reservations are required by Friday, February 27 (with an early bird special by Sunday, February 22) and are on a first-come, first-served basis.

For reservations and more information, visit [www.JewishMemphis.com/NOLA](http://www.JewishMemphis.com/NOLA) or call 901-754-0404. **HW**

# The Great Hamantaschen Bake-Off (Nobody Lost)



Beth Sholom Sisterhood bakers, led by Susan Levko (center) and Patti Elster (2nd from left) have baked 5,000 hamantaschen since January.

## By Melinda Lejman

In just a few weeks, the community will gather to celebrate Purim, donning costumes, shaking graggers, reading the Megillah, and giving gifts to friends and family. Leading up to this celebratory holiday, shul kitchens have been filled with the familiar aroma of hamantaschen for Mishloach Manot baskets and fundraising efforts that support synagogue activities year-round.

Beth Sholom Sisterhood has been rolling, filling, baking, and freezing hamantaschen since the beginning of January. "It's a Sisterhood fundraiser, and we sell them for \$16 per dozen. Even Rabbi Sammy (Rosenbaum) pitched in to help!" shares Jeannie Ashford, Beth Sholom Sisterhood member. Pre-sales have begun, and pick-up will be on February 25 and March 1 at Beth Sholom. These hamantaschen are also served at no cost during our Purim festivities and are donated or sold at a discount to Jewish organizations and Shabbat programs.

"We started making hamantaschen one year when there was a need in the community, and it's just grown out of a love from Sisterhood and community service," shares Susan Levko, Sisterhood member. "Our Sisterhood is a vibrant group thanks to so many wonderful women, including Sharon Finkelstein, of blessed memory, Barbara Hellman and Patty Elster, chair of the hamantaschen baking effort. We love coming together for the whole community and being inclusive with our outreach."

Cindi Weinstein, along with Myrna Cohen and Diana Lazar, leads a group of Sisterhood volunteer bakers at Baron Hirsch who use a secret ASBEE recipe for their hamantaschen. "Making hamantaschen at Baron Hirsch Congregation with everyone, I feel the love and family of all the women working closely together," shared Marci Platkin. "This makes me so happy – we all work as a team."

This group also sells a dozen hamantaschen for \$16, and pre-sales have begun.



Baron Hirsch Sisterhood's group of amazing volunteers have fun rolling, filling and pinching several hours weekly.

# THE Hebrew Watchman

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## Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Feb. 20, 2026 / 3 Adar, 5786 .....5:29 p.m.  
Havdalah, Sat. Feb. 21, 2026 / 4 Adar, 5786 ..... 6:26 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Terumah

Even the Barbara K. Lipman Early Learning Center joined in the fun, making hamantaschen at school with Judy Bearman, Sisterhood past president. For the past five years, children at the preschool's Gimmel to Junior Kindergarten classrooms have prepared hamantaschen with pre-made dough, filling "thumbprint" centers with a special chocolate batter and strawberry jelly.

"Making hamantaschen is more than just having fun, although it is a lot of fun! It's a time to tell the story of Purim and brings Judaism into their lives in a fun, engaging and interactive way," shares Judy, who along with Temple Sisterhood made 850 hamantaschen to serve during Temple's Purim festivities.

And so, in kitchens across our community – from Sisterhood kitchen counters dusted in flour to preschool classrooms sticky with jelly fingerprints – the triangular treats keep taking shape. Some are perfectly pinched, some lean a little to the left, and a few burst open in dramatic fashion. But each one carries something more important than poppy seeds or chocolate – it carries connection.

This Purim, when we gather in costume and celebration, we'll taste more than hamantaschen. We'll taste the laughter, the teamwork, the memories, and the love that went into every batch. In this Great Hamantaschen Bake-Off, nobody lost – because the whole community rose together. **HW**

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# Homeland Security Hires Social Media Manager Whose Posts Raised Alarm for Promoting 'White-Nationalist Rhetoric'

By Grace Gilson

(JTA) – The Department of Homeland Security has hired a new digital communications director whose social media content for the Labor Department reportedly raised alarm bells inside the department and beyond for promoting white supremacist rhetoric.

Peyton Rollins began his new role at Homeland Security this month, The New York Times was the first to report this week. Tricia McLaughlin, the Homeland Security spokeswoman, did not confirm the move to the newspaper, but Rollins' LinkedIn profile shows that he began working at the department this month.

Rollins, 21, has been identified as the staffer responsible for posts at the Labor Department that have been decried as making veiled antisemitic and racist allusions. He also claimed credit for a large banner of President Donald Trump's face that was hung from the Labor Department's headquarters, which its critics said echoed fascist stylings.

During Rollins' time at the Labor Department, its social media pages have featured a range of slogans including "the globalist status quo is OVER," "PATRIOTISM, NOT GLOBALISM" and "Patriotism will Prevail. America First. Always," which featured an image of an American flag with 11 stars, the number that appeared on some Confederate flags.

One post on X in November, which featured the phrase "Americanism Will

Prevail," spurred hundreds of negative comments because it appeared to use the same typeface used on the original cover of "Mein Kampf."

Staffers at the department were alarmed, according to The New York Times. "We're used to seeing posts about things like apprenticeships, benefits and unions," a former employee, Helen Luryi, told the newspaper. "All of a sudden, we get white-nationalist rhetoric."

In his new role, Rollins will oversee the Homeland Security social media accounts, including its X account, which has been accused of tweeting antisemitic dog whistles.

Rollins joins a growing list of hires under the Trump administration who have faced allegations of promoting extremist rhetoric.

In March, DHS hired speechwriter Eric Lendrum, who has previously promoted the "Great Replacement" theory and likened conservatives in the United States to Jews in Nazi Germany. In May, the Pentagon also appointed Kingsley Wilson, who has repeatedly echoed antisemitic rhetoric online, as its press secretary.

Last year, the appointments of Darren Beattie as the acting undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs in February and Paul Ingrassia in May to a senior legal role drew criticism for the pair's relationships with white supremacists. **HW**

# The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

Lunch is served at 11:30 a.m., and speakers and entertainment start at noon.

Monday, February 23

Preview Program with Elise Meyer

Join us for a special program with Elise Meyer, Professional Organizer. Elise helps individuals declutter and organize their homes, identify and reduce unnecessary items, and implement smart storage solutions that improve everyday efficiency and ease of use.

In addition to this preview, Elise will present an expanded program on Tuesday evening, March 10, from 7 - 9 p.m. — a great opportunity for those who prefer evening events.

The Monday session will follow our daily lunch and will include additional insights into Elise's work in packing/unpacking and event organization. She'll also share practical tips to help simplify your life, followed by a lively Q&A session.

Wednesday, February 25

A Very Special Field Trip to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

We are thrilled to offer a special tour of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. The visit will be led by a knowledgeable member of the hospital staff, offering a behind-the-scenes look at this remarkable institution.

Founded in 1962 by Danny Thomas, St. Jude remains a world-renowned center devoted to pediatric treatment and research of cancer and catastrophic diseases. It is the only National Cancer Institute — designated Comprehensive Cancer Center dedicated solely to children — where families never receive a bill for treatment, travel, housing or food.

Seats on the MJCC bus are limited to just 12 participants, so make your reservation early!

To reserve your spot for the lunch and tour, please call the Front Desk at 901-761-0810.

Monday, March 2

Mid-South Hobbies Tour and Craft Project

Get ready for another fun outing — to Mid-South Hobbies! Participants will not only enjoy a tour of this fascinating Memphis business but also get to take part in one of their exciting craft projects — completely free of charge!

Owners Aubrey and Don have long supported the MJCC seniors by bringing their projects to us, and now you can explore their full selection in person.

Grandparents — take note! If you're looking for creative and unique gifts for your grandkids, Mid-South Hobbies is an excellent place to find something special. Reservations are required, so please sign up early!

Daily Kosher Lunches at the MJCC

Join us Monday through Friday for a delicious, kosher lunch prepared by the kitchens of the Memphis Jewish Home. Cost: \$2 for seniors

Reservations: Please reserve by 1 p.m. the day before.

Contact:

Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator: 901-259-9220 or [stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org](mailto:stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org)

Steve is available Monday–Thursday, 9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

You may also call the Front Desk at 901-761-0810 to make a reservation.

Don't Miss Out!

Each of these events offers a wonderful opportunity for learning, friendship, and fun. We hope to see you at the MJCC soon! **HW**

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# Kosten Foundation Awards \$225,000 in Grants to Propel Pancreatic Cancer Research in 2026

The Kosten Foundation announced on February 5, 2026, it has approved \$225,000 in pancreatic cancer research grants for 2026, marking the largest annual research investment in the organization's history. The Memphis-based pancreatic cancer nonprofit will award \$75,000 each to the University of Texas Southwestern, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and NYU School of Medicine to support innovative pancreatic cancer research programs.

"We are incredibly grateful to our donors and supporters who made it possible for us to award \$225,000 in research grants this year," said Alan Kosten, chairman of the Kosten Foundation. "We take this responsibility very seriously. Supporting these outstanding research teams allows us to help accelerate progress toward earlier detection, more effective treatments, and ultimately better outcomes for patients facing pancreatic cancer."

The Kosten Foundation continues to expand its fundraising efforts to increase research impact. Community-supported events including the Foundation's annual Kick It 5K run/walk, and Kick It Pickleball Tournament fundraisers, play a significant role in making these record-setting research awards possible while also raising awareness about pancreatic cancer.

Since its founding in 2003, the Kosten Foundation has donated more than \$3.2

million to pancreatic cancer research. Summaries of the 2026 funded research programs are below:

- University of Texas Southwestern

Researchers are collecting clinical data and tissue samples from individuals at increased risk for pancreatic cancer to improve diagnostic accuracy and support the development of more personalized treatment strategies.

- University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Researchers are studying the effectiveness of a gene-based therapy designed to inhibit pancreatic tumor growth and increase the cancer's vulnerability to chemotherapy.

- NYU School of Medicine

Researchers are advancing methods to profile drug sensitivity using circulating tumor cell (CTC) cultures to better predict treatment response and disease progression, including advanced molecular analysis to identify aggressive pancreatic cancer cell populations.

Looking ahead, the Kosten Foundation is actively interested in expanding its research partnerships. Medical research institutions and investigators focused on pancreatic cancer are encouraged to submit inquiries and research proposals for potential 2027 funding consideration. Organizations seeking more information about the Foundation's research priorities and proposal process may visit [www.KostenFoundation.com](http://www.KostenFoundation.com)

to submit inquiries or initiate a proposal conversation.

In addition to its research initiatives, the Kosten Foundation hosts the only free, in-person and virtual pancreatic cancer support group in the Mid-South. The support group meets on the second Saturday of each month and is open to patients, caregivers, and loved ones.

More information about the Kosten Foundation, its research funding, support resources, and upcoming events is available at [www.KostenFoundation.com](http://www.KostenFoundation.com).

The Kosten Foundation can be found online at:

<http://www.kostenfoundation.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/kostenfoundation>

<http://www.twitter.com/kostenfdn>

## About Pancreatic Cancer:

Pancreatic cancer is one of the most difficult cancers to diagnose, largely because there are no definitive early symptoms, and standard diagnostic tests often fail to detect the disease in its earliest stages. Patients frequently report experiencing a combination of symptoms prior to diagnosis, including unintended weight loss, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal or back pain, fatigue, and jaundice. According to the American Cancer Society's most recent estimates:

- Approximately 67,500 people in the United States will be diagnosed with

pancreatic cancer this year.

- Approximately 52,700 people in the United States will die from pancreatic cancer this year.

- Pancreatic cancer accounts for about 3% of all cancers in the United States and approximately 7% of all cancer-related deaths.

- The average lifetime risk of developing pancreatic cancer for both men and women is approximately 1 in 60.

## About the Kosten Foundation:

The Kosten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research was founded in 2003 by the family of Herb Kosten after his death due to pancreatic cancer. Kosten's family sought to improve community support, awareness, and funding for pancreatic cancer, one of the deadliest known cancers. The organization has donated more than \$3.2 million for pancreatic cancer research and hosts a very active monthly support group meeting for patients, their families, and anyone interested in learning more about pancreatic cancer. The Kosten Foundation is hosting its third annual Kick It Pickleball Tournament in May of 2026. Money raised from the Pickleball Tournament helps fund pancreatic cancer research. For more information about the Kosten Foundation, its programs, and events, visit the website at [kostenfoundation.com](http://kostenfoundation.com). **HW**

# These Jewish Day Schools Embracing AI are Reimagining Education for the High-Tech Era



**At the Jewish Leadership Academy in Miami, which designed its classrooms to be fully equipped for hybrid, high-tech learning, AI is a regular feature of classroom instruction. (Courtesy of JLA)**

## By Peter Ephross

(JTA) – In one classroom, students create a podcast featuring an "interview" with the prophet Elijah. In another, instructors teach Jewish prayers using AI-created songs with rhyming lyrics.

Elsewhere, Jewish studies classes are automatically recorded and translated into multiple languages for a multilingual student body.

Welcome to Jewish day schools in the age of artificial intelligence.

With AI opening up new ways to work, learn and play, Jewish schools around North America are finding creative and unexpected methods to use the technology — and in a fraction of the time it would have taken in the pre-AI era.

"There are things that creative teachers used to do, and it would take five hours," said Rabbi Binyomin Segal, instructional technology coordinator at the Ida Crown Jewish Academy near Chicago. "Every teacher knows the

next 10 things they would do if they had time, and now AI can help them do some of them."

AI adoption varies greatly across Jewish day schools. Some haven't incorporated its use too much into the curriculum, while other schools are using the technology intensely.

At the Jewish Community Day School (JCDS) outside Boston, many students prepare for tests with AI-powered games. They use the AI tool NotebookLM to create study guides, flash cards, and practice quizzes, and use AI-powered chatbots, which can simulate conversations with humans, to quiz themselves in preparation for upcoming Mishnah tests.

"Creating a bot with a personality brings some extra fun and engagement to the routine of studying for a quiz," said Rabbi David Winship, a Judaic studies teacher at the school.

At the Gideon Hausner Jewish day school in California's Silicon Valley, the school's assistant head of innovation

turned a lobby area into an AI Tinkery space. Students use it to explore ethical issues around the role of AI in their lives. The space features a rotating set of hands-on activities, from games and manual computer science puzzles to a whiteboard filled with student questions. Students can practice how to distinguish AI-generated images from human-made photographs.

"We realized we needed to integrate AI into our school's culture and values, not just teach it as a tech subject," the educator, Smita Kolhatkar, who previously worked at Oracle for 15 years, told j. weekly in an interview. "That includes bringing it into the Jewish realm, into Hebrew and into ethical discussions."

To avoid over-reliance on AI, Rabbi Tzvi Hametz, director of STEM education and innovation and director of education technology at Berman Hebrew Academy in Rockville, Maryland, said humans need to stay very involved.

"I push hard that it should be human-AI-human; I call it the human sandwich," Hametz said. "We should never use AI for our first stage and our last stage. We need to see where AI was involved in your process, the way math teachers always made us show our work."

At JCDS, Winship employs a little trick to steer students away from plagiarizing from AI. He created a chatbot that students may use when working on summaries of Jewish texts, but the chatbot introduces a line of gibberish into its responses to students so they can't simply copy/paste AI-produced text and claim it as their own.

At the same time, educators warn that focusing too much on plagiarism sends the wrong message, especially when teachers are using AI as a shortcut, too.

"Students will smell the hypocrisy,"

Hametz said.

The Jewish Education Innovation Challenge (JEIC), whose mission is to improve the quality of Jewish education in day schools across North America, will feature several sessions on AI at its annual Innovators Retreat, scheduled for April in Atlanta. Among them: a session on using AI in chavruta (paired) Jewish learning and a session on the importance of balancing AI use with human interaction in the classroom. Said Sharon Freundel, managing director of JEIC, "At the 2026 Innovators Retreat, we will engage in interactive, hands-on sessions to explore how Jewish education evolves its methods — but not its mission — of fostering wisdom, identity, and humanity through thoughtful teaching, even in the AI era."

The Jewish Leadership Academy in Miami, which serves approximately 235 students in grades 6-12 and was built right after the COVID pandemic, designed its classrooms in collaboration with Zoom to be fully equipped for hybrid, high-tech learning. Every class is recorded, and students can access translations of lessons into multiple languages using an AI tool called Flint built specifically for school use. (Many Jewish day school students in the Miami area come from Spanish- or Hebrew-speaking homes and speak English as a second language.)

Rabbi Gil Perl, the academy's head of school, said it's understandable if some teachers are reluctant to use AI, either out of fear of the unknown or out of a concern that AI might eliminate their jobs, but AI is fast becoming an integral teaching tool.

"In two years, I don't think I would hire a teacher who can't leverage AI in

(See AI Page 5)

**Schonwetter...**

(Continued From Page 1)



**With Shelby County Schools closed due to the weather, Temple Israel's audience shifted to include its religious school parents and students from grades 6-12, with some community second- and third-generation attendees.**

ing, they only got a “small container of colored soup water and a slice of rotten bread twice a day,” he shared. “We had no running water, no bathrooms or showers, no changes of clothes. Sick people were everywhere, and dead bodies were in the streets.”

Three months later, Antonio Pilat helped the family escape over a barbed wire fence. They hid in his attic all winter – no talking, no crying, no laughing, no going outside. In the spring, they hid in forests of the Polish countryside, foraging for berries and mushrooms, remaining silent. Come winter, they searched for farmers willing to risk their lives to take them in. Some did, some didn't. One farmer graciously gave them shelter – he dug a hole under his barn's pigsty for the family to hide in and covered it with hay and wood. “It was so small we could only ever lie down, no standing, no sitting,” Mr. Schonwetter recalled. “We rolled over each other to a small corner we'd made a ‘bathroom.’ It was a horrible way to live; we suffered.”

Back in the forest in the fall of 1944, they heard tanks and explosions and knew they needed leave; the Germans were close. As they followed a group running away, they took on false identities with Polish names, not Jewish sounding. When Christian families took

them in, they learned customs like crossing themselves before a meal and going to church to blend in. “We lived day and night in fear,” Mr. Schonwetter said.

“In February 1945 it was suddenly quiet. We saw different soldiers speaking languages we didn't understand: Russian,” shared Mr. Schonwetter of the day they were freed. “One spoke Polish, telling us the war was over, we were liberated. A week later, we got back to our home. Mom hoped our family members would return, but nobody came. No one. Mom moved us to a bigger town, hoping there might be Jews.”

The family also learned their dad's fate from Mr. Pilat's son-in-law, who was forced to dig mass graves in the forest – where Mark's dad had been murdered. Mr. Schonwetter shared that he's in touch with the Pilat's granddaughter and his family had given their family one of their three houses in Poland post-war.

The Schonwetters lived in Poland under Communist rule until 1957, when they emigrated to Israel. Economic hardship led Mr. Schonwetter to seek opportunity in America, arriving in 1961 with just \$5 and no English.

He found work sweeping floors in a jewelry factory, learned the trade, and within five years became a factory manager. In 1971, he purchased Lieberfarb,

a wedding ring manufacturing company, eventually expanding it into a nationally recognized bridal brand. He remained in the jewelry business until retiring in 2018.

Mr. Schonwetter co-authored the memoir, “Together: A Journey for Survival” with his daughter, Ann Arnold. In 2019, Ann and Isabella founded the Mark Schonwetter Holocaust Education Foundation ([mshefoundation.org](http://mshefoundation.org)), dedicated to creating a world in which all people are treated with kindness and respect by expanding and supporting Holocaust education. To date, the Foundation has awarded grants in more than 42 states and reached over 250,000 students.

Married to his wife, Luba, for over 55 years, Mr. Schonwetter lives in Livingston, New Jersey, and speaks throughout the country. He and Isabella ended all the Memphis speaking engagements with a Q&A and requested a favor from the audiences.

“I share my journey of survival with young people, so they'll know the history of what really happened and make sure it'll never happen to you as you grow older and have a family,” he explained, emphasizing humanity not hatred. “No matter if Jewish, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, white, Black, brown, it makes no difference, we are humans. Hatred creates hatred. It's better to live with respect and love for each other.”

“I look out at you, and I see a rainbow. Different colors, different backgrounds – but all human. And that is beautiful,” Isabelle noted. “Survivors are aging out. Soon there will be no eyewitnesses left. And there are Holocaust deniers. That's why it's your responsibility to carry these stories forward. You have a voice. You can make a difference.”

High school students were invited to participate in Memphis Jewish Federation's Yom HaShoah essay contest, and the art contest is for grades 5-8.

[jcpmemphis.org/holocaustartandessay](http://jcpmemphis.org/holocaustartandessay)

The events at Temple Israel and University High School were just as impactful.

“When Mr. Schonwetter spoke with our students, history was no longer a chapter in a book, but a living voice,” shared Thomasena Stuckett, assistant director of academics, UHS. “His story carried pain, courage and truth. This experience is sure to leave a lasting imprint in their minds and hopefully shape the way they see the world and each other.”

“Our students at University High School were blessed to hear from Mr. Schonwetter as he shared his survival story. His message of love conquering all hatred was timely and poignant, sparking discussions amongst our students after they left the event,” added Erica Hipp, supervising ELA teacher, UHS. “He shared with them practical things they could do each day to push kindness in the world – something he posed had the potential to save lives now, just as it did his. We are forever thankful that he shared this story with us.”

With Shelby County Schools still closed due to the weather, Temple's audience shifted to include its religious school parents and students from grades 6-12, with some community second- and third-generation attendees.

In a troubling time when antisemitism and hate are once again rising, Mr. Schonwetter and Isabella's presence and messages in Memphis served as both a warning and call to action: one rooted in family, faith, courage, and – with fewer than 220,000 living Holocaust survivors – the enduring power of bearing witness and sharing the truth.

“Live every day with love not hatred,” Mr. Schonwetter reminded us, “and you'll accomplish so much more in life.” **HW**

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**AI...**

(Continued From Page 4)

the classroom,” he said.

Sarah Rubinson Levy, an educational consultant and author of the book “Crafting the Future: AI and Jewish Education,” says teachers will still be needed in a world dominated by AI use, but their role will change. Rather than merely serving as purveyors of information, teachers should help students acquire social-emotional skills such as grit and perseverance, help facilitate how students acquire knowledge and teach them to think critically.

AI “is the catalyst we desperately need to allow us to rethink and reimagine what education is, should be and can be,” Rubinson Levy said in a recent TEDx Talk.

At Jewish schools, the focus on AI use shouldn't just be adoption, but how educators can use the technology as a tool to support students' connection to their Judaism, said Ida Crown's Segal.

“If you can do this in such a way that can bring people closer to God,” said Olivia Friedman, a Judaic studies teacher at the Jewish Leadership Academy, “then why wouldn't you use it?”

Pretty soon, AI-literate educators will be the new baseline in Jewish day schools. By embracing these tools today, experts say, Jewish day schools are ensuring not just that they keep pace with the rapidly changing high-tech world, but that their students are equipped to navigate this new reality in a way that upholds and even reinforces Jewish values.

This article was sponsored by and produced in partnership with the Jewish Education Innovation Challenge, a bold initiative to radically improve the quality of Jewish education in day schools across North America. This article was produced by JTA's native content team. **HW**

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## 'Reminds Me of Anne Frank': Jewish Seniors are Offering to Hide their Haitian Caregivers as Trump's TPS End Looms



Rep. Seth Moulton, Rep. Ayanna Pressley and Sen. Ed Markey listen to testimony during a hearing on Temporary Protected Status for Haiti held at the Jubilee Christian Church in Boston, Jan. 20, 2026. Credit: Lane Turner/The Boston Globe via Getty Images

By Andrew Lapin

(JTA) – About 500 seniors live at Sinai Residences in Boca Raton, Florida, including many Holocaust survivors. Recently, some of them asked if they could hide the building's Haitian staff in their apartments.

"That reminds me of Anne Frank," Rachel Blumberg, president and CEO of the center, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "There's a kindred bond between our residents being Jewish and seeing the place that the Haitians have gone through."

The seniors were aware of something that is only beginning to dawn on the rest of the country: that in addition to the aggressive immigration enforcement operations underway in Minnesota and elsewhere, the Trump administration has moved to cancel Temporary Protected Status for immigrants from a handful of countries once deemed too unsafe to return to.

Earlier last month, a judge paused the end of TPS for Venezuelans. But barring any 11th-hour changes, about 350,000 Haitians lost their status ending their right to live and work in the United States legally and putting them at risk of immediate detention and deportation.

The deadline sent waves of panic through communities with many Haitian immigrants, including in Ohio – where the Trump team took aim at Haitians in 2024 – and in South Florida.

While the effects will be sharpest for the immigrants themselves, the end of TPS for Haitians is sure to have a ripple effect. At Sinai Residences, for example, 9% of staff members are Haitians with TPS, and they won't be able to work after the deadline. (In total, 69% of the center's staff are foreign-born; caregiving industries are heavily dependent on immigrant workers.)

To make up for the expected losses, the center is redoubling its hiring efforts. Representatives from other Jewish senior living homes say they will need to turn to temp agencies, suggesting a growing inconsistency in senior care. Whatever happens, residents are likely to see their own costs go up as a worker shortage is exacerbated.

But the blows will be felt in other ways, too. Seniors in long-term care facilities develop deep bonds with their staff. Blumberg's residents, she said, "can relate to not being wanted, to being kicked out and coming to America for salvage and freedom and safety and shelter. And they want to be able to protect the Haitians."

Temporary protected status for Haitians and similar communities dates back to the Reagan administration. Because it was offered by executive action, it can be undone without congressional approval.

"Temporary means temporary," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem has said about the administration's decision to end the status. Wednesday, February 4, a federal judge ruled that Noem had exceeded her authority by ending the status, but additional court intervention was needed before Wednesday to delay or deter the action.

With a rapidly aging American population, experts say, the country's seniors will especially feel the effects of restricting immigrant laborers. The policy, to those who come face to face with the workers and those they serve every day, makes no sense.

"We have a workforce filled with people who weathered COVID in a nursing home. This is no small thing. And now you're saying they don't deserve to be in this country? I don't think so," one Jewish senior living director, who requested anonymity so as not to draw

attention to the center and its workers, told JTA. "There will be no caregivers in this country if our isolationist policies are all enforced."

Some argue that Jews, especially, should be attuned to these dynamics.

"The Jewish community employs these populations to care for the most vulnerable among us. And it creates major challenges," said Reuben Rotman, president and CEO of the Network of Jewish Human Services Agencies. Many Jewish social services agencies also serve immigrants as clients, he noted: "This is part of our Jewish identity and ethos, to serve our full community with Jewish values and welcoming the stranger. So this is all connected."

Rotman continued: "The Jewish community depends on these populations. And for them to feel so vulnerable that they're afraid to go to work because they might get picked up and deported, or they might get picked up and sent to a Texas detention center, nobody should have to live with that fear."

Ruth Katz, president and CEO of the Association for Jewish Aging Services, told JTA that senior living executives have no choice now but to familiarize themselves with the federal immigration system.

"They're feeling the need to share as much information as possible, get

as smart about immigration policy and immigration enforcement as they can," Katz said. "Because they're all worried about this."

Back at Sinai, residents aren't waiting for careful plans to be laid. Every worker soon to lose their status is receiving "\$2,000 and a hug" from the center; many residents are contributing more out of their own pockets.

Residents mounted a letter-writing campaign to Washington (only Rep. Jared Moskowitz, the Florida Jewish Democrat, responded, Blumberg said). They are asking what more they can do.

Some Sinai residents will be attending a weekend protest against ICE being held at a local Home Depot, where ICE agents across the country have been seizing day laborers.

And, of course, there is the Anne Frank offer. Others – including, last month, the governor of Minnesota – have drawn criticism for invoking the Holocaust's most famous victim in connection with Trump's immigration policies. But given what awaits those who are deported, Blumberg said, the comparison makes sense.

"The Haitians cannot go back to Haiti. They'll be murdered," she said. "The gangs have taken over the country, and it is life-threatening for them. And our residents do recognize and realize that." **HW**

## James Van Der Beek, 'Dawson's Creek' Star Who Died at 48, had Longstanding Ties to Israel

By Grace Gilson

(JTA) – James Van Der Beek, the beloved star of the 1990s television show "Dawson's Creek" who married his wife in Tel Aviv in 2010, has died.

Van Der Beek died last Wednesday at 48, following a years-long battle with colorectal cancer.

"Our beloved James David Van Der Beek passed peacefully this morning," his family wrote on Instagram last Wednesday. "He met his final days with courage, faith, and grace. There is much to share regarding his wishes, love for humanity, and the sacredness of time. Those days will come. For now we ask for peaceful privacy as we grieve our loving husband,

father, son, brother, and friend."

Van Der Beek's breakout role, playing 15-year-old Dawson Leery in the hit teen drama "Dawson's Creek" in 1998, earned him widespread acclaim and cemented him as a teenage heartthrob of the early 2000s.

Van Der Beek, who was not Jewish, met his wife, Kimberly Brook, in 2009 while traveling in Tel Aviv at a restaurant on Bograshov Beach.

In August 2010, the pair returned to Israel where they were married at the Kabbalah Center in Tel Aviv and toured around the country during their honeymoon.


In a post on Instagram in 2021, Van Der Beek recalled his time in Israel and Hebron, a city in the West Bank, detailing shouts of "Mazel Tov" from Israelis as well as the arrest of their tour guide by Israeli police.


"This is by no means a complete picture of the situation, and I won't pretend to understand the geopolitical complexities fueling this conflict..." wrote Van Der Beek. "But there's a lot of humanity on both sides of that razor wire, and whatever 'solution' fails to recognize that... isn't a solution."

Van Der Beek is survived by his wife and their six children, Olivia, Joshua, Anabel, Emilia, Gwendolyn and Jeremiah.

Among the close friends and associates who mourned Van Der Beek after his death were "Golda" director Guy Nattiv and Becky Tahel, an Israeli-American creative whose career in Hollywood began as a babysitter to the Van Der Beeks' young children.

"Looking back at so many moments, so many evenings that became sacred because you were in them," Nattiv posted on Instagram. "Birthdays, Jewish holidays, crowded tables, loud laughter, NFL games and concerts. James, you weren't just present in our lives you were woven into them. Every piece of you lives inside our hearts now." **HW**





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cones, available for an additional cost.

Your participation fulfills the mitzvah of giving tzedakah on Purim. All proceeds benefit Camp Dream Street, helping create summer camp experiences for children with physical disabilities. This event is sponsored in part by Temple Israel Sisterhood and Brotherhood. This is the one celebration you won't want to miss!

Wristbands are \$15 per child (ages 2+) and \$10 per adult (ages 21+) in advance. Day-of pricing is \$20 per child and \$15 per adult. Wristbands may be picked up early at the Welcome Center or at the door on the day of the event. Scan the QR code in the picture to register or visit <https://www.timemphis.org/form/2026-purim-carnival.html> **HW**

# Rep. Becca Balint Storms Out of Epstein Hearing after Pam Bondi Raises Her Record on Antisemitism



By Grace Gilson

(JTA) – “Are you serious? Talking about antisemitism to a woman who lost her grandfather in the Holocaust?” Balint responded.

Rep. Becca Balint stormed out of Attorney General Pam Bondi's House Judiciary Committee hearing last Wednesday after Bondi deflected questions about the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and instead criticized Balint's record on antisemitism.

Lawmakers called the hearing to press Bondi on a range of issues, including Epstein and the Trump administration's immigration enforcement efforts.

Balint, a Vermont progressive, asked Bondi during her questioning whether Trump had been aware of billionaire financier Howard Lutnick's ties to Epstein when he was appointed as commerce secretary. The most recent files released last month showed that Lutnick had visited Epstein's private island and dined with him years after he said he had cut off ties – and after Epstein pled guilty to sex crimes.

After Bondi refused to answer Balint's question, the congresswoman replied, “I'm going to conclude that the president, in fact, did know about his ties.”

At the end of Balint's questioning, which devolved into shouting as Bondi consistently interrupted Balint, Bondi then raised Balint's record on antisemitism.

“With this antisemitic culture right now, she voted against a resolution condemning ‘from the river to the sea,’” said Bondi, appearing to refer to Balint's April 2024 vote against a House resolution condemning the common pro-Palestinian slogan. (At the time, Balint said the resolution was “yet another way to sow

*Rep. Becca Balint questions U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi before the House Judiciary Committee in the Rayburn House Office Building on Feb. 11, 2026, in Washington, D.C. Credit: Win McNamee/Getty Images*

division and demonize Palestinians.”)

Balint quickly shot back at Bondi's remarks.

“Oh, do you want to go there, attorney general? Do you want to go there? Are you serious? Talking about antisemitism to a woman who lost her grandfather in the Holocaust? Really? Really?” said Balint, before rising from her seat and exiting the chambers.

During her 2022 campaign for Vermont's single seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, Balint, who describes her family as “Jew-ish,” frequently invoked the story of her Jewish grandfather's murder during the Holocaust.

“My grandfather was murdered in the Holocaust,” Balint said in a campaign video at the time. “My whole life I've known that beating the forces set on dividing us takes showing up every chance you get.”

Balint's grandfather, Leopold Bálint, was killed by the Nazis on a forced march from Mauthausen Concentration Camp in 1945 after he stopped to assist a prisoner.

The hearing last Wednesday featured scathing criticism from Democratic lawmakers of Bondi's handling of the Epstein case, with Maryland Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin accusing her of “siding with the perpetrators” and “ignoring the victims.”

“If AG Bondi claims to care about Epstein survivors, why did she reveal their identities but redact the names of the rich pedophiles and sex abusers who hurt them?” Balint wrote in a post on X last Wednesday. “She must take accountability for this cover-up and finally deliver the justice these victims deserve.” **HW**

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## Financial Tips for the Sandwich Generation

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

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More and more adults are feeling the financial squeeze of not only raising a family and setting their own budgets and retirement goals but also helping their parents. Those adults are a part of the sandwich generation. According to data from SIPP<sup>1</sup>, the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation, in 2020 more than 4.3 million U.S. adults were providing more than \$17.5 billion in voluntary financial assistance to their parents. That's nearly the same number as the 4.4 million people who made mandatory child support payments.

**The more you know ...**

Family and money can be very challenging. Many adults don't talk about money with their parents until there is a problem like too much debt, overspending, or a healthcare crisis.

However, it can be easier to address an issue before it spirals and takes on a life of its own. Reversing roles by talking money with your parents may be awkward, but looking at how much money is coming in and how much is going out can save you time, money, and frustration in the long run.

**Budgets can be key**

Budgeting for both your household and your parents can help mitigate risk and financial challenges. Be sure to address their current investments, pensions, mortgages and other debt, and even health care and Social Security. It's important to look not just at what parents currently need but what could be on the horizon, like hospital bills, independent or assisted living, or even memory care or nursing homes. Those are financial challenges that could be looming, and making them a line item as you plan can prove helpful.

Parents often want to maintain their independence, but you may find common ground that makes sense for everyone. Is their house too big for them? Does it cost too much to maintain? Could they save money by downsizing? Where else could you help them

save money? Reducing from two cars to one? Helping them shop for things like groceries or perhaps even bringing them some meals to control costs and waste? Saving them money now could save you money down the road.

**Take care when giving money**

When it comes to providing financial support to your parents, be sure you set limits and goals. What do they actually need and what can you and your siblings afford? It may make sense for you to take over paying their bills as some older parents may have trouble overpaying or simply not paying their bills. You may want to address their online spending as well; that can be a way to lower budgets for things that may not be needed. Yes, it will mean some extra time for you and an adjustment for everyone, but it can streamline bills and help everyone stick to a budget they can live with.

Whatever you decide, make sure you develop a plan well in advance, which a financial advisor may be able to help with. It can be easy for emotion to take over when dealing with finances and family, but you and your parents will likely both be better off when you take the time to ask questions and plan.

<sup>1</sup> census.gov/library/stories/2023/06/adults-provided-support-to-parents.html

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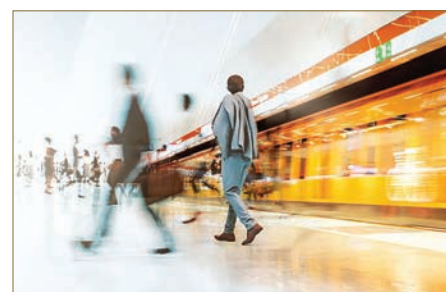


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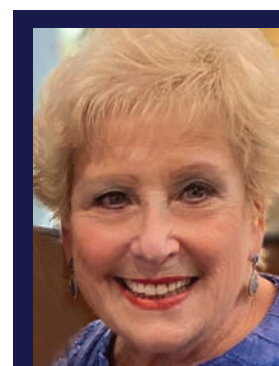
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# 'The Pitt' Tackled the Trauma of the Tree of Life Attack. Here's How Survivors of the Synagogue Shooting Reacted to the Episode.



**Irina Dubova, left, and Noah Wyle in a scene from "The Pitt." Dubova portrays a survivor of the Tree of Life synagogue shooting who is still experiencing trauma years later. Courtesy of HBO Max**

**By Benjamin Cohen**

*This article originally appeared on Forward, reprinted with permission.*

January 23, 2026 – When Audrey Glickman, a lifelong Pittsburgher and a survivor of the Tree of Life massacre, sat down to watch “The Pitt” Friday morning, she knew exactly what was coming. And still she found herself moved by it.

On that Thursday’s episode of the HBO Max medical drama, which is set in Pittsburgh, a patient arrives at the emergency room with a burn. It’s the Fourth of July. Fireworks crackle outside. In her kitchen, the woman had been using a samovar – a traditional metal urn often used in Jewish homes to heat water – when the sudden noise startled her and she dropped it.

The scalding water spilled onto her leg.

When her doctor asks what happened, she offers an explanation that reaches further back than the holiday. “I was on my way inside,” she says. “October 27, 2018.”

She doesn’t need to say more.

The episode never recreates the Tree of Life synagogue shooting, the deadliest antisemitic attack in American history. There are no gunshots, no flashbacks, no swelling score. Instead, the trauma surfaces the way it often does in real life: indirectly, years later, triggered by noise, memory, or the body’s refusal to forget. The scene assumes the audience already carries the weight of that day. That restraint reflects how the show has handled Jewish moments.

In its first season, “The Pitt” established – not through backstory but through behavior – that its protagonist, Dr. Michael “Robby” Rabinovich (played by Noah Wyle), is Jewish. In one episode, after a brutal shift, he sits on the floor of a makeshift morgue, clutching a Star of David and reciting the Shema prayer. The moment is brief and unresolved; he later admits he isn’t even sure he believes the words he’s saying. It’s not a declaration of faith so much as a reflex – what surfaces when language runs out.

In the new episode, the survivor, named Yana Kovalenko and portrayed by actress Irina Dubova, asks Dr. Robby where he goes to synagogue.

“Rodef Shalom,” he replies, naming an actual Reform shul in Pittsburgh.

Kovalenko says she is a Tree of Life member and was at the synagogue on the day of the attack.

“They’re rebuilding,” Dr. Robby says. “Yes, something new,” she says, add-

ing, “Remember, rebuild, renew,” echoing the same phrase Tree of Life uses on its website.

That exchange gains more meaning if you know that Tree of Life is, in fact, rebuilding on its original site – and that, for now, its congregation meets in Rodef Shalom’s building. That insistence on local specificity extends beyond the script. Wyle, who is Jewish and whose parents met while attending college in Pittsburgh, has said authenticity is key to the series, which was inspired by the city’s Allegheny General Hospital.

Glickman said friends texted her about the episode Friday morning, so she was prepared for the reference but was still affected by how it unfolded.

“It’s really delightful,” she told the Forward. Not because every detail was perfect – she laughed about the accents, and the samovar struck her as more inherited than typical – but because the episode captured something truer than procedural accuracy.

“They do a lot of calling out of Pittsburgh,” Glickman said. “They treat it the way other shows treat New York or San Francisco. It lends authenticity, and it’s kind of exciting.”

Television often treats trauma as singular and spectacular, something that happens once and violently to one person at a time. “The Pitt” depicts it instead as communal and environmental, something that hums in the background long after the event itself has passed. “There is no clock on how long it takes,” Dr. Robby tells his patient.

Barry Werber, another Tree of Life survivor, knows that trauma personally. Werber was in the basement with his fellow congregants when they heard

gunfire. He escaped into a storage room with two others, Carol Black and Melvin Wax. “We couldn’t find the light switch,” he later recalled. “It was pitch black.”

After a few moments, Wax, who was hard of hearing, thought the shooting had ended, so he took a fateful step outside the storage room and was instantly shot dead. His body fell back into the storage room, and the shooter, Robert Gregory Bowers, stepped inside. Through the darkness, Werber said, Bowers could not see Black hiding behind the door or himself toward the back of the room.

“To this day, I can’t go into a room and sit with my back facing the door,” he told the Forward.

Years later, that vigilance remains. Werber is still in therapy. He avoids crowds. He instinctively scans buildings for security. He attends synagogue services now via Zoom – partly because his wife is ill, and partly because being in a room full of people still doesn’t feel safe. “It took a lot out of me,” he said.

Werber, who worked for nearly 40 years for the healthcare company that inspired the show, has yet to see the episode. He doesn’t subscribe to Max. “I spend enough on cable,” he said. “I don’t think we’ll get HBO. I’ll see if any of my friends have watched it.”

Carol Black, who was hiding in the same basement storage area as Werber during the attack, said the episode’s portrayal of flinching felt immediately familiar. “Every little unexpected sound still makes me jump,” she told the Forward. “If somebody sneezes and I’m not expecting it, I jump.” She said she has learned to live with the reflex. “You’re never going to get over it,” she said. “You just get used to it.”

Black, whose brother Richard Gottfried was among the 11 people

killed in the shooting, said she was grateful to see the story reach a wider audience. “I don’t want the story of what we experienced to go cold,” she said. “This is a very popular show. People need to know about this.”

One of the episode’s most quietly revealing moments comes when the patient asks the nurse tending to her burns if she is Muslim. When the nurse says yes, the patient thanks her – not for the care she’s receiving in the room, but for what came years earlier. After the shooting, she recalls, it was the Muslim community that showed up, raised money, and paid for funerals.

Wyle, who also co-wrote this episode, told Variety that the interfaith solidarity “was the most underreported aspect of the story, and perhaps the most hopeful moving forward.” R. Scott Gemmill, an executive producer, added: “You can’t do a medical show, set in Pittsburgh, with a Jewish doctor without addressing that.”


The exchange in the episode is brief, almost awkward. The nurse doesn’t know what to say. The patient waves it off. “Anyway,” she says. “Thank you.” The show doesn’t pause to turn the moment into a lesson. It lets it pass, the way lived history often does.

That restraint resonated deeply with Glickman, who remembers the support across religious lines that followed the attack, and the ache of realizing how rare that feeling now seems. “I hope it means we’re going to get past the divisions we’re having right now,” she said. “We were there before. We can be there again.”

She also laughed at a detail few critics would think to note: Before arriving at the hospital, the patient treats her burns with honey. “That is so us,” Glickman said with a laugh. “That is so Jewish.” **HW**

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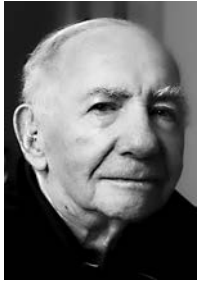
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# Esther, the Spelling Bee Champ



*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

(1/31/12) – Purim is just around the corner. This wild, chaotic holiday demands that we loudly twirl our gregor, get drunk and read the story of our deliverance. My kind of holiday. Food, drink, and a good story, though by now I know the plot so there's no suspense. One of those typical "they tried to kill us – we killed them instead – let's eat." It's the only day my good friend, Herb, a low mitzvah-scoring Jew (he's about 15 out of 633 including the one about muzzling his ox – if he had one) goes to shul.

"I'm a Purim Jew," declares Herb. Though he claims he davens at home a lot. "I'll record my Shabbos services for you," he shouts.

"Uh, no thanks, Herb, I believe you."

"OK, I'll video it."

"Herb, drop it, OK."

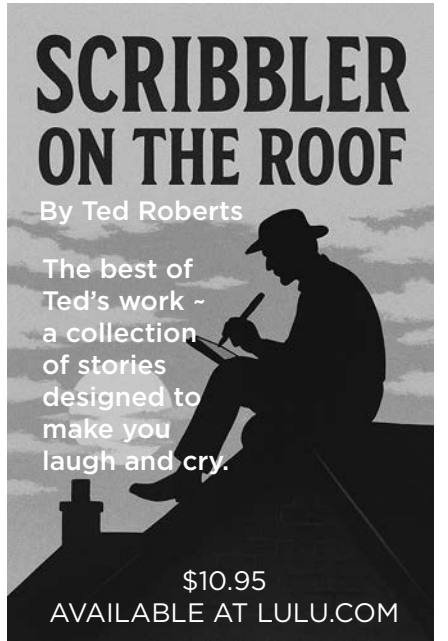
But most Jews don't observe Purim very well because you're supposed to get so drunk you don't know Haman from Humash. But we Jews are such bad drinkers. You go to a Jewish wedding and there's a buffet table groaning with its load of apps (appetizers, not applications) then a seated dinner. And all of the guests at best are sipping iced tea. In a dark corner of the ballroom is a cardboard box with a six-pack of Budlight. It arrived as a 6-pack and maybe due to a couple of Jewish drunks, it leaves as a 4-pack. Though I must admit that I once attended a Purim in a New Orleans temple where a jazz band paraded down the aisle stimulated by a bar set up in the foyer. They didn't know Haman from Halavah. True, I promise.

But back to Purim. We're great gregor twirlers so there's plenty of noise and since we're the People of the Book, we enthusiastically read the book of Esther. So, not bad for us. We're 2 outa 3.

To me, Purim is one of the most exotic stories of our Tanach. We're saved from total destruction – just like our deliver-

ance from Pharaoh, the Haman of his day. But incredibly instead of our G-d with a fistful of plagues, our savior is a young girl – and let's be realistic – with a body full of charms one would assume. Clearly, these were her weapons of salvation. Her shield and our shield. And as I'm sure most readers know, there's not one mention of G-d in the whole book of Esther. Surprising, to say the least. Since as he hardened the heart of Pharaoh, he could have mellowed the heart of King Ahashveros. Maybe He did; but gave all the credit to Esther so that our sages, our historians, would enhance the glory of the softer gender. There's a midrash about Esther (there's a midrash about everything) that King Ahashveros (Ahazveros, Ahashveros, Achasferos, Ahaxueros) loved this young Jewish concubine who was skinny, ugly and obnoxious, but she was the only member of the royal consort who could come within two letters of spelling his name correctly. So, he governed his empire in a constant state of irritation. ("Why, aside from this young Jewess, can't they get it right?")

I do not believe this midrash, I simply



repeat it for your information. Don't forget one other factoid. The ancient kingdom of Persia is today's Iran. Where are you, Esther, when we need you? May the Lord, unmentioned in the scroll of Esther, not stay absent from our current travail. Hillary is no substitute for Esther!

*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*

## SJP Event at City University of New York Law School Casts Hamas Tunnels as 'Decolonial Land Use'

(JNS) – The Students for Justice in Palestine chapter of the City University of New York's School of Law is promoting a campus event described as an "anthropologic investigation" that characterizes Hamas's tunnel network in Gaza as "social organization in resistance to colonization."

In a social media post shared on Feb. 7, CUNY Law SJP invited students to attend a March 5 discussion with Hadeel Assali, an anthropologist affiliated with Columbia University's Center for Science and Society, on "decolonial land use in Gaza" and "the history and usage of tunnels in Gaza."

Assali, whose work "looks at the on-

going colonial legacies of the discipline of geology as well as anti-colonial ways of knowing and relating to the earth in southern Palestine," has a history of radical activism, particularly against Israel.

In 2024, Assali wrote the essay "Notes on the Underground in Gaza," calling the tunnels "an essential form of resistance in Palestine." She reframes Hamas's use of underground tunnels to commit acts of terrorism as a relationship "between indigenous people and the land."

Columbia Faculty and Staff Supporting Israel criticized Assali's invitation to speak at CUNY.

"This is the same lecturer named in the Kasowitz lawsuit for canceling her

class multiple times to encourage attendance at anti-Israel protests," the group stated, sharing a section of the 2024 complaint filed against Columbia University and Barnard College alleging they failed to protect Jewish students.

The Columbia Jewish Alumni Association also objected to the event, stating, "This is how it happens."

"First, radical faculty at Columbia replace scholarship with political advocacy in their own classrooms, and the administration does nothing," the group wrote. "Then, they leverage Columbia's prestige to export this poisonous model to other campuses."

Brandy Shufutinsky, director of ed-

ucation and national security at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, condemned the event, stating that it is "reframing the terror tunnels that held dozens of Israelis hostage, where many were tortured, sexually assaulted and murdered."

"No number of 'teach-ins' can erase the atrocities committed by Gazan terrorists," she wrote. "Terror tunnels are not a form of 'decolonial land use.'"

CUNY Law has faced repeated controversy tied to anti-Israel activism, including backlash over a 2023 commencement speech that prompted condemnation from the university's chancellor and board of trustees. HW

## ISRAEL INSIGHTS Deni

By Howard Weisband

President Herzog is in Australia, Prime Minister Netanyahu is in Washington.

This column is not about the proverbial "Who's minding the store?" nor is it about the always prevalent unknowns in Israel and in the Mideast, for instance:

Will the President warm the Australian Prime Minister and his Government toward Israel? Will the Prime Minister and the IDF Air Force Chief bring President Trump and his team to a clearer understanding of the necessity of more focused achievements in thwarting the Iranian threat?

More unknowns: will Hamas disarm? How? Ditto regarding Hezbollah. What will be the governing structure in Gaza?

Those are merely some of the external unknowns. Internally, when will be elections in 2026, in October or sooner? Will there be a strong draft law of Haredi young men to meet an IDF manpower need, or again an appeasement toward the Haredi parties? Will there be an independent state investigation or a political attempt to determine what went wrong and who had responsibility leading up to October 7?

Finally, the ultimate unknown in 2026 is what will be the next coalition to govern Israel, who will be in and who will

be out after the voters have their say.

All unknowns, and there are more. Israelis always seem to live with unknowns.

Yet there is one known this month that has had Israel excited.

Deni Avdija is an NBA All-Star!

If you are a sports fan, as I am, and follow the National Basketball Association, and perhaps a bit of Israeli sports, you are excited that Deni Avdija, a forward for the Portland Trailblazers, is having a career year. He has been selected as one of the top 24 professional players in the NBA, following an extensive fan vote, and similarly determined by all NBA players and coaches.

Israel values sports competition both at home and on the world stage. Soccer and basketball are the two major team sports, with teams in local leagues and in European competition. Baseball has made some headway in recent years, and Israel will again be fielding a team this month in the World Baseball Classic. At this moment in the Winter Olympics several individuals are competing, including an Israeli bobsled team!

Israeli athletes often bring home medals, gold silver, and bronze, in competitive tennis, judo, gymnastics, swimming, martial arts, and many other

sports in venues across the globe. Israel is also well represented in sports in the Paralympics such as wheelchair basketball and tennis, with many disabled IDF veterans in otherwise good physical condition taking part.

But there has been a special buzz and excitement with Deni Avdija's selection as an NBA All-Star. Why?

Perhaps we only need a quote from Deni himself in the Israeli daily, Yisrael Hayom, (Israel Today) from its front page on February 3: "Am Yisrael (the Jewish people, or the people of Israel) is my source of strength – it is a merit to represent the State of Israel" (my translation). Inside the paper is a three-page spread, pictures and articles, plus quotes from President Herzog and several NBA stars. Included is a column by Tal Brody, himself a well-known American Israeli basketball star from some years ago, titled in Hebrew "Our Name is on the Map."

Herb Keinon wrote in the Jerusalem Post on February 2: Why Deni Avdija's All-Star moment feels bigger than basketball in Israel." He quoted Deni: "This is my country, where I was born, where I grew up. I love my country; there are a lot of great things about my country... I'm a proud Israeli, because that's where

I grew up. I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for Israel and the support the people and fans gave me."

Keinon asks: "... what does that (Deni's selection as an All-Star) say about the country? ...like whenever Israel does well at the Olympics or in the Eurovision Song Contest – it answers an inward need for reassurance. It reminds Israelis, first and foremost, that we are good at normal things – like basketball and singing – not only at war and turning beepers into pocket bombs."

He ends his analysis with: "For Avdija, it's just basketball. For a nation traumatized by war, wounded by global reaction, and always hungry for acceptance, it is much more."

Herb Keinon calls it "normalcy." It is that, plus Deni brings a healthy dose of pride and excitement.

*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*

# Netanyahu Draws Criticism after Asking to Excise the Word 'Massacre' from Title of Oct. 7 Commemoration Bill

By Grace Gilson

(JTA) – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ignited outcry after his office requested to remove the word “massacre” from the title of a bill commemorating the Oct. 7 attacks.

During a discussion of the bill in the Knesset last Wednesday, Yoel Elbaz, a Netanyahu representative, proposed that the title of the bill should use the Hebrew word for “events” rather than “massacre.”

He argued that the bill should show that Oct. 7 was “was not only a massacre – there was also heroism” and said he expected that the full scope of Oct. 7’s devastation would be reflected in its language, if not its title.

“The word massacre will be written within the law – later on, just as it will be written that there was murder and rape and all the things that were done,” Elbaz said during the discussion.

Still, the official request has triggered a backlash at a time when Netanyahu is facing scrutiny over his willingness to accept responsibility for Oct. 7, when 1,200 Israelis were killed and 250 taken hostage during a siege from Gaza that lasted for much of a day.

Last week, Netanyahu released a 55-page document detailing his answers to a state-led investigation into the attacks where he cast blame on his political rivals. Last Wednesday, the Knesset also discussed Netanyahu’s effort to appoint an investigative body instead of supporting a state commission of inquiry, Israel’s highest investigative authority.

The October 7 Council, which represents the families of those murdered during the attacks, wrote that the request for the title change represented “the Prime Minister’s Office’s latest attempt to cover up the October 7 massacre.”

“We are here to state clearly: there was a massacre. We paid the highest possible price for it. We will ensure that everyone responsible is investigated by a state commission of inquiry and also pays the price,” the statement read, adding, “No politician’s blood is redder than the blood of our children, our brothers, and our parents. Shame on you.”

Individual family members also lambasted the wording proposal.

“He will not be allowed to whitewash it,” tweeted Manny Manzuri, whose daughters Roya and Norelle were murdered at the Nova music festival. “What you are putting us through. Dragging us into the darkness that we try to climb out of, every single day anew.”

The parents of Libi Cohen-Meguri, also killed at Nova, published a video criticizing the wording. “There was

no Holocaust, only ‘demographic decline,’” her father, Yariv Yogev, offered as an analogy for the “events” language.

And Hila Abir, the sister of Lotan Abir, also murdered at the Nova festival, spoke at the Knesset hearing. “This law will pass over my dead body,” she said, according to the Times of Israel. “Where is the death of our brothers and children? It was all erased!”

Netanyahu’s political rivals also criticized the language proposal.

“Netanyahu joins antisemites who deny that there was a massacre against Jews on 7.10, and is working to remove the word ‘massacre’ from the law commemorating 7.10!,” the Israeli lawmaker Avigdor Lieberman wrote in a post on Facebook. “There was a massacre, rape, and barbaric murder on a scale we haven’t seen since the Holocaust. So the disgusting attempt to rewrite history – won’t help. We can’t let him escape responsibility!”

In a post on X, former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, seen as a top contender to prevail in this year’s elections, wrote that “only a detached government tries to erase a massacre etched in blood into every Jewish heart.”

Netanyahu’s office rejected the criticism, saying that the bill is intended to “ensure a worthy and complete commemoration for future generations” and contending that the focus on the title was misplaced.

“Contrary to recent reports, the word ‘massacre’ appears explicitly in the bill,” the statement continued. “The bill is intended to commemorate the events of October 7 in their full severity and scope – the massacre, the battles and fighting, the stories of the hostages, the fallen and the returnees, as well as the manifestations of heroism, evil and mutual support of Israeli citizens and the security forces.”

Culture Minister Miki Zohar defended the title change on Kan public radio last Thursday, saying, “We can definitely be vulnerable – but we are not being slaughtered.”

Knesset member Yosef Taieb initially opposed the proposal during deliberations, arguing, “We all know there was a massacre, but the question is whether our children and grandchildren will know there was a massacre.”

The committee ended up approving the request, with the bill now titled “Memory and Commemoration of the Events of Simhat Torah,” though Taieb said that the issue would be revisited before a final vote, according to the Times of Israel. **HW**

# Largest US Labor Union Accused of Ignoring Jewish Concerns During Holocaust Education Event

By Jessica Russak-Hoffman

(JNS) – The National Education Association, the nation’s largest labor union, is being accused of politicizing an online International Holocaust Remembrance Day event.

The Jan. 27 “understanding antisemitism” event was a conversation between Becky Pringle, president of the union, and Amy Spitalnick, CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

“At JCPA, we believe that engagement and solidarity, not retrenchment and insularity, is the way to strengthen our democracy and end the rise of antisemitism, bigotry and hate in our country,” JCPA stated. “Together with our allies at the National Education Association, JCPA is working to provide educators, administrators and school boards with the resources needed to provide Jewish students and educators with safe, inclusive spaces.”

During the discussion, Pringle linked Holocaust remembrance to contemporary activism, citing events in Minnesota and saying that the safety of the Jewish people is “connected to the safety of all” and “is so critical right now, as this administration focuses on stoking fear and division between, within and among groups.”

“Genocide continues to confound us, where even as we mourn the horror and the inhumanity, we are at this moment repeating history,” she said.

Spitalnick raised concerns during the webinar about Jewish educators being

targeted in professional spaces.

“As we’ve seen, particularly since this past spring, increasing violence seeking to hold Jews accountable for the actions of the Israeli government, targeting Jewish people, leaders, institutions here under the guise of protesting Israel,” she said.

She added that Jewish NEA members had shared “the pain and the fear that they felt at various convenings where they were specifically targeted or otherwise ostracized by members simply for being Jewish.”

Pringle did not respond to Spitalnick’s comment.

After the webinar, the union shared resources on antisemitism, including the Nexus Project, which divides Zionism from Judaism, and Bend the Arc, which says that antisemitism is a “key characteristic” of right-wing political movements.

Mika Hackner, director of research at the North American Values Institute, told JNS that the NEA president derailed the purpose of the event.

“Becky Pringle ignored the concerns of Jewish NEA members and used a webinar meant to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day to instead make links to events in Minnesota and call for activism,” Hackner said.

“It is so telling of the organization that the NEA has become under Pringle’s leadership,” she said. **HW**

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**Over the next two years, we will publish 100 Stories for 100 Years – a weekly column spotlighting resident, staff, and lay leader stories with the Home from throughout our history. This week, we are sharing words from our Director of Dining Services, Roxane Thompson.**



**Roxane Thompson**

**By Jasmine Williams**

**MJHR: Tell us about yourself (hometown, education, family, hobbies, career).**

I have been married for 32 years. I am a mother of four, and grandmother to five beautiful grandchildren. My oldest is 39 years old, and my youngest is 32. My oldest grandchild is 16 years old, and my youngest is seven months old. I just like to laugh, have fun and uplift people. Oh, I feed the homeless every other Saturday, and I donate to back-to-school drives and clothing drives. I just do a lot!

**MJHR: How did you become connected to MJHR?**

I was a housewife until the kids graduated from high school. Then I became a CNA at a nursing home in Alabama, where I lived for only 8 months. When I moved back to Memphis, I transferred to dietary, and someone told me about MJHR. My biggest fear at the time was that I didn't have a car, and I stayed 30 minutes away from MJHR. I was contracted part-time. I rode three buses and one cab to get to work. It took four hours to get to work for five hours. Yes, I was determined!

**MJHR: Share your favorite MJHR story.**

I was a pantry aide, and I can't think of the resident's name, but she didn't talk at all. From what I observed with her, she didn't like to eat in front of anybody. So, every time people would leave, she would come back. She would come back to the dining room, and I would be back in the pantry. A couple of days went on, and we would do the same thing. I'd offer her a banana and some crackers. So, every day, I would sit down and talk to her. And when she passed, it was like my grandmother had died. It was just terrible. I really fell in love with that resident because it was like she was trying to tell you something, but she was just speaking through her eyes. I love this place!

**MJHR: What do you wish for the future 100 years of the organization?**

I know, I hope, well, I know the organization will expand. I'm hoping to be



**Roxane celebrates National Dining Services Week with her team.**

here when they do a children's daycare. We have a lot of people here who need daycare for their kids. I know they have a CNA Program, but I hope they get scholarships for different types of programs, because my goal was not to be a Director of Dietary, but I plan on retiring here. That's what I'm looking forward to, continuing education for other departments.

**MJHR: What makes you love serving on the board of the Home?**

I had challenges in my life for 27 years and once I overcame those challenges, I wanted to help people who were going through those challenges as well. I knew I couldn't do a lot, but anything helps. I

go out, winter, summer, fall, and I feed the homeless, give them clothes, give children toys and backpacks. The feeling I get is almost a thrill for me. I don't know if it's a selfish thrill, but the more I do it, the more it satisfies me.

Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab is a not-for-profit nursing home, Jewish in character and environment, dedicated to providing the highest level of care possible with dignity, compassion, and professionalism. Only through the help of generous donors is the organization able to care for those in need. Find more information at [www.memphisjewishhome.org/giving](http://www.memphisjewishhome.org/giving). **HW**

## After 3-Hour White House Meeting, Trump Says He 'Insisted' to Netanyahu that Iran Talks Should Continue



**President Donald Trump (R) meets with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (L) at the White House on Feb. 11, 2026, in Washington D.C. Credit: Avi Ohayon - GPO/Anadolu via Getty Images**

**By Grace Gilson**

(JTA) – Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Donald Trump at the White House last Wednesday in an effort to push the U.S. leader to widen negotiation with Iran to include Israeli security priorities.

"Nothing definitive" came out of the highly anticipated meeting between the leaders, which lasted roughly three hours, Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social immediately afterwards. But he signaled that he had resisted a push to

end direct talks with Iran.

"There was nothing definitive reached other than I insisted that negotiations with Iran continue to see whether or not a Deal can be consummated. If it can, I let the Prime Minister know that will be a preference. If it cannot, we will just have to see what the outcome will be," wrote Trump.

Prior to boarding a flight on his way to Washington D.C. last Tuesday, Netanyahu told reporters that his meeting

with Trump would center "first and foremost" on negotiations with Iran.

"I will present to the president our views on the principles in the negotiations, the important principles, and in my opinion they are important not only to Israel – but to everyone in the world who wants peace and security in the Middle East," Netanyahu told reporters.

During last Wednesday's meeting, which was closed to the press, Netanyahu was expected to push Trump to widen negotiations with Iran beyond its nuclear program, including imposing restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile program and ending Iranian support for Hamas and Hezbollah.

The talks last Wednesday were also expected to center on developments in the ceasefire in Gaza, with Netanyahu officially joining the Board of Peace during a meeting with Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier in the day.

Netanyahu's visit last Wednesday was his sixth to the United States since the beginning of Trump's term. Trump surprised him at an earlier meeting by announcing that he planned to open direct talks with Iran, which has vowed to destroy Israel.

The visit shortly followed talks in Oman the previous Friday between

Iran's foreign minister and Trump administration officials on reaching a potential nuclear deal. Those talks came a month after Iranian leaders ordered a crackdown on civil protesters in which an estimated 30,000 Iranians or more were murdered.

Last Tuesday, Trump told Axios that he was "thinking" about sending another aircraft carrier strike group to the Gulf where he has already assembled a large military buildup, adding, "Either we will make a deal or we will have to do something very tough like last time."

Iran has said it will retaliate if the United States strikes to curb its nuclear program, sparking concern of a war. Last June, the United States struck three nuclear sites in Iran amid the country's 12-day war with Israel, damaging but not destroying them.

In an interview last Tuesday with Fox Business Network's Larry Kudlow, Trump said that a good deal with Iran would mean "no nuclear weapons, no missiles."

"We'll see what happens. I think they want to make a deal," said Trump. "I think they'd be foolish if they didn't. We took out their nuclear power last time, and we'll have to see if we take out more this time." **HW**