

ESSEX JEWISH NEWS

CHANUKAH ISSUE 5781/2020

THE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ESSEX & EAST ANGLIA

Inside your 28-page Community Newspaper

Permanent head for Clore Tikva



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Jeffrey Leader gets the MBE



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It's Chanukah – but not as you know it!

BY MICHAELA BLITZ

MENORAH LIGHTINGS WILL BE STREAMED TO YOUR HOME

CHANUKAH is traditionally a time of celebration for the whole Essex Jewish community.

As part of that, Chabad has, for many years, organised large public menorah lightings across Essex – attracting large crowds and bringing the light and joy of the festival to so many.

The coronavirus pandemic means that things are going to be a little different this year ... but still just as much fun.

The public menorahs will all be in place as always, but the community will be able to view the lightings from the comfort of their own homes instead. Each night, an Essex rabbi will light a menorah at a different venue, all filmed by a camera crew and live streamed for everyone to enjoy.

Rabbi Odom Brandman of Chabad Buckhurst Hill has been working together with his colleagues Rabbi Sufrin and Rabbi Posen, as well as other religious leaders within the community, to plan these events in order to bring everyone together and share the joy of Chanukah during these uncertain times.

Rabbi Brandman told the *Essex Jewish News*: “We wanted to be able to find a way to still do something to celebrate Chanukah that would be safe and adhere to Covid-19 re-



Rabbi Brandman of Chabad Buckhurst Hill prepares for Chanukah

strictions, and we hope that it will mean that more people than usual will be able to join in.”

The online menorah lightings are open to everyone across the community and will be streamed on the Jewish Essex website at 6:30pm each night from Thursday 10 December, the first night of

Chanukah.

Starting in Epping, every night filming will take place at a different menorah and will be led by the rabbi of each community. Timing will be the same throughout the festival apart from the last night (17 December), when it will take place in Fullwell Cross at 5pm

to give everyone good time to be ready for another exciting communal event later that evening ... The Grand Chanukah Drive-In.

The Drive-In style party will be a Covid-19 compliant, non-contact event, with everyone who attends remaining inside their vehicles within designated bays.

Hosted by Chabad NE London & Essex, and including communities across our region, it will be held at The Drive In, Edmonton N18. Attendees are promised a great programme of entertainment including magic acts, jugglers, a band and a live performance from Voice UK contestant Moni Tivony – all broadcast on a giant screen. There will also be the chance to buy kosher food and drink, which can be delivered to your car.

The event, which has the capacity for around 300 cars, is set to be the only ‘in-person’ communal Chanukah celebration happening this year, and organisers recommend purchasing tickets early to avoid disappointment.

Further details about both events, and how to purchase tickets for the Grand Chanukah Drive-In, can be found on the Jewish Essex website at www.jewishesssex.com

Jewish Care is to make staff members redundant

BY MANNY ROBINSON

JEWISH CARE is in consultation with 120 staff members, with around 100 facing redundancy, as the charity battles against coronavirus and the financial impact the pandemic has had on the organisation.

Chief executive Daniel Carmel-Brown said Jewish Care had been forced to reassess and accelerate its strategic review. This would involve a reorganisation of the charity’s centres by enhancing the outreach programmes it has developed. It also means cutting its 1,300-strong workforce.

In a statement, the charity said: “Regrettably, these changes mean that we are simply unable to sustain the full complement of the centre’s staff that were needed to run the services when we could meet all our members in person.

“This has been an extremely difficult decision for us to make and we have not taken it lightly. We deeply value the contribution of each and every one of our staff and the care and love they bring to their work.

“We are currently working through a consultation process with our staff on their roles and we hope to confirm a new staff structure in December. All the services we have been running recently, and throughout the pandemic, will continue and will be delivered by many familiar faces.

“The Redbridge Jewish Community Centre will continue to



Daniel Carmel-Brown



This has been an extremely difficult decision for us

offer telephone befriending, frozen meals on wheels, guidance, sign posting, social work referrals, Zoom social groups and pen pal connections with others in the community.”

Jewish Care chair Jonathan Zenios added: “These are challenging times but responding to them quickly and thoughtfully ensures our long-term resilience. I also know that we can continue to count on the fantastic support of our thousands of volunteers and hugely generous supporters alongside the tremendous commitment of our workforce.”



Mitzvahs are a piece of cake

THE young people of East London & Essex Liberal Synagogue all got together on Zoom for Mitzvah Day to bake cakes for Mill Grove children's home.

The cakes were then collected by cheder head Jonathan Young and delivered to the South Woodford home, which cares for children and young people who cannot live with their own families.

Mitzvah Day this year was a scaled down affair due to the coronavirus pandemic, but still saw thousands of volunteers all over the country doing small acts of kindness for others.

Read more on pages 14 & 15



THIS ISSUE OF THE ESSEX JEWISH NEWS IS AVAILABLE TO VIEW ONLINE AT: www.issue.com/essexjewishnews

ESSEX JEWISH NEWS

The Essex Jewish News is the newspaper of the Jewish community in Essex and is published by Essex Jewish News Ltd.

CIRCULATION AREA

Barking, Barkingside, Brentwood, Cambridge, Chigwell, Chingford, Chelmsford, Epping, Gants Hill, Gidea Park, Harold Hill, Harlow, Hainault, Highams Park, Ilford, Leyton, Leytonstone, Loughton, Newbury Park, Redbridge, Romford, Southend and Westcliff, Wanstead and Woodford.

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Typesetting & artwork Bayard Design

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ADVERTISEMENT RATES

	MONO	COLOUR
Full Page	£550	£750
Half Page	£300	£430
Quarter Page	£170	£270
Eighth Page	£110	£170

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Printed by Sharman Printers, Peterborough

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Age Concern Redbridge
 020 8220 6000
Ahada Bereavement Counselling
 07758 727 328
Alzheimer's Society
 020 8970 5770
Beehive Lane JACS
 020 8554 0150
Board of Deputies Information Desk
 020 7543 5400
Chabad Gants Hill addiction support
 020 8554 1624
Chai Cancer Care
 0808 808 4567
Chigwell and Hainault League of Jewish Women
 0790 560 5781
Chigwell and Hainault JACS
 020 8551 2355
Citizens Advice Bureau
 0870 126 4140
Empathy
 07765 191 067
Gants Hill JACS
 0208 550 9450
Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade
 020 8989 8990
Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service
 020 8457 9710
Jewish Blind and Disabled
 020 8371 6611

Jewish Care
 020 8922 2222
Jewish Marriage Council
 020 8203 6311
Jewish Women's Aid
 0800 591 203
Moving on (Formerly Bereaved Partners Group)
 020 8554 5227
Newbury Park League of Jewish Women
 020 8530 5411 or 020 8500 7832
Redbridge Jewish Community Centre
 020 8551 0017
Redbridge WIZO
 020 8551 1301
Resource
 020 8346 4000
Samaritans
 020 8553 9900/020 8520 9191
Southend and Westcliff JACS
 01268 771978
Wanstead Jewish Literary Society
 020 8505 0063

Phone numbers are correct at the time of going to press. If your contact number or the contact number of your organisation has changed, or if you would like a contact number to be included, please advise us.

We must not lose our faith!

THE MOTTO of your 'EJN Comment' writer's one-time Central Foundation Grammar School, in the City of London, was "Spe Labore Fide" ... Hope Work Faith. It wasn't a Jewish school, of course; though quite a large proportion of its students were Jewish (maybe including some current EJN readers), many of them (including your writer) hailing from the old 'Jewish East End' (your writer from the now almost legendary 'Petticoat Lane'). We young Jewish lads were so fortunate, and glad, to have passed our 11+ exams; and then to have been selected by the 'Cowper Street' school's headmaster, so that we could obtain an excellent education and seize the opportunity to progress in life.

And the school's motto – albeit expressed in Latin, an essence of its 'classics' curriculum – was also not insignificant to our Judaism. The undoubted necessity to "Work" hard would be so important to us, during both our school and future career. And the abiding essentials of "Hope" and "Faith" were especially applicable to our sense of potential achievement and, markedly, to our spiritual wellbeing.

One of your writer's favoured school subjects for O- and A- and S- level was 'modern European history'. Certainly, learning about the rise of Nazism and the subsequent Holocaust, with six million Jewish lives eliminated, had a major impact on this then teenager's Jewish efforts to grasp – and to seek an understanding of – the world in which we live. As a youth, your EJN scribe read many books about the Shoah, some authored by survivors; and he became aware that a considerable number of such – harbouring dreadful memories of close family being led away to the gas chambers, and of the horrific suffering in concentration camps – had felt unable subsequently to continue with their Jewish faith and belief in Hashem.

Some observers of this resolve would've remarked that such a surrender of faith was very sad, though understandable in all the genocidal circumstances.

COMMENT

Others might've asserted that such a reaction was just what Hitler would've wanted ... a manifest abandonment of their faith in the Almighty.

One cannot underestimate the inherent complexity, philosophical and otherwise, of this still debated 'within living memory' subject; and the numerous profound and difficult questions to which it has given rise in Jewish minds. Even extending back over the centuries of recurring antisemitic hatred, discrimination, abusive persecution and far worse. But Jewish people have always strived – often courageously – to deal with, and to overcome, the tragic periods in their long history; and their enduring, consistent faith in Hashem has meant the survival of our ancient religion into this post-modern era.

Evidently, Mankind has warped the concept of 'free will' with which it had been endowed; but which has led, sometimes and sorrowfully, to appalling if not catastrophic evil and wickedness. Nevertheless, the Roman Empire no longer exists! The Crusaders no longer exist! The Spanish Inquisition no longer exist! And Hitler with his Nazis no longer exist! Though, sadly, this isn't to say, of course, that all hatreds – including antisemitism – no longer exist! Because they do, indeed, persist; and, alas, past lessons seem arguably unlikely to be learned. But we must also bear in mind the hallowed words of Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for the Almighty is with me, Your rod and Your staff they comfort me."

And maybe we should also think accordingly in relation to the current coronavirus pandemic, which has caused many challenging problems for faith communities and, of course, others. Though the amazing, internal and supportive efforts – technological and otherwise – have been

notable and noteworthy, including for Jewish religious services, social care and welfare, festival rituals, simchas and also levoayas, sadly of an apparently disproportionate number of Covid-19 victims.

There's so much ongoing evidence, on this albeit tiny planet and across the millennia, of Mankind's hubris. However, and in the final analysis, it really isn't us human beings who do or can know and comprehend everything! And we Earthlings don't and perhaps won't have the questions, let alone the answers, to more than may meet the eye. For a moment or so, just allow your mind to ponder – or, rather, boggle at – the eternal and limitless Cosmos.

Sometimes, we (including, say, the medical profession) feel compelled to do something we don't at all relish doing, because it may cause serious anxiety at the very least. But, nonetheless, it has to be acknowledged that an absolute need could exist to do that something in order to avoid an even more terrible disaster. This unprecedented year, Mankind has been alerted to – and compelled to use all of its current resources to deal with – an ominously fatal, global virus. And relatively soon, it's hoped, Mankind's present resourcefulness will be in a position to confront Covid-19 with a new vaccine (but one without serious side effects) or otherwise. Always assuming that the coronavirus doesn't disappear off the face of the Earth of its own accord.

But, in the context of this 'Comment' piece, a significant point to perhaps bear in mind is this ... At least Mankind has been awakened to – and will more than likely give further concentrated consideration now to – the really terrifying possibility, indeed, of a much more potent and devastating future, global, viral pandemic, one with the incredible potential for horrific numbers of fatalities, far in excess of such melancholy statistics for Covid-19; and even threatening Mankind's very existence on Earth.

So we must not lose our faith ... for to lose our faith may result in losing our all.

'Lockdown' art of faith

AN ARTWORK, created faithfully by your 'EJN Comment' writer during the Covid-19 'lockdown' earlier this year, is being donated to charity for fundraising purposes.

The piece of art – in a 'Triptych' format – is entitled: "Windows onto Faith". It's intended to convey, as noted by the artist: "A tranquility before the darkness descends followed by the light of hope arising ... but always 'faith', as reflected in the menorah-like branches of the [illustrated] trees of life."



Through one of the windows of the artist's family living-room can be perceived

part of a row of a particular species of tree, the trunk and main branches of which re-

semble a 'menorah' ... one of the principal symbols of the Jewish faith.

WHERE YOU CAN PICK UP THE ESSEX JEWISH NEWS

SYNAGOGUES

Chabad Buckhurst Hill
 Chabad Epping
 Chabad Gants Hill
 Chelmsford Jewish Community
 Chigwell Synagogue
 Chingford Synagogue
 Cranbrook United
 East London & Essex Liberal Synagogue
 Harlow Synagogue
 Ilford Federation
 Loughton Synagogue
 New Essex Masorti
 Romford Synagogue
 Southend & Westcliff Hebrew Congregation
 Southend Reform
 South West Essex and Settlement Reform

Sukkat Shalom
 Woodford Forest

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge Synagogue
 Beth Shalom Synagogue

SCHOOLS

Kantor King Solomon
 Clore Tikva
 Wohl Ilford Jewish Primary

COMMUNAL

Aish Essex
 Redbridge Jewish Community Centre,
 Sinclair House
 Jewish Care's Vi and John
 Rubens House
 Jewish Blind & Disabled
 Aztec House
 Jewish Blind & Disabled
 Hilary Dennis Court

Jewish Blind & Disabled
 Milne Court
 Spire London East Hospital
 Holly House
 The Shop, Southend
 Day Centre, Cobham Road,
 Southend
 Holiday Inn, Southend

RETAIL

V&V, Barkingside
 Sandra Davidson, Redbridge
 Gary Green, Clayhall
 Shalom Bakery, Gants Hill
 Deliphone, Barkingside
 Delicacy, Chigwell
 Abridge Golf Club
 Just Kosher, Clayhall
 Derby Stores, Cambridge
 Kosher on Sea, Southend

SUPERMARKETS

Morrison's Loughton
 Sainsbury's Barkingside
 Sainsbury's Loughton
 Sainsbury's Ongar
 Sainsbury's Newbury Park
 Sainsbury's South Woodford
 Sainsbury's Westcliff
 Tesco Barkingside
 Tesco Epping
 Tesco Westcliff
 Tesco Woodford Avenue

LIBRARIES

Barkingside, Gants Hill.
 Clayhall and South Woodford

Due to the pandemic, distribution to all the above venues cannot be guaranteed

Liberal Judaism to allow chuppah for mixed faith marriages



BY **SIMON ROTHSTEIN**

LIBERAL Judaism has announced that mixed faith couples will be able to receive a wedding blessing from a rabbi under the traditional Jewish chuppah.

Liberal Judaism's Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors (CoLRaC) came to the decision, after much discussion, in order to recognise and celebrate the diversity of Jewish life in 2020.

It is the culmination of a process that began more than two decades ago, when Liberal rabbis first began to conduct mixed faith wedding blessings in private. The next step was holding these in public, including in synagogue, and now the option of a chuppah has been added.

Mixed faith couples must be civilly married before any blessing, as the Marriage Law of England and Wales only permits rabbis and synagogue marriage secretaries to 'officiate' where both bride and groom 'profess' the Jewish faith.

As with all weddings, the use of the chuppah is at the rabbi's discretion and where the couple intend to maintain

a Jewish home.

CoLRaC chair Rabbi Aaron Goldstein said: "This is both a common sense and courageous decision to allow our rabbis and cantors discretion to use a chuppah - the symbol of the creation of a Jewish home blessed by God."

One local couple heading for the chuppah are East London & Essex Liberal Synagogue members Ruth and Andrew Seager.

Ruth is a lifelong Liberal Jew and the current chair of the movement; Andrew has no religion but sees himself as a non-Jewish member of a Jewish family.

They first married in May 1983 at Crawley Registry Office, when they were both 23. They have three children – Joshua, Rebecca and Reuben – who they have raised to be informed and committed Jews. They now intend to renew their vows under the chuppah.

Ruth said: "By the time we got married, it was very clear to us both that we would have a Jewish home and a Jewish family. So, for us not to be allowed to have a blessing in our synagogue was disappointing and a bit sad. It was a long time ago, but I still remember feeling a certain sense of shame.

"Andrew has always been an active member of the community – schlepping tables and chairs, doing security and attending services. He has stood up to be counted when it comes to the Jewish world, so now I am pleased that the Jewish community is giving Andrew the welcome that he deserved 38



Ruth and Andrew Seager are heading for the chuppah and, above right, on their first wedding day at Crawley Registry Office in 1983

years ago."

Andrew added: "I describe myself as a person of no faith who lives in a Jewish household. Liberal Judaism is a faith that makes an awful lot of sense to me, were I religious, and was something that I certainly wanted to see that perpetuated and continued. The right approach was to bring the children up as Jewish.

"The symbolism of being able to have a blessing under the chuppah – given that it represents the formation of a new Jewish household – feels to me very right to be made available to families who are going to embark on the approach we took."

If you would like to find out more about mixed faith wedding blessings, please email montagu@liberaljudaism.org

Disability, not dependency.

When Joel's parents first learned of his cerebral palsy they were sick with worry about what his future might hold. Now, thanks to Jewish Blind & Disabled, they all enjoy Joel's independent life in his own mobility apartment with 24/7 on site support.

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“Pivotal” head made permanent



BY SIMON ROTHSTEIN

CLORE TIKVA Primary School has appointed Margot Buller as its new permanent headteacher.

Mrs Buller, who first joined the school as an interim head in September 2019, got the job after playing a “pivotal” role in taking the school

forward and leading them in the incredibly difficult circumstances brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

Clore Tikva’s chair of governors, Louise Dorling, said: “Mrs Buller has been with us as headteacher for over a year and has been instrumental not only in improving our Ofsted rating to a very secure good, but also the curriculum, behaviour for

learning and many other aspects of our school.

“Latterly, Mrs Buller, ably assisted by the team of teaching and non-teaching staff, has coped admirably with the new and many Covid-19 protocols that have enabled our children to learn in a secure, protected environment.

“I am sure everyone in the community will all join me in congratulating her on this new

appointment, which can only ensure that our school goes from strength to strength.”

Mrs Buller applied for the position as she was convinced by the vast potential the Barkingside school has going forward.

She said: “It is a wonderful place to work and to learn, and I appreciate all the support the school receives from the local community.”

Kantor King Solomon helps pupils celebrate



FOR anyone celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah recently things may have not gone according to plan due to the pandemic. However, students at Kantor King Solomon High School were given a chance to celebrate their special occasion with their classmates.

Many of the Year 8 and 9 students who were unable to celebrate earlier this year, due to lockdown restrictions, took part in two kiddushim held at the school in their honour.

The two ceremonies were held a week apart, due to not being able to mix year groups, and each pupil received a ‘bar/bat mitzvah in a box’ which was full of exciting treats along with a certificate to mark this special occasion.

At each ceremony, assistant

head Melanie Shutz delivered a short message to the students about their journey into adulthood and how to deal with these unusual times.

Noah Salahi was one of the Year 9 students who took part in the ceremony and told the *Essex Jewish News*: “It was a great opportunity for those of us who haven’t been able to experience their barmitzvah, and a good way to connect pupils with each other who are all in a similar situation.”

Miss Shutz added: “We are so delighted to be able to celebrate these moments with our students, despite this difficult time, and hope that even though they may not have been able to have the events that they had planned, their bar/bat mitzvah will still be memorable.”

Parents enjoy virtual siddur presentation



YEAR 2 pupils at Wohl Ilford Jewish Primary School, who missed out on their Chagigat

Siddur ceremony in the summer due to Covid-19, received their Siddurim at a

special virtual presentation in October. The event was watched by parents, grand-

parents and other family and friends from across the world.

Faith matters



WIJPS nursery pupils learning about Diwali

Children continue their father's fight for Scout Hall



Howard Mallach pictured with his family, who are continuing his legacy

BY **MICAELA BLITZ**

THE 12th Ilford Cubs prides itself on being the only Jewish scouting group in Essex. When it first started over 67 years ago, the group was based at Coventry Road Synagogue before moving to Roll Gardens in Gants Hill, where it stayed for many years.

For those that grew up in the local area, Roll Gardens will no doubt have many happy memories not only for those attending Scouts, but

also the Brownies, Guides and Cubs groups that also ran for many years on this site.

In 1998, the Cubs group moved and the buildings that stood there were demolished. Since then, the land, which was bequeathed to the 12th Ilford Cubs in the 1930s, has remained unused and barren; but a determined group of supporters have been trying for many years to bring it back to its former glory.

Howard Mallach spent the last 25 years, along with others

campaigning to rebuild the hut and redevelop the ground in the hope that it would be a space not only for the scouting group, but also for the wider Essex Jewish community.

When Howard sadly died of a heart attack earlier this year, his children – Joy, Denise and Michael – were determined to continue their father's legacy and make his dream a reality, with help from other scouting leaders Jason Levy, Howard Temple and Graham Gillary who also share



12th Ilford Cubs today - still the only Jewish scouting group in Essex

their vision.

For Joy, Denise and Michael, like their father, scouting is very much in their blood. They have been involved in scouting for most of their lives, and are also closely connected to the 12th Ilford Cub group. Twins Joy and Denise are both leaders, whilst Michael is the Akela of the group which, prior to Covid-19, was running every Thursday at The Rodings in Roding Lane South.

They plan to register as a charity in order to be able to raise funds to starting building work, which has been estimated to be in the region of £250,000 of investment; and they are hoping that they might be able to work with other organisations within the local

community to potentially fund the project together. As part of their fundraising, they will be offering a chance for people to sponsor a memory brick to help rebuild the past, but also create something exciting for the future.

As Joy comments: "My dad put so much into it, that if we don't do something it would be such a loss. He worked tirelessly to try and make this happen, and we want to make sure we succeed in creating what he hoped to achieve."

If people would like to get in touch to find out more about how they can help, please call Joy Mallach or Jason Levy on 07926 817 893 or email ilford-cubsth12@yahoo.co.uk

A GROUP of amateur artists, including Chigwell's Avril Tuohy, have created an online exhibition to raise money for charity.

All are selling their work with the proceeds being donated to Ordinary to Extraordinary (O2e). O2e is a community of volunteers who take part in various challenges for charities that support disabled and life limited children.

Avril said: "With so many of our usual events being cancelled this year, we wanted to find other ways to raise funds."

These original pieces could be great Chanukah gifts, whilst also helping to make a difference to the lives of others. You can find them via @artforo2e on Instagram or the 'ArtforO2e2020' Facebook page.

CHABAD WITH THE COMMUNITIES ACROSS ESSEX ANNOUNCES ITS EXCITING CHANUKAH PLANS

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MENORAH LIGHTINGS

- EPPING**
Thursday 10th December - 6.30PM
- GANTS HILL**
Saturday 12th December - 6.30PM
- BUCKHURST HILL**
Sunday 13th December - 6.30PM
- CHIGWELL**
Monday 14th December - 6.30PM
- LOUGHTON**
Tuesday 15th December - 6.30PM
- WOODFORD**
Wednesday 16th December - 6.30PM
- BARKINGSIDE**
Thursday 17th December - 5.00PM

Nobody should come in person to the events please. Only the Rabbis and a camera crew can be present in person.

THESE EVENTS CAN BE VIEWED ON WWW.JEWISHESSEX.COM

chabad Lubavitch centres

Kindness by the bag load

BY MICHAELA BLITZ

CORONAVIRUS has been difficult for many of us but, for women and children trapped in abusive relationships, spending an extended amount of time at home can be extremely stressful and, in some cases, dangerous.

During the pandemic, there has been a significant rise in domestic violence being reported, with many fleeing to women's refuges for safety.

Claire Hartley (pictured), from North Chingford, wanted to find a way of helping women in this situation. Having previously volunteered at a women's refuge, she was aware of what it can be like for those arriving, often just with the clothes on their backs and very few possessions.

Early on in lockdown, she was baking cakes and donating to local refuges, but felt that there was more that she could do that could help women on a more practical level.

She started by putting together wish lists on Amazon and asking people to purchase items to give to these women. She received a lot of help and support through her posts on Facebook and Instagram, and was overwhelmed by people's generosity. She also put together small bags of essential items, such as toiletries, to help these women; and the idea for her 'Bags of Kindness' initiative developed from there.

With 10 years' experience working in fundraising at Jewish Care, she has a lot of con-

tacts and connections with individuals and businesses. Claire admits that she is not afraid to ask people for help, and has put this to good use in order to help her campaign. Claire recently left Jewish Care to pursue a part-time role, so that she could do more voluntary work with a women's refuge. She also trained as an 'Ask Me' Ambassador for Jewish Women's Aid and hopes to be able to work more with this organisation in the future.

Claire is always extremely grateful to receive donations but is keen to only pass on brand new items, rather than second-hand or nearly new. As she explains: "For many of these women, a lot of what they have may be secondhand or passed down and I wanted to be able to give them something that was more like a gift just for them, rather than a charity donation. It really gives people a sense of pride and happiness to feel they are being given something just for them."

The refuges are not only safe spaces for women suffering domestic abuse, but for their children as well, who often may find the situation difficult to adjust to. As a way to help, Claire has created 'Buddy Bags' which are tailored for the age and gender of the child and full of toys and treats, as well as things like new pyjamas and books, to help them feel more settled.

Birthdays can be a difficult time for children staying at refuges and she has been in-



involved in arranging birthday parties and gifts for children, so that they are able to celebrate their special day in some way. She is also working on an appeal for the festive holidays in December, and plans to give a gift to every child, no matter their religion or beliefs.

As well as the bags, Claire wants to find ways to offer treats and experiences for the women, such as manicures and pamper days to help make them feel special; and she is keen to connect with local individuals and businesses that might be able to help.

She adds: "Many of the women who have been in abu-

sive relationships will often have very low self esteem and have endured physical and mental abuse, possibly for many years; by giving them a chance to enjoy something nice, that is just for them, really helps their mental wellbeing and how they feel about themselves."

Claire currently works with refuges in Essex, North London and Hertfordshire, but hopes to be able to reach out to refuges across other parts of London and the wider area.

If you would like to help Claire's 'Bags of Kindness' project, please contact her on claire_lerner@hotmail.com

Chanukah fun on the run

WHILST many charity events this year have been cancelled or postponed due to coronavirus, the annual Essex Menorah Run is ready and set to go on Sunday 13 December.

The community event, now in its fourth year, takes in a running route around the seven main Chanukiot in the area. The 21K route, which is the equivalent distance of a half marathon, starts in Woodford and finishes in Fullwell Cross. For those who might find running this distance a bit daunting, there are also options for 5K and 10K starting at various points along the route.

As well as the running routes, this year sees the introduction of a new circular cycle route, which will be starting at the menorah in Fulwell Cross and following a route to Trafalgar Square and back.

The event usually raises money for the three local Jewish schools – Clore Tikva, Wohl Ilford Jewish and Kantor King Solomon, but it was felt this year all proceeds should go towards helping families of children at these schools who may have found themselves in financial difficulties due to the current Covid-19 situation.

Each family will be given a supermarket voucher and hamper of goodies to help them through this difficult period. Anyone who may require additional help can contact the head teacher of the relevant school, with all enquiries

being dealt with in the strictest confidence.

There will also be a socially distanced collection taking place in the Kantor King Solomon car park between 10:30 and 12:30 on the day for anyone who would like to donate any dried or non-perishable goods to be included in these hampers.

Due to current Covid-19 restrictions, some of the arrangements for the event could potentially be affected but, at the time of press, the event is planned to start around 09:30 from a location in Woodford. Details and updates about the event will be posted on EssexK Facebook page.

The event is open to anyone of all ages and athletic abilities so, if you would like to get involved, there is still time to take part by contacting menorahrn@gmail.com

To make a donation, please visit the JustGiving page <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/menorahrn>



CLORE Tikva Primary School has joined the Redbridge Local Lottery, a good causes lottery with a prize of £25,000.

Tickets cost £1; with lots of prizes on offer – with 50% of each ticket bought from the link below going straight to Clore Tikva!

You can play at www.redbridgelottery.co.uk/support/clore-tikva-school-foundation

Beatrice celebrates her century



BY SIMON ROTHSTEIN

BEATRICE CARO celebrated her 100th birthday at Jewish Care's Vi & John Ruben's House.

The centenarian enjoyed a Zoom celebration with her daughter, Linda Mishkin, and family, including three grandchildren and some of her five great-grandchildren. The event was made even more special by young volunteer and talented musician Rafi Sandford playing some of Beatrice's favourite songs from the shows.

Beatrice has led an incredible life, including a long and happy marriage of 56 years to husband Harry.

Beatrice was a dressmaker and Harry was a tailor. They lived in the East End before moving to Islington, where she then worked as a part-time post mistress for the Sub Post Office. Following this, Beatrice worked on the Revlon make-up counter in a department store in Wood Green and, finally, in the West End at DH Evans, before she retired.

Harry and Beatrice enjoyed

their post-retirement life – especially all the memorable holidays – until Harry sadly passed away 19 years ago.

Daughter Linda told the *Essex Jewish News*: "My mum is the most amazing lady, with a great deal of style. We all miss visiting her, but the staff at Vi & John Rubens House are fantastic and working in such difficult circumstances. I'm very grateful to all of them."

Beatrice's 100th birthday celebrations also included receiving a card from The Queen and a lovely tea party with other residents and staff.

Chanukah appeal brings light



JEWISH Care has launched a Chanukah appeal starring a Redbridge resident, in order to help fund the extra support for older people, who are relying on the organisation even more heavily since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

The appeal – which features 95-year-old Leslie Barnett – focuses on the way the charity is bringing light to many vulnerable and isolated people, especially through its Meals on Wheels service.

Since March, the organisation's chefs have been making more than double the amount of meals for vulnerable older people in the community. The nutritious Kosher food is delivered by dedicated volunteers, who stop for socially distanced chats in order to also bring relief from social isolation and light to those who rely

on the charity. Despite all of this, the service receives no government funding.

Leslie has lived on his own since his late wife, Angela, passed away. He told the *Essex Jewish News*: "I'm not used to being stuck at home on my own. Especially not for this long. Before the pandemic, I would go to the Jewish Care community centre at least once every week to see my friends."

"I'm no spring chicken and my health isn't what it was. So, I have to shelter at home to keep myself safe. Sadly, Angela and I were not blessed with children, so I don't have any family of my own nearby."

Speaking about why the Meals on Wheels service is so vital, Leslie added: "I have found myself staring at the same four walls every day. I've never been much of a cook, though

Angela used to let me do the vegetables sometimes if she was going to be late back from work. But that was years ago and, most of the time, all that is in my fridge are some empty boxes and a duster to clean it with."

Daniel Carmel-Brown, Jewish Care's chief executive, told how the charity has sent out more than 33,000 hot and frozen Kosher meals since the start of the pandemic and, in the same period, the Jewish Care Direct Helpline has also received 40% more enquiries for assistance.

He said: "We know the need for the unique help we provide for the entire Jewish community in London and the South East is growing all the time. But that help comes at a cost."

"We need to raise £5 million, on top of the £16 million we already need to raise, just to continue to provide care and support to the 10,000 lives we touch."

"With almost all of our fundraising events cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic, we are depending more than ever on the generosity of supporters like you. So please make a gift this Chanukah and help continue to bring light into the lives of more people like Leslie."

Visit www.jewishcare.org/donate or call 020 8922 2600 if you'd like to donate to the Chanukah appeal or contact the Jewish Care Direct Helpline on 020 8922 2222 for support or advice.

Online event still tastes great



Rabbi Aryeh Sufrin enjoys the whisky evening



Katie Groves guided the tasting via Zoom

AFTER six extremely popular whisky tasting events, Chabad Events Team (CET) were determined to not let this year pass without one.

Taking into account the re-

strictions needed to keep everyone safe in these times of coronavirus, CET sat down with Katie Groves of Milroy's to discuss how to go ahead with one of the social highlights of the Chabad

calendar, whilst adhering to guidelines.

Katie came up with the idea of running the tasting via Zoom, so that supporters could participate from their own homes. Once this had been agreed, more than 40 people joined the virtual event.

Prior to the evening, packs were sent to each household containing four miniature whiskeys, tickets for a free prize draw and plenty of tasty snacks.

A welcome was made by the chair, Hazel Weinberg, before Katie proceeded to host a very lively tasting session.

Continuing their double act from previous years, Rabbi Aryeh Sufrin MBE and Katie kept the audience informed and amused, whilst reminding them of the very good cause they were raising funds for – Chabad Counselling Service – which has become even more important over the lockdown, with more and more people being affected. In addition, everyone was treated to a presentation from Danny Saltman on his company's specialist Kosher whisky.

Hazel told the *Essex Jewish News*: "The evening was a resounding success and financially raised much needed funds for the Chabad Counselling Service. And to emphasise this, there were requests for a repeat event in a few months' time, which already has a waiting list."

"A vote of thanks was given to Katie Groves, and Milroy's for hosting the evening and their continued generosity and support for Chabad; and to the community without whom this event would not have been so successful."

'Covid won't stop us'

BY SUSAN GEIST

IT'S not what anyone had planned for 2020 but, like the rest of us, when New Essex Masorti Synagogue (NEMS) found out that all their services and events had to cease. Naturally there was a feeling of sadness for the community and concern for isolated members.

However, NEMS were determined not to dwell on the negatives and, instead, its Board started immediately formulating a plan for how to keep members connected to prayer, learning and each other. Thus, the NEMS Lockdown Programme was born.

Since the start of lockdown, NEMS have been running a huge schedule of online events including a weekly Ma'riv service every Thursday, when mourners can say kaddish. This has now evolved into what NEMS are calling 'The Aleph-Bet Project' where each week, as well as the normal service, there will now be an informal learning session about an area of Judaism, beginning with each consecutive letter of the Aleph-Bet as the weeks go on.

In addition to this, NEMS and its members have really embraced technology with reg-

ular and well-attended Zoom quizzes, live music via Facebook – where people can even send in requests – interactive cook-along sessions for younger members and a programme of online talks led by experienced local speakers.

One thing the Board was most concerned about was how to connect with the community over the High Holy Days. This was truly an area where they triumphed; with a huge effort from many NEMS members, the High Holy Day Zone was launched on the NEMS website.

This included video and audio recordings of all services, complete with readings and Shofar blasts, as well as resources to download such as a Yizkor booklet, and instructional videos for how to build a sukkah and how to make and use the Arba Minim.

On top of this, members were asked to participate by sending in their memories of Yomtovs gone by, some amusing and some poignant, for all the community to read and enjoy, bringing a feeling of togetherness.

To ensure all members were included, especially the small number who cannot access the online resources, Rosh

Hashanah 'goodie bags' were distributed. A small and Covid-compliant Yizkor service was held in person at Clore Tikva School and a prayer-book lending service was organised for those who wished to observe the festivals at home.

As we continue to face Covid restrictions, NEMS have some ongoing plans and a schedule of upcoming events to continue to connect and serve the local community.

They continue to offer a programme of fascinating NEMS talks on a huge range of subjects, which currently runs until February 2021 and have some exciting events planned for Chanukah, including a virtual communal candle lighting.

Executive committee member Yvonne Levy said: "We could never have predicted the circumstances we find ourselves in, but I am delighted with the way that members have really pulled together and embraced the challenge of keeping the community spirit alive."

To find out more about upcoming events or for membership enquiries, visit: www.nemssynagogue.co.uk or call 07922 090180.

'Jews and mushrooms go back a long way'

MICHAEL GREEN WRITES ON HOW THE SUPPORT OF EAST LONDON AND ESSEX LIBERAL SYNAGOGUE (EELS) AND THE CREATION OF THE LONDON FUNGUS NETWORK HELPED HIM THROUGH A VERY TOUGH TIME

EARLIER this year, I became a volunteer ranger with London National Park City, an initiative to make the capital a greener and wilder place.

That was back in March, just as lockdown hit, and the greenest thing I was able to do was to walk around the park and forage for wild plants during my precious daily hour of exercise.

As well as getting outdoors, when we were all stuck inside, foraging helped me to feed myself with nutritious plants like nettles, as well as gather bitter herbs like dandelion for 'maror' at Seder; and at a time when standing in a supermarket queue felt like you were taking your life into your own hands.

Many people might turn their nose up at the idea of gathering a bunch of 'weeds' for lunch, but I like to think that it's what our ancestors did for generations, and long be-

fore Waitrose was invented.

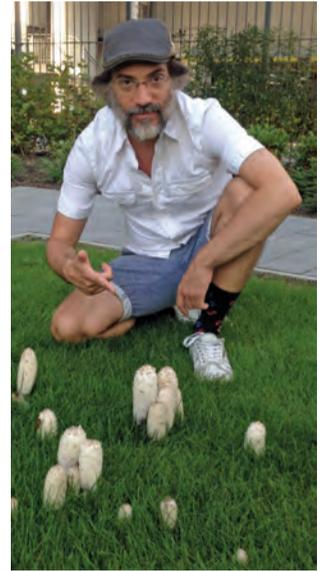
Then, this summer, my parents Sara and Douglas both sadly passed away. During this devastating time, the two things that helped me cope were support from the Jewish community, especially Rabbi David and Fiona Hulbert of EELS, and spending time in nature.

In her book *The Way Though the Woods*, Long Litt Woon wrote about how spending time in the Norwegian forest, hunting for mushrooms, helped her cope after losing her husband. I knew how she felt as, when I'm in the woods, I instantly feel calmer and more at peace.

So, with help from National Park City, I launched a project called the London Fungus Network to inspire people about urban fungi.

Contrary to popular belief, wild mushrooms are not going to kill you if you get too close to them! I prefer to think of them as our fungal friends and throughout the autumn I have been holding socially-distanced Fungi Forays, exploring local woods in small groups to learn how to identify our fungal neighbours and their role in the ecosystem.

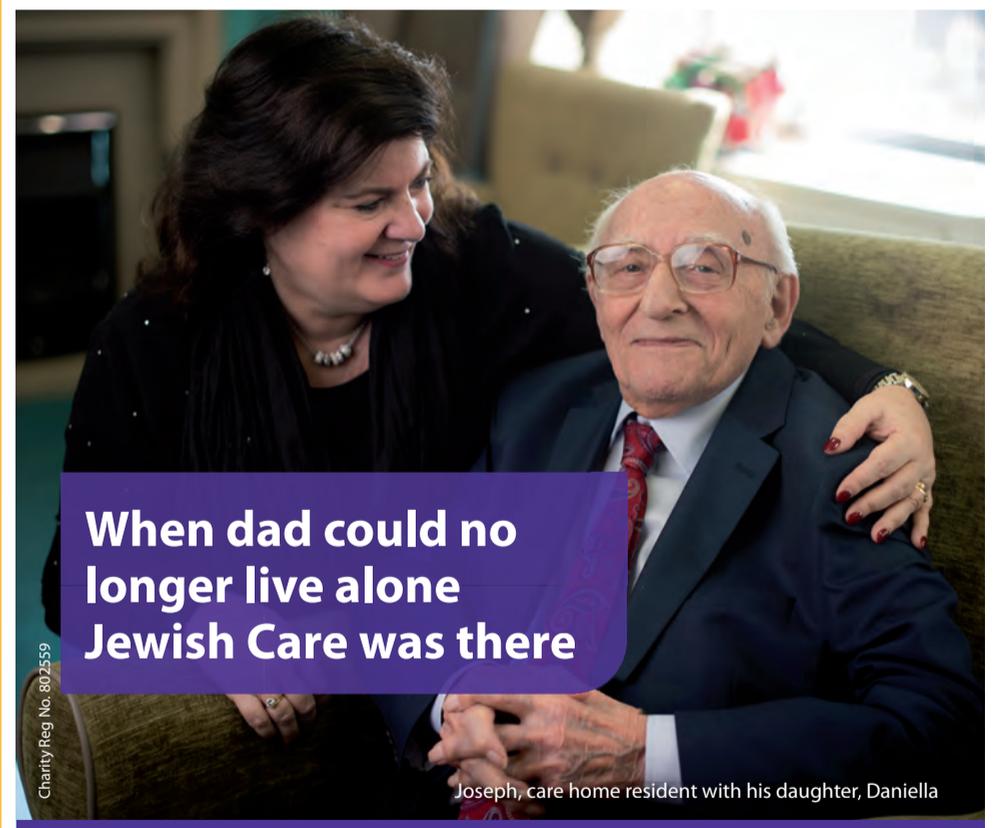
It might not seem obvious, but Jews and mushrooms go back a long way. As far back as the Exodus in fact: the Manna from heaven is thought to be a species of



desert truffle called *Terfezia*, which can be found in markets from Beersheba to Damascus to this day.

There is even a mushroom used in Chinese cuisine known as the 'Jews Ear', which is actually a mispronunciation of its original name the 'Judas Ear', taking its title from the story of the apostle who is said to have hanged himself from an Elder tree, on which the mushroom typically grows.

For more information on the London Fungus Network, please follow 'londonfungusnetwork' on Facebook or Instagram.



When dad could no longer live alone Jewish Care was there

Joseph, care home resident with his daughter, Daniella

As someone who was so dedicated to his community, dad wanted to be cared for by people who understood and respected him and everything he believed in. He has now happily lived at one of Jewish Care's care homes for over three years.

With a gift in your Will to Jewish Care, you can make sure that future generations of our community get the care they need that respects their heritage – when they need it most.

For more information about leaving a gift in your Will and our free Will writing service please call Alison Rubenstein on 020 8922 2833 or email legacyteam@jcare.org or visit jewishcare.org/legacy

JEWISH CARE

From Clore Tikvah to the IDF

BY ADELE BONGART

MY daughter Rhianna had her first experience of Israel when she went with her dad Paul, in 2010, aged 10 with Clore Tikva Primary School.

Various other trips followed. She travelled to Israel with other students in her year at Kantor King Solomon in 2015, as well as on many family holidays. Whilst at home, Rhianna continued with her education at King Solomon and then transferred to JFS for its sixth form.

During the summer holidays, she helped Rabbi Brandman of Chabad Buckhurst Hill and Jewish Care at Sinclair House with their summer schemes and loved working with all the children, including helping children who had special needs on a one-to-one basis. In 2017, she was presented with the Young Volunteer Individual Award from Jewish Care.

Rhianna was then a participant in the first English cohort for the Diller Teen Fellows programme and visited Israel in 2017. In 2018, she was awarded the position of junior counsellor, meaning

that she led the group to Israel in 2018.

With FZY she went to Israel in 2016, Ghana in 2017 and in 2018 went back to Israel for nine months, taking part in FZY's gap-year programme 'Year Course', together with FZY's sister movements Young Judea and the Israeli Scouts (Tzofim).

Making new friends along the way, from different countries and within Israel, Rhianna came to the decision that she wanted to make Aliyah and draft to the IDF as a Lone Soldier, aided by the programme Garin Tzabar.

The hardest thing for Rhianna was to tell us, including the news that she was giving up her place at Birmingham University. When she did, yes we were upset and yes there were tears but, on the other hand, fully supportive and could not be more proud.

So at the end of last year, aged 19, Rhianna made Aliyah. She is now six months into her IDF service. Rhianna has completed a Hebrew course, passed as a Mashakit Tash (an army social worker) and is now serving at an air force base in the south of Israel.



Staying connected at East London & Essex Liberal



ELELS barmitzva boy Liam Bell

EAST London & Essex Liberal Synagogue (ELELS) have made sure that the entire community have stayed connected, in touch and engaged while the synagogue building is physically closed.

Steps taken include setting up a telephone tree. Every household in the community was contacted by telephone. If the member enjoyed the call, they continued and still are continuing. Some members who found isolation difficult were contacted by a special team named 'support callers'. Support callers telephoned these members on a daily basis. In some cases, members received more than one call a day.

Knowing that not everyone can get to grips with new technology, synagogue member Rachel Kamall has assisted many via telephone and email, helping them to navigate their phones, desk-top or laptop computers. This has included showing people how to download Zoom in order to join in with services and many of the other items of interest that ELELS offers, both during the day and in the evening.

The community also enjoyed the Zoom barmitzva of Liam Bell, with a hybrid ceremony giving the best of both worlds (held in the period between lockdowns).

Mum Emma and dad Gavin told the *Essex Jewish News*: "With a lot of planning, a couple of rehearsals and an early start, we were able to fulfil Liam's wish of reading the Torah with 15 people present, including close family members and Rabbi David and Fiona Hulbert, who was Liam's

teacher.

"Using Zoom to share the occasion with the community, we were still able to have Rabbi Richard Jacobi lead the service remotely and many others joined in from wherever they were.

"We are lucky that Liam is very tech-savvy. He was able to set up the links and the TV screens to share the service. He was even able to help when there were technical glitches.

"Although we missed the physical presence of being within the community during this time, we were able to share and join in the celebration using Zoom, and we hope one day to still have a celebration in person with the community back in our synagogue."

CORRECTIONS

IN the obituary for the late Larry Foster (*EJN* Rosh Hashanah edition) his date of birth should have been 16 March 1955 and not 1935' and he was married to his wife Mandy for 38 years and not 18 years as stated. We apologise for the factual errors.

■■■■■

IN the *EJN* Passover edition, reprinted in part with the Rosh Hashanah issue, we stated that Clayhall Synagogue and Ilford Synagogue had marked their first year as a merged shul. This, of course, should have referred to Redbridge United Synagogue merging with Ilford United Synagogue. Clayhall Synagogue had merged earlier with Newbury Park Synagogue to become Redbridge United Synagogue.

Chelmsford's unexpected Covid benefit

BY STAN KELLER

THERE doesn't seem much more to say about the coronavirus that hasn't already been said.

However, one side effect that the Chelmsford Jewish Community (CJC) has found is

the support and enthusiasm for our online services.

We are a small community without our own shul and, under normal circumstances, we hire a room every other Friday night to hold our Shabbat services.

Because of the lockdown

and other restrictions this has not been possible so, like so many other synagogues, we turned to Zoom and also decided to hold them weekly rather than fortnightly. The take-up has been quite amazing really. Attendances have tripled! One important aspect of

these services is the social side. The ability for members to see each other and talk to each other online. This is particularly beneficial for those members living alone. We are able to share news, chat about what's on TV, ask for assistance if required and generally renew and enhance friendships.

In fact, we are meeting members whom we don't generally see and finding out things we never knew before, thereby making new friends.

The Chelmsford Jewish Community is not affiliated to any religious body and has retained an independent status, so the decision to use technology was in accordance with our views on Jewish observance.

We continued online services for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot, all of which also had relatively high attendances; and, it must be said, all of which were enjoyed by the community. It was also a pleasure to welcome back members who have moved out of the area ... yet another bonus.

The CJC is very fortunate that it has a few members who are able to lead services and keep them interesting.

Whether it is the convenience of not having to leave the comfort of your own home or simply the need to meet up with other people, the Zoom Friday nights have proven to be a success beyond our expectations.

Once this pandemic is over – and surely it must come to an end eventually – our community will need to assess whether we revert to regular face-to-face services or have some sort of hybrid version, with some services online and others back in our hired premises. In the meantime, we will enjoy our weekly get-togethers.

Stan Keller is chair of the Chelmsford Jewish Community.



Chelmsford chair Stan Keller leading a CJC service from home

TRAVEL

MARK HARRIS



Punkt*!

THIS IS GLOBETROTTER MARK HARRIS' 80TH EJM TRAVEL PAGE

I WOULD like to say that this is my 80th 'Travel' page for the *Essex Jewish News*!

Though regrettably, and extraordinarily, I haven't been sojourning overseas since the beginning of this year's Covid-19 'lockdown' in March. Dismally, it has turned out to be the only (and depressingly lengthy) period in several decades during which I haven't – and for good reason – ventured forth from UK shores.

In consequence, I've decided to fill this 'fourscore' anniversary column with a number of images – of the thousands by my then trusty and very active SLR camera – from some of my many (often protracted) adventures abroad, and taken in the mid- to late 1990s, and which I reported on; including, as customary, much of specifically

'Jewish' interest – in my regular 'EJM Travel' feature page through the first few years after volunteering, 25 years ago, to become a contributor for the ever popular community newspaper. So this *EJM* Chanukah 2020 issue is really a kind of 'double anniversary' for me!

Happily, I've been an avid world traveller from the time I was originally inspired, and encouraged, to become such when a teenager and an enthusiastic member of Brady Club in London's then 'Jewish East End'. And while thoroughly enjoying annual, summer, youthhostel-based holidays – in Italy and Switzerland – with my fellow Bradians across the latter 1950s. Though my ambitious, overseas travel aspirations really expanded, and soon took off, over the 'Long Vacations' of my uni-



■ ISRAEL: Jerusalem (Western Wall)

versity years, studying for a Law degree in the first half of the 'Swinging Sixties'. And I was quick to discover that, indeed, 'travel broadens the mind'!

I recall that, in the earlier years of my association with the *EJM*, there were four editions of the paper every year (including an early summer issue). That publication arrangement was usually, but not necessarily always, sufficient to take on board practically all of my globe-hopping

activities. Not quite so since those pre-three-issue days of our *EJM*'s yesteryear. Except, unfortunately, for this unforeseeably and miserably viral, Covid-19 year, which imposed a sudden, unexpected and frustrating halt to various planned and projected exploits in foreign parts.

Hopefully – and as we move beyond the forthcoming winter months towards the spring of 2021 – a recognisably and assuredly safe, recognisably authentic and psychologically comfortable 'normality' will return to our planet. And thus enabling us all to again explore new and absorbing destinations in a world free from this dreadful coronavirus pandemic!

* No, this isn't the name of an East European city!



■ JAPAN : Kyoto



■ USA: San Francisco (Golden Gate Bridge)



■ AUSTRALIA: Ayers Rock



■ SOUTH AFRICA: Cape Town



■ AUSTRALIA: Sydney Opera House



■ CANADA: Quebec (Heights)



■ JAPAN: Tokyo



■ ISRAEL: Tel Aviv



■ CANADA: Niagara Falls



■ HONG KONG: Kowloon

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Jewish Bereavement launches support group for Covid mourners

BY MANNY ROBINSON

FAMILY members who have lost a loved one through coronavirus are being given a helping hand from a new Jewish bereavement counselling service.

The support group 'Bereavement during Covid-19 – for people bereaved during the virus' meets via Zoom.

Trisha Curtis, manager of JBCS, said that there has been a surge of requests from Jewish people all over the country for advice and counselling.

She said: "One of the saddest situations during this coronavirus has been the sight of a loved one being taken away by ambulance, and never having the opportunity of seeing them again because of the restrictions on visiting hospitals. This has had a traumatic effect on many people."

She added: "Most of us all experience a loss or bereavement at some time in our lives. People grieve in their individual and unique way and may experience many different feelings."

"When someone close to you dies you may feel sadness, anger, fear, guilt, loneliness or denial. All these feelings are natural reactions, but the intensity may leave you feeling that you are not managing everyday life in the way that you would like."

"Many people need support following a bereavement, and often family or friends can be of great help. Yet it may be difficult to talk to those we know well about our emotions."

"Sometimes it may be helpful to talk to someone who is not emotionally involved but is there to listen and care. Our bereavement counsellors have special knowledge of the grieving process and can provide this support."



Many people need support during a bereavement ... yet it may be difficult to talk to those we know

She added: "We can and will support people on a one-to-one basis, either online or by telephone (due to social distancing restrictions), and we are able to support clients for a year or two to help them recover from the trauma and adjust to a differ-

ent life."

The pandemic has hit residents in Redbridge hard, and among the well-known personalities who have fallen victim are kosher butcher Norman Goldberg and disc jockey Larry Foster. The borough has seen a spike in coronavirus infections and has one of the highest number of cases in London.

The Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service has offered a counselling service to the community for over 35 years, and consists of a team of volunteer counsellors who are professionally trained to work with people of all ages.

For those interested in the new Covid-19 support group or another JBCS support group plus one-to-one counselling, please call 0208 951 3881 and leave a message or email trisha@jbc.org.uk and visit the website www.jbc.org.uk

Band leader Ziek adds another string to his bow

PAT LIDIKER TALKS TO CHIGWELL'S ZIEK GELKOFF ABOUT CREATING A NEW INCOME DURING CORONAVIRUS

ZIEK GELKOFF, the power behind popular XS Showband, has shown us how reinventing yourself during Covid-19 can be an answer to combating its devastating impact.

Israeli born Ziek (pronounced Zeek), who lives with his young family in Chigwell, told me: "We had a full programme of bookings, including many weddings and barmitzvahs, all over the country and were looking forward to a great year. Then in March it came to a complete halt along with my own catering business. It was devastating for everyone but, of course, so much worse for those living alone."

"For us, social media has proved the ideal media to go forwards."

His wife Francesca is a singer and the founder of XS Showband. She is teaching piano and has increased the number of lessons during lockdown, also setting up new venture www.sunnydalesoft-play.com selling foam playroom sets for children and nurseries.

The couple's own toddlers, Casey and Havana, have been happy to give the products their seal of approval!

Ziek's own latest venture, which he greatly enjoys, involves giving conversational Ivrit classes on Zoom – and it certainly helps that he was born in Israel, where his parents still live.

His grandparents ran a famous chocolate and cigar shop in Brick Lane and were always key in inspiring Ziek to be self-employed. They lived their last 35 years in Ilford, overlooking nearby Valentine's Park. So with his roots in the East End and Ilford, and since starting his own family here, Ziek considers himself a real Essex lad (not that you'd know it from



Ziek Gelkoff with his wife Francesca and their children Casey and Havana

his rich Israeli accent).

Francesca comes from an established, well-known Redbridge family where her father, Howard Berlin, is a Fairlop Ward councillor and stood as a parliamentary candidate last year.

With a degree in environmental science, Ziek has another string to his bow in the business of energy performance certification – an important aspect of green awareness.

Finding new streams of income is a blessing, but Ziek and Francesca still miss the band and say it's just a matter of time before they are back on stage again.

All aspects of show business have taken a shattering blow this year with so many struggling for work, including his cousin's son, talented child

star Aaron Gelkoff, who has previously featured in the pages of the *Essex Jewish News*.

The band was massively in



We had a full programme of bookings all over the country and were looking forward to a great year

demand all over London, with bookings in Liverpool, Manchester and Europe also, but everything went on hold when lockdown struck.

"We have done 'lockdown performances' with band members in little boxes on Instagram, YouTube, Zoom and Facebook, but nothing beats a real live audience," says Ziek, who owns and organises XS.

"But I do remain optimistic – sooner or later this will be behind us and the band will be back in full swing. It could take a few months, or a year or so, but it is what it is. I just feel grateful and lucky to be here."

For more information on conversational Ivrit classes, please call or email Ziek on 0780 7060 553 / z.gelkoff@gmail.com

Taxi driver Sam takes a new route out of lockdown



Sam Isaacs and his keep fit friends

BY SIMON ROTHSTEIN

FORMER taxi driver Sam Isaacs has been one of the Essex stars of lockdown – by helping others stay fit during the pandemic.

Sam retired from driving five years ago, after 39 years behind the wheel of his London taxi, and decided to become a personal trainer, studying both exercise and nutrition. After changing his own diet and exercise regime, he lost over five stone and now aims to help others lead fitter and healthier lives.

At the beginning of last year, he started a keep fit class for the over 50s in Hornchurch on a Tuesday lunchtime. Things were going well until the start of the pandemic, when gyms closed and classes were suspended.

So, instead, Sam started recording short WhatsApp exercise videos, which he sent out to his class members three times a week.

During lockdown, one of the ladies in the keep fit class lost her husband, who was a doctor, due to Covid-19. Sam decided to start a JustGiving fundraising page in his memory and raised over £1,000 for the NHS.

In addition, at the request of his neighbours, Sam started keep fit classes in the street with everyone socially distancing (pictured), as well as a Zoom class for family and friends.

Wife Lorraine said: "Even when the first lockdown ended, everyone wanted to carry on!"

"Sam's motto is that you're never too old to change and, having changed career at 61, he has proved that it can be done."

Charity will now allow "safe" care home visits

THIRTY THREE residents at Jewish Care homes have died after being tested positive for Covid-19.

The charity said in a statement that, under current government guidelines, they are able to facilitate a small number of visits to their care homes "as long as they can be done in a safe way and do not pose a risk to residents, staff or other visitors."

The statement continues: "We are working hard to enable visits during the winter months to ensure that the wellbeing of our residents and

their mental health remains a priority. Visitors will need to book a visiting slot with the care home directly and will be offered one of three types of visits: window visits, dedicated space visits or room visits."

Jewish Care has a direct telephone line for those seeking further information, which is open Monday-Friday 8.30am-5pm on 0208 922 2222, and also a helpline which is open Sunday-Thursday 12pm-12am or Friday 12pm-3pm on 0800 6529249.

A sixty second shmooze with ... Marc Michaels

**MICAELA BLITZ
TALKS TO SOFER
MARC MICHAELS**

Tell us about yourself

I'm Marc Michaels, but I also go by my Hebrew name Mordechai Pinchas. I'm a Sofer, which is a Jewish scribe who writes and restores holy writing using traditional quills, parchment and special inks. The full title is Sofer STa"m and these initials stand for Sefer Torah, tefillin and mezuzah which are the three main areas that I work in, either fixing those that might have been damaged in some way, or writing new ones. I also write megillot and gittin (divorce documents).

How did you become a Sofer?

My parents (Rabbi Maurice and Eileen Michaels) were at a conference in Harrogate and met a man in his 70s at breakfast who turned out to be Vivian Solomon, a well-known and much admired Sofer. At one time, he was the only scribe in Britain helping the Progressive movement with the maintenance of their Sifrei Torah.

He told them that he had been looking for an apprentice for around 10 years without success. The person he was looking for needed to have a combination of a good halachic understanding and observance as well as being creative. My parents said that they knew someone who could fit the bill and suggested me. I had studied graphic design at Goldsmith's College and had recently completed an MA in Jewish Studies from Leo Baeck College, so this sounded the right sort of thing for me.

What was it like learning from someone like Vivian?

It was quite daunting. During my first lesson, which was back in August 1988, I realised that there was a lot to learn before I would even start writing. Vivian was a really amazing person. He was around 75 years old when I met him, and full of energy and enthusiasm for his work. He was determined to teach me as much as he could or, as he put it, "to pass on before he passed out". I sometimes describe it like Star Wars, where he was the Jedi master teaching his Padawan (apprentice), but using quills instead of lightsabres.

What skills do you think you need to be a Sofer?

Being a Sofer is more than just calligraphy. I think it requires quite a unique mix of skills. Although being artistic is important, there is so much more than that. You need to have a detailed knowledge of Jewish laws (halacha) and be G-d-fearing (i.e. observant). There are a lot of rules related to being a Sofer, and you need to understand and follow these properly. Before starting to write, I have to make a specific declaration of intention to convey holiness before I start, and obviously make sure



my hands are clean and dry (there is even a practical halachic suggestion to blow your nose!)

Being able to connect spiritually with the word of G-d through what you are writing, and thinking about the meaning behind the words, is essential. A Sefer Torah is considered to be the most holy object in Judaism, and the 613th commandment is actually to write a Sefer Torah, so as a Sofer I am fulfilling this important mitzvah on behalf of the community.

It can be a very intense experience and it's important that, when you are doing this kind of work, you are in the right headspace. Sometimes, I can lose track of time when I am really in the flow with something, because it requires so much concentration and detail. You really need to have your brain in gear, otherwise mistakes may happen and that could mean that the object is pasul (invalid, not kosher) and therefore unable to be used. It is a serious undertaking, and I don't take my responsibility lightly.

What else is involved in your role?

A large part of my time is spent in repairing scrolls that have been damaged or worn out through use. There are a lot of elements to be considered in the making of scrolls including the parchment, the ink and even the seams, and I have to know how to deal with issues relating to all of these. Some of the scrolls I am working on have endured all sorts of conditions, and it can be very intense work to ensure that they are useable again. Sometimes, I will have to go over every single letter if the ink has faded, or fix broken seams where they have worn out. It's as much a kind of religious restoration as calligraphy practice.

What is your process?

I would initially inspect the object in question and do an in-depth report, and then create an estimate based on the time required to do it and the level of work required. A new Sefer Torah can take more than a year to write (full-time) in order to

make sure it is completely right. Repairs will vary, based on the amount of damage. Sometimes (but fortunately rarely) they can be so badly damaged that it would cost more to repair it than to have a new one written.

In terms of process, whether you are writing afresh or fixing, you need to cut a quill (or shape a reed) you have a tiqqun sofrim (copyist guide) to hand. You make certain declarations regarding the holiness of the items you are to write or repair, and get yourself into the right frame of mind – kavannah (spiritual intention) – to write or overwrite. You test the quill by writing Amalek and crossing it through, and you need to use a specially prepared ink (d'yo) that is the blackest of the black. As you write, you sound out or think the letters and keep that concentration. Repairs will also potentially involve scraping, smoothing or patching the parchment. On new works, you will then join yeriot (sheets) together using gidin (animal sinew) or, for repairs where seams have come apart, re-sew. There are lots of rules, but there are special rules when anything involves G-d's Holy Names. There's lots of detail on my website: www.sofer.co.uk

What is the most unusual project you have had to work on?

There was a time when I was contacted by a family who told me that their dog had literally eaten the barmitzvah parasha in the family Sefer Torah, which was at home for practice. He had managed to chew through three columns as well as the handles. It wasn't a standard tiqqun, so I had to find a way to recreate the text on a computer and then write it in the style of the original scribe (I'm a firm believer in trying to match styles and not mix). There was a two-month deadline till the simcha, so quite an effort to meet the deadline. The family made sure that they kept the dog well away in future!

A few years ago, I fixed a megillah scroll that actually belonged to the Tyburn convent based in Hyde Park, London. The megillah dated from the 18th century and had been gifted to the nuns by a Jewish lawyer

and I were interviewed for the BBC World Service and we were featured in both the Jewish and Catholic press. The whole thing was a fascinating and challenging experience and I went on to write a book, which looks not only at the restoration but the many parallels between the story of Megillah Esther and that of the Tyburn Convent, entitled *Restoring the Tyburn Megillah*.

Your wife, Avielah Barclay-Michaels, is also a scribe. Is it unusual to have female Sofers?

Yes, she is actually the first female in the modern world to be a 'Soferet'. She trained with Sofrim in Israel, though apparently did visit my website for information before we ever met. I think we are the only married scribal couple in the world, and possibly all of history, which is quite unique.

Is being a Sofer your full-time occupation?

I'm actually a Strategy and Creative Director in a London marketing agency for most of my week. Avielah and I also have a small publishing imprint, Kulmus Publishing, which specialises in producing books of scribal and Jewish interest. I have actually written a few books relating to some of the documents that I have restored, as well as writing and illustrating some children's books. Currently, I am also doing a PhD in Jewish Manuscripts, at Cambridge, and just had my first academic monograph published – *Sefer Tagin Fragments from the Cairo Genizah*, part of the Cambridge Genizah Studies series.

What do you enjoy most

about being a Sofer?

I think it is a great honour to be able to have such a direct relationship with the text I am working on, and being able to connect with the word of G-d as it has been written, without any commentaries intervening. It really suits my creative and artistic nature, and my religious studies.

I have also worked on further conservation of the Czech scrolls; which were a collection of Sifrei Torah along with countless other Jewish books and textiles that were saved during World War II by being sent to the Jewish Museum in Prague from Bohemia and Moravia. After the war, around 1,500 were left in a damp warehouse which, unfortunately, left them in a really bad condition. These scrolls were worked on by a group of scribes and are loaned to communities around the world for them to use. I also worked on a different, quite famous Torah that was also saved from the Nazis, the Alexander Torah, which I have also written a book about (*The Torah in the Wardrobe*) as I could track its progress from being written to ending up in the UK, and it had many special features. Being able to restore and preserve part of our heritage and culture, and connect with our history, is really important.

I have been lucky to have travelled all over the UK and other countries, and met and taught some really amazing and interesting people through this job, and it is great being able to help Jewish communities across the spectrum to be able to practice their faith and learn from the texts I have written or restored. In the UK, there are very few scribes, so to be part of this special group is very humbling.



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For details of our events for the eight
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The Executive and Council of Southend
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Synagogue Council
wish all readers a
Happy Chanukah**

Veteran flying high after receiving award



A SECOND World War veteran has been recognised by the French Government for his involvement in D-Day by being given the Legion of Honour award.

Maurice Conway (pictured), 96, received the award for his role in helping to liberate France as part of the Normandy landings operation in June 1944. As a rear gunner in Canadian 420 Squadron of Bomber Command, Maurice, along with his crew, managed to destroy a bridge preventing German forces from being able to gain access to the beachhead in Countances, France.

Maurice received the award in September, having submitted his application almost a year ago. He told the *Essex Jewish News*: "I'm delighted to receive this medal and commendation. After a year of waiting, I had almost forgotten about it, so it was a lovely surprise especially in the current situation."

The crew that he flew with on that historic day unfortunately are no longer around, so Maurice was proud to accept the award on behalf of them as well.

During his service, Maurice was involved in 35 raids, and he kept a diary of his operations throughout this time. Some of his entries have been published in the Cranbrook United Synagogue

Magazine and give an interesting insight into how he must have felt going into battle. As he explains: "I was only 18 when I signed up in 1943 and it was quite daunting, so writing a diary helped me to get down on paper my thoughts and feelings at the time."

He has put these entries together in a personal book for his family, entitled 'Going to War

Backwards'. The title refers to the fact that, in his role as a rear gunner, he spent much of his time with his back to the rest of the crew during battle.

For Maurice, looking back at his service, he realises that, whilst it was an extremely dangerous time, he admits that he "didn't really think about it, and just got on with it".

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*The Governors, Staff and Students at both schools
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When is a latke more than a latke?

When it brings care and company.



Essex communities take part in a Month of Mitzvahs

SYNAGOGUES and schools around Essex not only enjoyed Mitzvah Day this year, but took part in a whole Month of Mitzvahs.

The initiative was created by Mitzvah Day after its organisers realised that the usual annual activities – which this year took place on Sunday 15 November – wouldn't be enough in the midst of the pandemic. So, instead, a whole month of good deeds and small acts of kindness took place in November.

In total, more than 300 British faith communities and organisations took part, joined by 40 schools and thousands of families and individual volunteers doing good deeds from home.

Mitzvah Day projects in Essex included:

(Picture 1) Pupils at **Wohl Ilford Jewish Primary School** collected toys and games for Camp Simcha and food and toiletries for the Redbridge Food Bank. They also made cards to send to children in hospital as well as residents in Jewish Care homes, tenants in Jewish Blind & Disabled's Aztec House and army veterans to be distributed by AJEX.

(Picture 2) **Clare Tikva** children showed appreciation to the key workers who have been so vital during the pandemic – making chocolates that were given out to the cardiac ward of St Bartholomew's Hospital, the antenatal ward at Queen's Hos-

pital and the surgical ward at Newham General Hospital. They also designed Chanukah cards for the elderly members of South West Essex and Settlement Reform Synagogue and collected toys for Camp Simcha.

(Picture 3) At **Kantor King Solomon High School**, the students wrote cards to thank the staff for all of their hard work and contribution to the school community. This included cleaners, kitchen staff, caretakers, IT department and the teachers. In total more than 1,000 Mitzvah Day cards were completed by the students and put on a display, fostering appreciation and encompassing the idea that kind words and appreciation can help people through challenging times.

(Picture 4) **Ilford Federation Synagogue** held a car park collection in association with Gants Hill JACS, with members and friends donating goods to the charity GIFT which will go to help those in need locally.

(Picture 5) **New Essex Masorti Synagogue** collected donations of toiletries and children's toys for Bags of Kindness, which supports women's domestic abuse refuges in London, Essex and Hertfordshire. Pictured is shul member Cathy Forman with some of the congregation's donations.

(Pictures 6 and 7) The cheder children of **East London & Essex Liberal Synagogue**, in-

cluding Max and Daniel Delow, baked cakes in their own homes, joined together via a virtual classroom, for Mill Grove children's home. Keith and Ruth, who run Mill Grove, then joined the community for a Zoom discussion, answering questions about its amazing 120-year history. The synagogue's Merle Muswell said: "We understand the youngsters there loved the cakes – and we know this will be the start of a fruitful and fulfilling relationship."

(Picture 8) Participants of **Jewish Care's MIKE** youth leadership programme, including Ben and Georgia Matthews (pictured), donated items to their local food bank, delivered by Jewish Care's youth and family coordinator Emma Senitt.

(Picture 9) At **Jewish Care's Vi & John Ruben's House**, residents enjoyed joining in with a Zoom singalong of English and Yiddish classics with John Rose. Residents were also entertained as youngsters played tunes on musical instruments. This included Noah Joseph (10) playing the flute, Ari Joseph (8) playing the violin and Jodie Cooper (8) playing the guitar.

Others taking part and/or recording video messages this year included British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Leader of the Opposition Sir Keir Starmer, Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, London Mayor Sadiq Khan, Minister for Faith Lord Greenhalgh, Chief Rabbi Ephraim

Mirvis and Jewish and faith leaders from across the spectrum.

Sir Keir Starmer, who attended a car park collection in Hampstead, said: "This is a wonderful opportunity to see people of different faiths working together to enrich their local communities. While this year feels very different, the Jewish values behind Mitzvah Day are more important than ever."

The Prime Minister said: "Mitzvah Day has become a great British tradition. I am delighted and not at all surprised to see all the inspirational Mitzvah Day volunteers rise to the challenge of COVID – not just maintaining this fantastic Jewish-led day of good deeds, but creating an entire month of mitzvahs!"





Leslie receiving Meals on Wheels from volunteer, Leon.

This Chanukah, will you bring light into the lives of isolated people like Leslie?

Leslie has been self-isolating since the first lockdown began. This Chanukah thousands of Meals on Wheels will be delivered to Jewish men and women who rely on them, just like Leslie.

But it isn't just the hot, Kosher food that they rely on, by staying indoors they miss the company too. That's why our delivery drivers always go out of their way to chat to clients when they bring their food – in a socially distanced way of course.

The number of Meals on Wheels we have to produce has more than doubled since March and we receive no government support to provide this vital service.

So please make a gift to Jewish Care this Chanukah and help to bring more light into the lives of people like Leslie.

To make your gift, please call 020 8922 2600, or visit jewishcare.org/donate

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CNANUKAH 5781/DECEMBER 2020



Howard's fourth novel hits the bookshops



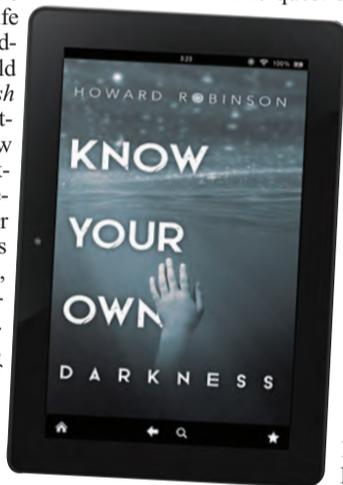
BY AN EJM REPORTER

A LOCAL author has just had his fourth novel published. Howard

Robinson, 55, who lives with his wife Melanie, in Woodford Green, told the *Essex Jewish News* that his latest book, *Know Your Own Darkness*, sees the return of a character from one of his earlier books, Detective Inspector Jack Munday.

Howard, who is one of the coordinators on the council at New Stoke Newington Synagogue, said that his latest plot begins with a group of children who had witnessed the accidental drowning of a friend. The story then moves forward 30 years from that tragedy, with those children, now adults and parents themselves, receiving messages claiming to be from the boy who died.

The notes become more alarming when one of their own children disappears and with time



running out for the detective inspector, as he balances the sensitive case alongside his own personal problems and a demanding new superior officer.

"The question that the police need to answer is who is sending the messages and why, and to do so fast enough knowing that time is of the essence in a potential abduction," Howard said of the plot.

Howard's other novels are *Micah Seven* and *Five* – the first Jack Munday novel – *The Sixth Republic* and *The Bitterest Pill*. He has also written a number of short stories.

Know Your Own Darkness is available from Amazon; wordery.com and inspired-quill.com or can be ordered from any bookshop. It is available in paperback at £9.99 or for Kindle or ebook at £3.49. More is available about Howard's writing at www.howard-robinson.com

Going the extra mile

A FAMILY-RUN deli, bakery and café in Chigwell went the extra mile for their customers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The business, named *Delicacy*, has a large number of elderly and vulnerable regular customers so the owner and manager, Michele McCloud, sprang into action to support them when the UK went into lockdown in March.

Many customers and friends in *Delicacy's* local network were furloughed or unable to work, so Michele organised them into a volunteer team.

The team telephoned those who may be isolated or at risk to check what they needed and then visited them regularly, bringing deliveries from *Delicacy*, supermarkets and the pharmacy and often ending up providing some much-needed social and emotional support as well.

Delicacy also began selling an afternoon tea in a box and advertising with customers and on social media, which immediately took off as locals sent pick-me-ups to brighten the days of friends and family they couldn't see in person.

Many of these went to those in need - scared and tired NHS staff, lonely grandparents, and new mums having to figure it out alone. Michele sent her volunteer team to deliver and often would not accept any payment. *Delicacy's* motto is that everything is made with love, and you could certainly feel that in Michele's efforts to support the local community during lockdown.

You can visit *Delicacy* on Manor Road, Chigwell. You can also find *Delicacy* on Facebook by searching 'DelicacyChigwell' and Instagram on @DelicacyCafe.

Jacky goes from Sinclair House to Amazon Prime

BY SIMON ROTHSTEIN

A RENOWNED UK author, who splits her time between her hometown of Romford and the delightful Caribbean Island of St Maarten, has recalled how she was set on the path to success at Sinclair House.

Jacky Rom – who is also a presenter and drama teacher – had her first full-length play, entitled *Another Mouth To Feed*, performed there in 1979.

Jacky told the *Essex Jewish News*: "Sinclair House will always have a special place in my heart. I loved growing up in Essex and remember my youth spent participating in JLGB and attending the Redbridge and Barking-side youth clubs."

Now 40 years on, Jacky has written 15 books, presented the documentary *Method of Murder* on Amazon Prime and has her own podcast entitled: *The Life of a Crime Novelist*.

She can also be seen on the YouTube series *Jacky Rom Investigates*, where she interviews ordinary people with extraordinary lives.

Jacky also runs two charities – a radio station called www.switchdunmow.com and the St Maarten based www.allaboutasmile.org



just about to go back to St Maarten to finish her latest novel, *Fame to Felony* ... which is book 3 in the series of the *Sandra Bernstein Chronicles*. This crime fiction series follows

[allaboutasmile.org](http://www.allaboutasmile.org)

After spending time in Romford, Jacky is

a make-up artiste as she travels the world, from one film set to another, and murder just seems to be around each corner.

Why Sandra Bernstein? Jacky revealed: "Well! When my grandfather came over from Poland his surname was Borenstein. But as was very usual in those times, it was misspelt and renamed Bernstein.

"He then changed it again

by going into a telephone box and using a pin to choose a more Anglicised name of Ether-ton."

You may know that name as Jacky's first cousin is Sir Terence Etherton, current Master of the Rolls.

If you would like to find out more about Jacky Rom, please visit www.jackyrom.com

A writing career in full Bloom!

BY MICAELA BLITZ

LOSING a partner is an extremely traumatic experience and, for Sharon Rosenbloom, dealing with it at the age of just 39 and with two young children to care for made it even more difficult.

At the time, Sharon admits that she felt completely overwhelmed by her situation and had so many unanswered questions. As she explains: "I kept asking myself, why me? Why did this awful thing happen to me? I felt like a victim and was totally broken and lost."

She received bereavement therapy for two years, which helped; but she was also told that her son, who has special needs, probably wouldn't grieve for about three years, and this meant that she then had to go through it again with him.

Having a personal understanding of how to deal with loss has enabled Sharon to use her ability to use her own experiences to empathise with others through volunteering with Ahada Bereavement Counselling. She has also gone on to gain other qualifications and has an advanced diploma in counselling, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, life coaching and mindfulness.

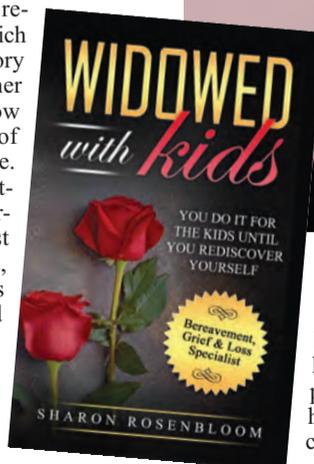
When a friend posted on Facebook that she had just had a book published, and suggest-

ing that others contact her publisher, Sharon decided to get in touch in order to share her own story, as she thought it could help others in similar situations.

As she explains: "I felt that I wanted to share my personal journey, and how I had changed. I wanted to call the book *A Rose in Bloom*, which was not only a play on my surname, but also describes the way I had grown in myself and bloomed."

Through speaking to the publisher, the story that developed was actually a much more reflective one, which looked at the story of her losing her husband and how she came out of the other side. She started writing the book during the first lockdown and, after six months of writing and soul searching, her book *Widowed with Kids* will be published in December 2020 and available through Amazon.

Sharon describes writing the book as "very therapeutic" and it has enabled her to work through some of her own feelings and memories. She feels



that it has been a positive experience and shown her how far she has come over the past 17 years, and how much she has changed.

At the time of her husband's death, Sharon describes herself as being 'Miss Fearful' adding that she was always too afraid to try things and didn't want to bring attention to herself; but after learning to

deal with her feelings, she now sees herself as 'Miss Fearless' and writing this book has proved this.

She concluded: "I am really surprised at myself. Writing a book is not something I ever imagined I would do, but I hope that this will help others to come to terms with their own loss and realise they are not alone. I went through some really dark times, so I know what it is like and feel that it is now my soul's passion to help others."

I found the selflessness of everyone just incredible

HAZEL CAPAL ON THE WONDERFUL GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS HELPING OUT DURING THE PANDEMIC

I KNOW we have all had different ways of coping (or not!) during this dreadful period.

I had always been extremely grateful that we didn't have to live through the horrors of the Holocaust and a World War, where my uncle was killed the day after D-Day, tending to a patient. We did not suffer as our ancestors did, including my grandfather, who escaped the pogroms in eastern Europe. All the male members of his family were murdered.

When the full horror of the pandemic emerged, I desperately wanted to become involved and help. I remember asking my mum what she did in the long, dark days of WW2; and she worked in a munitions factory. So I could certainly do something to help. I tried to volunteer for the NHS, but they closed their volunteer lines – or it might have been they didn't want me. Who knows?

I came across an organisation involved in making scrubs for Queens Hospital and King George's, plus a couple of smaller hospitals. It turned out because of such a massive increase in staff, round the clock, plus a huge back-up in the laundry, there was a desperate shortage of scrubs.

Queens set up a fund to raise the money for the special, approved fabric, and we were off! I volunteered to coordinate a group of sewers (as in machinists, not drains ...), ending up with almost 60 in Chigwell, Woodford, Buckhurst Hill and Loughton. I also had eight



Hazel Capal ... grateful we didn't live through the Holocaust

drivers to help with pick-ups of the cut fabric from Upminster, delivering locally, then collecting again to return to the base and on to Queens.

What an amazing experience; everybody was working voluntarily to help at all times and hours of the day. I received messages at almost midnight, then again at 6 a.m. We completed 11,000 sets of scrubs for the two main hospitals, St. Francis Hospice, plus some went to Southend, Newham, even Hampshire.

I found the selflessness of everyone who volunteered just incredible – we had wealth fund managers, nurses, paramedics, accountants, teachers, entertainers, event managers, senior executives of large companies, 80-plus year-olds (yes, older than me!), university stu-

dents and people from all walks of life.

In particular, I would like to mention four volunteers, amongst hundreds. One has, what she called, a "lodger" in her head, an inoperable brain tumour; another guy wanted to "give back" to the NHS as he had a bone marrow transplant which saved his life. One driver has a serious auto-immune disease, working full-time as a social worker, yet running around in the evening and weekends collecting items and driving to Upminster to deliver.

A fourth was undergoing chemotherapy, seriously ill, so did not have the energy to sew, but was at the end of a phone line offering advice. Sadly, she has not replied to messages or phone calls for a month now,

so I am very upset. Oh my goodness! I do realise how lucky we are. These are heroes, too.

One of my drivers is a 'resting' actor, who will just jump up at any time to deliver items. He has been in numerous productions, usually portrayed as a criminal, so I did wonder what the neighbours might have thought when he dropped items off from the back of his car, especially with his lockdown beard!

I also asked another driver if he would not mind taking on a few extra on his round to help out. "Hazel, I used to have 400 in a day when I worked for a delivery company; I can cope with your 12," was his reply.

As we came to the end of the 11,000 scrubs originally required, some of the ladies wanted to continue helping the community, so I set up a group making face coverings to donate to places like food banks, schools, nurseries. It is tough enough for food bank recipients to find money for food, let alone for these items.

We have been inundated with requests, and I have found some local businesses very helpful with supplying offcuts of material etc. We have been purchasing our own elastic, too.

If nothing else, the time has shot by with being so involved and busy. Yes, physically, thank goodness, we are well. We are lucky, in comfortable homes, lots of food (too much!), and I managed to source deliveries of everything, even plants and deli.

We are now cooperating with a local Covid-19 support group in Epping Forest, supplying face coverings and also other much needed items.

Out of this horrific situation, there is a lot of good work being carried out.

PERSONAL OPINION



RENEE BRAVO

Zoom has given us a new lease of life

IN the section on Halachah in the Encyclopaedia Judaica are these words:

"A material feature of Jewish Law is its ever-continuing evolution. This is the fountain of authority, and the starting point for the whole Halachic system, with all its changes and evolutions throughout the generations. Halachah goes back to Moses, plus the various later elaborations, extensions, applications and innovations in accordance with new circumstances."

I can think of no greater example of new circumstances than the position we find ourselves in today, and I have been looking at how the local synagogues are tackling it.

Rather than worrying that the new shutdown will lead to a loss of synagogue activity, a new lease of life has been injected into the community. It is called Zoom.

An everyday morning service, which would usually only attract a handful of participants, can get up to 50 attending on Zoom. This pattern is being repeated in both Orthodox and non-Orthodox congregations.

A learning session on 'this week's Sedra' attracted 220 'hits'; 200 people came to a drive-in Havdalah service at Kantor King Solomon High School. A teatime 'lunch and

learn' session on Zoom regularly attracts 50-60 people.

The need to 'look after' each other, especially the elderly, has led to a much greater participation by members. One of our larger synagogues has a pool of 150 volunteers looking after its vulnerable members.

These are unusual times, and all the usual rules no longer apply. The late Lord Jonathan Sacks, the previous Chief Rabbi, in one of his regular articles in *The Times*, wrote: "We should test our beliefs in the arena of free debate, rigorous argument, and a willingness to confront positions antithetical to one's own. To argue is not to lessen one's religious beliefs, but to increase them through greater understanding."

After the giving of the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai, God says to Moses: "Tell the Children of Israel, in every place where my name is remembered, I will come to you and bless you."

We stand today in a new place, called Zoom, with the possibility of a whole new chapter in the story of the religious life of the Jewish people, and all the peripheral possibilities.

Perhaps we should take advantage of all this new technology, and send Him an e-mail, reminding Him of His promise.



Being inclusive and accessible is easy

ESSEX JEWISH NEWS MEETS THE PARENTS BEHIND A DISABILITY WEBSITE FOR FAMILIES

IN 2012, Chigwell & Hainault Synagogue members David and Emma Bara's two-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour. Surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy saved her life but left her with some life-changing disabilities.

Through their journey, they met hundreds of families who are also trying to navigate their way through a world that isn't always designed for kids like theirs.

So they created WeCan Access (www.wecanaccess.com), an online platform where people with disabilities, their families and carers can find support, share ideas and discover ways to access the world around them.

WeCanAccess unites people with disabilities, parents/carers, businesses and SEND professionals, encouraging them to share personal experiences, ideas and



Emma and David Bara with their website

perspectives. The website provides a variety of free resources, which enable access to everything under one roof.

By simply creating an account, users can contribute to the online discussion boards and find out more from people with disabilities or SEND professionals in the blog area. There is also a growing accessibility guide, for places and businesses across the country.

The 'review' area offers the opportunity to search for, or leave a recommendation for, somewhere that does inclusion or access well. WeCanAccess particularly wants to hear about those hidden gems around the corner!

The site also uses 'recite me' software, which can translate or read the website out loud to visitors.

David and Emma told the

Essex Jewish News: "As a family with a SEND child, we struggled to find suitable places to get products our child needed, and then there was the constant struggle to get the appropriate support."

Having noticed a gap in the market, David and Emma created a platform for others just like themselves – with access and inclusion at its heart.

They added: "We wanted people to get ideas, support and information from each other but wanted to remove the usual labels. This way people can get a different perspective on an issue."

"We want to show that being inclusive and accessible is easy and the smart thing to do."

WeCanAccess is a certified Social Enterprise, a partner of the World Health Innovation Summit and a UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Champion. Emma and David are also exemplar partners in the #learning-planet global festival of learning in January 2021. Find out more at www.learning-planet.org/en/festival

Southend and Westcliff Hebrew Congregation
warmly wish the Community and all EJM Readers

CHANUKAH SAMEACH!

We're a friendly modern-orthodox shul and we'd love to welcome you to our wonderful community. We'd also like to take this opportunity to wish YOUR SHOP AT THE SHUL a *Happy 10th Anniversary* - all your kosher food supplies and Judaica easily located on-site!

Southend & Westcliff Hebrew Congregation
The Shul by the Sea

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CAMBRIDGE DIET

MARK HARRIS



I'VE BEEN like living in like Cambridge for like 11 years now, after like retiring from like the legal profession and like moving to the like ancient university town from like Clayhall in Redbridge ... and like continuing to author like fiction books for like publication. With a like laptop and tablet, I don't like need to like write at home: and like I've kind of built up like a range of like creative niches in a number of like college cafes and bars – as well as like comfy, shady and tranquil al-fresco spots in their like lovely campus gardens during like warmer and sunnier weather. But like Covid-19 this year has like sadly stopped all that, because the like general public – even like locals with like 'Cambridge resident' passes for like free entry to those colleges that like otherwise charge for ingress – are like now prohibited from like entering their like historic and iconic grounds.



Much has like changed or evolved in like academia – maybe like unsurprisingly in some respects – since like my own 'uni' days in like the 'Swinging Sixties' and like significantly in the like spoken English language. And in that like linguistic aspect of like post-modern society, certain like speech developments have like occurred ... and like notably amongst like young adults, including like undergraduates (whether like male or female, and like not excluding Jewish lads and lasses).



One like oral, literary revolution that I've like especially noted – particularly during my like niche writing interludes, whilst like surrounded by students in like college cafes and bars – appears like to be ... well, I'm like fairly certain you've like guessed it by like now. But I'll like state the like perceived transformation anyway. It's the like almost incredibly continual like usage of the word 'like' in like student conversations during like social intercourse. I'm not like saying that like all undergrads engage – to like whatever degree – in this like comparatively recent like lifestyle of like dialogue phenomenon. But like many such actually like do so; and like wherever these like 'English-speaking' students like hail from in the world.

I believe I'm like speaking authentically, like, when I mention that it's like not a like rare occurrence in like my own 'overheard undergrad chatting' experiences; and even like somewhat unexpectedly, as I've like gathered, involving like students who are like studying 'English'! My like most recent encounter with like this subject was like

nearing the end of like Lent Term much earlier this year, like. I was like imbibing a like Americano in the like Whale Cafe at the like Cambridge Zoological Museum. This was, of course, before the like coronavirus pandemic descended on us. So the like two young female undergrads were like sitting within like two metres of me; and at one of the like longish tables in the like quite spacious and popular like snack bar and coffee shop (with the like huge skeleton of a like fin whale suspended from the like nearby museum ceiling).

Unlike the like several other students like perched around me – eyes like glued to their like laptops or tablets – the two like near-neighbouring girls, within like close earshot, were like enjoying some like light chit-chat over their like hot beverages. I couldn't like fail to overhear what they were like talking about; they weren't like exactly whispering to each other. As a like curious – in the like inquisitive sense, you like understand – and like observant author, one on the like lookout for like contemporary speech traits, I like became interested if not intrigued, like. But like less in the like varying topics of their like girly interaction, and like more in their like utilisation of like the little word 'like'.



Naturally like, this wasn't the like first occasion on which I'd like come across the more than like spasmodic employment of the word 'like' in like students' gossip sessions like nowadays. But, this like extraordinary time around, I was like totally and amazingly gobsmacked by the like virtually continuous usage of the 'like' word after like almost every few like other words. For the like first time, it like caused me to like wonder – and more than like superficially – about the like likely reason this was like happening so widely today. And about the like origin of such like oddly equivocal word use; as well as like where the like relatively newly adopted but like quite ubiquitous, conversing custom and practice might be like headed in the future.

Do you 'like' or 'no like'?

BUT IT'S NOT ONLY CAMBRIDGE STUDENTS, LIKE!



Lovely Magdalene College (pronounced like maudlin, which the like author hopes like this feature isn't, like)

Now I began to like speculate whether the word 'like' – in like the informal conversational context – had sort of like superseded the like former interspersed hesitancy or like 'thinking time' grunts of

like 'er' or 'hmm' or like whatever. I couldn't like clearly imagine any other like justifiable motivation or explanation. And, in a way like, my thoughts were like confirmed when I like researched

online some special websites, like.

The Cambridge English Dictionary like states that the word 'like' is: "Used in conversation as a pause" and that, "In informal speaking you will hear 'like' used very commonly ... it is important not to use these forms in formal writing such as academic essays". Any like student EJM readers please like take note! Fairly similarly, Lexico like refers to the word 'like' as being "used in speech as a meaningless filler". But like why has the like specific word 'like' taken on this like superfluous role? Why not a word such as like 'let' or 'so' or 'put' or 'as' etcetera? Or even the like not so infrequently used 'undergrad' word **** that like I can't mention in a like family newspaper!

If my like initial notion, hypothesis or conjecture is, like seemingly, the like veritable rationale, how and why has this like linguistic evolution like crept up on us (or like rather our young folk)?

Were its like earliest adherents like unaware of what they were like persistently uttering as a kind of like orally expressed thinking space? And did like Cambridge's (and like assuredly also other universities) students really like need continually to have the 'like' articulated pause-time to like ponder momentarily – and like increasingly habitually – what they were like going to say next, like? Or had like the change just kind of like slunk into the like informal, young adult exchanges without anyone like really knowing, realising, appreciating or assimilating the fact, like? Akin, say, to a like invisible and viral pandemic suddenly like enveloping planet Earth?



And my mind like prompted me to like mull over whether the like 'literary' substitution of a like actual word for a grunt could be like criticised at all. Could this be like argued to constitute a like linguistic improvement to like casual 'English language' conversation, which like might otherwise include a like series of perpetual pause-grunts? In like any event, the like practice is likely to like continue if not like persist with its like impassive – though like maybe 'unknowing' – participants, whether any like bog-gle-eyed bystander-listeners do like or not like! Like they should like mind their own business, like so to speak, some undergrad students might like say of 'Queen's English' critics, like!



And in that like linguistic aspect of like post-modern society, certain like speech developments have like occurred and like notably amongst like young adults, including like undergraduates whether like male or female, and like not excluding Jewish lads and lasses



Likes: 235
or like
thereabouts

POSTCARDS FROM SOUTHEND



A ROUND-UP OF STORIES AND NEWS FROM OUR SEASIDE COMMUNITY.

Doris celebrates her 100th at Southend's Shebson Lodge

BY LAURA JOHNSON

THE wonderful Doris Rose celebrated her 100th birthday in November at Jewish Care's Shebson Lodge retirement

living apartments.

I speak to Doris every week as a befriender, but we had never met. So I visited her on behalf of Jewish Care Southend & Westcliff Community Centre, socially dis-

tanced on her doorstep, and presented her with a hamper and lemon drizzle cake – her favourite.

She was overwhelmed and very happy, and excited to have reached 100.

For many years her son, now in his 70s, has arranged birthday parties for her, but she is very disappointed to be missing out this year due to Covid-19.

She spoke to me about her life, and meeting her future husband at The Royal in Tottenham when she was 16.

Doris spent her early 20's in the army as a radar operator in Guildford. She then travelled to many places throughout England and finished her period in the army at Acton, leaving when she became pregnant with her son.

I sang Happy Birthday to her and played Stevie Wonder's Happy Birthday on my phone, and she danced to this and said how much she still loves dancing.

She was delighted to receive her card from the Queen, which she opened with her son, and was also looking forward to being interviewed on BBC Radio Essex to tell her story.

Doris Rose's 100th birthday in Southend with flowers from Laura Johnson, befriender from Jewish Care's Southend & Westcliff Community Centre



Nothing is Amess

BY MARILYN SALT

SIR David Amess MP found time in his very busy schedule to participate in a Zoom meeting, organised by Southend & Westcliff Hebrew Congregation board member Yael Bebb.

As functions chair, it was my pleasure to introduce Sir David, stating his many attributes – how he had been in Parliament for 40 years, was involved in many worthwhile causes including animal welfare and his campaign for a Raoul Wallenberg memorial. A leading member of the Friends of Israel, Sir David also holds the voting record in the House of Commons.

Sir David then gave a wonderful talk about life in Parliament. He had asked for questions from the community beforehand and had taken the trouble to speak to Southend Council and Parliament on the issues brought up, so that he



could answer them extensively. Many people were impressed with the thoughtfulness and the appreciation he has for

his constituents. The Zoom meeting ended at 8pm as Sir David had to rush off to vote in Parliament.

When Bournemouth ruled the sea (sides)

BY MARILYN SALT

AN interesting Zoom talk, organised by Yael Bebb for SWHC, saw Geoffrey Feld speak about the Rise and Fall of the Bournemouth Hotels – covering the period from the 1940s to 1980s.

Geoffrey started by asking how many had stayed in the Jewish hotels in Bournemouth and many hands went up. The Kosher Jewish hotel business started after the First World War. A family holiday was with sun, sea and beaches and Bournemouth was smart, sophisticated and clean, and only 100 miles from London. It started with small hotels and then larger ones and, amid the 1930's, hotels were built in art deco style.

Bournemouth was the No1 choice for Jewish holiday makers. The first Jewish hotel was the Ambassador and survived for 60 years. The Marriott family moved to Bournemouth from Torquay in 1943 and things started to happen. They established The Green Park, 60 bedroom hotel under the Beth Din. After the Second World War, there were 600 bedrooms available in the town for Jewish holiday-makers.

Geoffrey told us how his parents, Bluma and Isaac, had bought the Cumberland in Pessach 1949 and how the hotel was run. He talked about the many famous guests that stayed there and all about how there was continuous food all day long, sometimes until midnight.

The hotels were full and there was extensive competition between them. The Green Park was the most expensive, charging two and a half guineas a day full board. The Cumberland, £2. By 1950, the Bournemouth hotels offered top service, second only to the



Catskills in the US.

All the hotels tried to be better in food, entertainment and all the cream of Anglo-Jewry came to Bournemouth. The hotels became the place for Jewish people to meet and many 'shidduchs' were made in the hotels. They were sold out every summer.

Geoffrey's father had a black book containing people he didn't want to come back for various reasons. He even limited the number of children allowed in the hotel. Although later, when things changed, the black book was cancelled.

There were 10-day bookings at Christmas with bands and cabarets with famous people, including Jewish comedians.

A typical day at a Jewish hotel – the big fress! At 9am queuing for full breakfast, 10am walk, 11.30am coffee and biscuits, 1pm four-course milky lunch including Dover sole, then at 2.30pm card playing (very popular), kalooki and canasta, because Jewish people love to gamble. This would be followed by a walk, an afternoon tea at 4pm then a 'schluf' before 7pm queuing for the four-course meaty dinner, with dancing at 8.30pm. Then followed 10pm evening tea and

cakes. Every Shabbat there would be a buffet with free drinks.

Geoffrey told many anecdotes regarding people staying in the hotel. On Seder night, they had dinner for 300 including people from the outside. On Yom Kippur, there was more room service than any other day – room service was busy all day. On Sukkot and Simchat Torah, they were fully booked and people from outside were allowed to come in and had free tea etc. Geoffrey called all the hoteliers together to change this.

The Green Park had the first heated pool and others followed. Of course, there were no credit cards, only cash and cheques. The Cumberland only advertised in the JC and they were full. Many people had wedding, simchas, barmitzvahs and charity weekends.

The first crack in the hotel business happened in the 1960s when, thanks to Laker Airways, cheap holidays became the normal and people started going abroad.

Geoffrey told several humorous stories about the guests. He then opened the Zoom to questions from the audience, and many reminisced and told their own stories and memories of their stays in Bournemouth.

A decade of kosher shopping

BY SARA VANDERMOLEN

THE Shop in the Shul celebrated its 10th birthday in October.

To mark this milestone birthday, a socially distanced l'chaim event was held to which everyone was invited – with all customers entered into a free draw with a chance to win vouchers to spend in the Shop. The winners highlighted the diversity and pull of the Shop's customer base with the first living in Colchester, and coming for an order every few weeks, and the second being one of weekly customers.

Manager David Law continues to cook a variety of tempting recipes each week to order and sell in the Shop, as well as his 'salt beef and latke' specials on occasional Sundays.

Never has it been more evident how important a kosher shop is, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the paramount aim to ensure the Jewish community had their kosher food delivered to their doors. This was done in Southend with the



Pictured is Pamela Freedman, Southend and Westcliff Hebrew Congregation's Office Manager

wonderful support of the Chesed Club, an amazing initiative from Alan and Lyetta Witzendorf, who were also instrumental in the Shop's original being, too. We thank them greatly.

OUR THANKS TO **GEOFFREY PEPPER** FOR HIS HELP IN COMPILING STORIES FOR THIS PAGE

FOCUS ON Lockdown livelihoods



OVER the past few months, many people have faced uncertainty and even unemployment, with so many jobs, businesses and entire industries under threat. Micaela Blitz spoke to those who have taken this change in circumstances to find alternative ways to make a living during lockdown.

JASON PALMER

UNIFY



Timely for the travelling public

Although Covid-19 may have ruined lots of people's holiday plans this year, ex-travel agency general manager Jason Palmer, who lives in Clayhall, is creating an email sales platform that he hopes will help both travel agencies and travel organisers send offers that are relevant and timely to the travelling public.

With over 30 years' experience in the travel industry, Jason first had the idea about a year or so ago, but finally put it into practice during lockdown.

In his previous role at Collett's Travel in Hendon, he worked closely with suppliers to ensure that their offers and deals were shared with sales teams and potential clients. Due to the quick turnaround of these deals, he found that it was often very difficult to ensure that the right offer was shared with the right client at the right time. This was something reflected throughout the industry.

As he explains: "Being able to communicate the best deals from suppliers to travel agency clients is vital, but really time consuming. In many cases, agencies just don't have the resources to do this properly. In some cases, travel agency databases are not fully up to date, making this job even harder. I wanted to find a solution to solve this issue, so that travel suppliers, agencies and their customers can all benefit."

Jason began thinking about ways to try and close this loop and make the whole process easier. He started working with media and marketing expert, Mel Lewis and UNIFY was born. The concept behind the UNIFY platform is essentially about connecting the informa-

tion gap between travel suppliers, travel agencies and their consumers by helping them focus their marketing, so that customers get the best deals based on their personal holiday preferences.

UNIFY is in the early stages of testing and Jason hopes that, once this has been successfully completed, he can move on with developing the actual app.

Jason added: "I've always wanted to start my own business, but never thought I would launch it in the middle of a pandemic! It has been tricky in these uncertain times, but it has given me the opportunity to reach out to people in the travel industry about my idea and I have learnt a great deal from them."

"By getting people on board now, I hope that when trading conditions improve, we will be ahead of the game!"

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DANNY SAMUELS

AUSTIN SAMUELS



Much more able to help his customers

Lockdown has meant people have spent more time at home than ever before and may even be thinking of moving, and that's where Danny Samuels comes in. As regional director of Purple Bricks for the past two years, Danny really understands the property market.

When he was made redundant at the start of lockdown, he wanted to put his experience to good use and decided to start up on his own. Being made redundant at the height of a pandemic could have been quite a blow to many people, but Danny describes himself as a "glass half full" kind of person

and believes that the key to success is having the right mindset and staying focussed.

His new company, Austin Samuels, is a hybrid agency, meaning that they do everything that a high street estate agency does, but just without a physical office. This is the direction that many companies within this industry are moving, and Danny feels that this does not take anything away from the level of customer service he is able to offer and, in fact, makes him more able to help customers.

Covering much of West Essex area, as well as other parts of Essex and East London, Danny has a lot of great properties on his books with others coming up all the time. With the government offering reduced rates of stamp duty on residential properties purchased until 31 March 2021, he feels that this will encourage more to finally make their move.

Despite the current restrictions in place, Danny offers valuations and viewings of properties, either in person (with all Covid compliance in place) or through virtual tours.

Danny realises that to some this might seem to be an unusual time to start a business, but he has confidence that he will be able to make a success of it.

As he comments: "If you would have told me a year ago that I would start a business in the middle of a recession, I would have said you were mad, but now I believe that if I can start it now, I can be successful any time! Being driven by what I do and being able to help people is important and what keeps me going."

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ALEX SHERRICK

THE HOME FIRST



Focusing on first time buyers

Alex Sherrick is another person keen to help house hunters find a property, but his focus is on first time buyers.

The former Kantor King Solomon student has worked in the property industry for six years and found that, when dealing

with first time buyers, many of them were unsure of what questions they should be asking, and what they should know before purchasing.

He says: "I'm always surprised at how few questions first time buyers ask, often because they do not want to look stupid. I don't believe there is such a thing as stupid questions, and I wanted to use my experience and understanding to help them get the best deals possible on their properties, and avoid any problems along the way."

He set up The Home First after facing redundancy and, having built relationships with developers across London, he could liaise with first time buyers when purchasing new build properties. The service he offers is completely free to the buyer and covers developments across all of London and the home counties.

He is always happy to chat to people to assess what they are looking for from their ideal property, as well as being able to offer contacts with a mortgage provider to help regarding finance. Alex really enjoys being able to help people to get their first property, and understands what a big deal it is for people to make that first step on the property ladder.

He adds: "For me it's a job, but for them it's a real journey and it's great being able to help them by being on that journey with them, and helping them to get their dream home."

CONTACT DETAILS

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AMY GOLDSTONE

AMY'S COOKIES



The finer things of life

A baker experiencing the sweet smell of success is Amy Goldstone from Woodford. Early on in lockdown she had Covid-19 symptoms and isolated in her room for two weeks to be safe. It was whilst

isolating that she became hooked on Great British Bake Off.

Once Amy had recovered, she was inspired to start making some tasty creations of her own, especially cookies, and after receiving positive feedback, she thought she would start her own business. So Amy's Cookies was born (or rather baked!).

As a recruitment consultant working with luxury retail brands, such as Harrods, she knows a little about the finer things in life, and wanted to make her cookies just as luxurious. She has a wide range of delicious flavours, with the most popular by far being the Lotus Biscoff, which also happens to be her personal favourite.

Amy enjoys experimenting with different flavours, and posts all her results on her Instagram page in all their yumminess. As well as different flavours, she also does themed cookies and recently produced some Halloween-related items which were 'scarily' good.

For those who are looking for a sugar rush on a bigger scale, Amy also makes giant-sized cookies which can be personalised for special occasions, such as birthdays.

CONTACT DETAILS

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KAREN STERN

KAZGIFTS



Adapting creative skills in different ways

Karen Stern has been designing invitations and decorations for events for many years, but with simchas cancelled due to the pandemic, what was meant to be her busiest year to date did not quite turn out that way.

Not knowing when functions might be starting up again, she knew that she would have to adapt her cre-

ative skills in different ways.

She had been designing handmade cards even before she started making invitations, but knew that she needed other new ideas.

Karen started producing gift boxes for special occasions, including afternoon tea boxes, pamper boxes and even a 'postponed the day but that's ok' gift boxes for couples who have to postpone their weddings due to Covid-19. Each one is beautifully presented and can be personalised for gifts.

She has also created a novel way to store the now must-have accessory of recent times – a personalised mask holder, so that everyone in the household can easily find their masks before leaving the house.

With the help of her daughter, she started posting on Instagram and Facebook, and has been pleased with the response, and she is constantly updating with different designs and products for every occasion.

CONTACT DETAILS

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JADE FOSTER-JERRETT

MEMORIES STICK



A way to remember happy memories

The coronavirus pandemic has been tough for Jade Foster-Jerrett not only on a professional level, as a children's entertainer and social media trainer, but also on a very personal level. Jade sadly lost her father, Larry Foster, to Covid-19 earlier this year.

To help deal with her grief, Jade threw herself into her love of scrapbooking, and started putting together a wedding photo album.

As she explains: "I actually got married around five years ago but had never got around to doing anything with the pictures. Lockdown was a good time to try and do this, and it was also a way to remember happy memories."

She created a 99-page album that not only included photographs of her special day, but lots of other significant images that told the story of her relationship; and she posted the results on Facebook.

Her friends were impressed with what she had created and asked her to do the same for them. She was happy to help in this way and soon started thinking about the potential of this concept. As an owner of two other businesses, she was not sure if she wanted to embark on another, especially in the current economic climate; but after conducting a survey with friends and family, she started to see that it would be useful to a lot of people.

Memories Stick was launched in September: and Jade has had many clients she has worked with to help create special albums for. She works closely with clients, using all their own photographs and helping them to not only make sure all their images are backed up, but in beautifully presented, unique albums full of special memories.

She encourages others thinking of starting a business to never discount anything when coming up with ideas.

Jade concludes: "I realised that the hobby I enjoyed was a great idea for a business, and it had been in front of me all that time!"

CONTACT DETAILS

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HANNAH TURNER

DISTINCT DANCE CLASSES



Everyone can join in and have fun

For the past five years, dancer and performer Hannah Turner has been teaching dance classes to children and adults all over Essex. As lockdown started looking more likely, she soon realised that in order to continue teaching her classes she would have to move lessons online, and so started thinking of ways to do this.

She organised her first vir-

tual class via Facebook on Mother's Day. Her 'Mum's dance class Live' – which she did with her own mum – was a virtual class for mums and kids to join in together. The lesson got such good feedback that she decided to offer more, and soon created a weekly timetable which offered a wide range of classes and charged £1 per household.

Hannah created classes for adults and children, and wanted them to appeal to as many people as possible. She said: "I wanted everyone to be able to join in and have fun, no matter what your age. My oldest student was 68 and my youngest was only 18-months-old."

As her classes became more popular, Hannah and her parents began to realise that holding dance classes whilst they were working from home might get a little noisy and distracting, so Hannah came up with a solution. As she explains: "I decided to transfer my classes to my garden shed so that I can dance to my heart's content without disturbing my parents, and it is like my own little dance studio. If I can do it in my shed, then anyone can join in however big or small a space they have."

As a dancer, Hannah is used to performing in front of people, but admits that doing online classes was quite a different experience and was not sure whether it would work the same. But she feels that, despite not being in the same room, there is still a real energy and feel-good atmosphere, which she describes as "electric".

Hannah has not only been offering virtual dance classes; she has also been running online dance parties for children, and what she describes as 'boozy bingo parties' for adults, too. Over the summer holidays, she also ran a summer school with the help of many of her friends in the arts who were out of work. She ran over 140 sessions on a variety of subjects from circus skills to West End workshops, and all of which were well received. With Chanukah coming up, her next virtual event is a scavenger hunt on 13 December, which promises to be a lot of fun for the whole family.

During lockdown, staying fit and healthy is important not only for physical health, but mental health, too; and Hannah hopes that her classes have helped people during these difficult times and given them something positive to focus on. She has really enjoyed being able to help people in this way and plans to continue teaching classes online for the foreseeable future.

Hannah has also been working with Broadway The-

atre in Barking and dreams, once restrictions are lifted, of running a home education, performing arts school with them.

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KIRSTY SPENCER

KIRSTY SPENCER BAKES



Sweet treats for difficult shifts

Kirsty Spencer worked at a PR agency before lockdown hit. Finding herself furloughed like many others, she got involved with the Chicken Soup Run organised by Yochy Davis and Lesley Gold – making brownies and cakes for those in need. She also made them for friends who were working in the NHS, as a sweet treat during difficult shifts.

She shared images of her baking skills on Instagram, and began receiving not only positive feedback, but also orders from friends and family, as well as those further afield who had seen her posts.

Using her PR experience, she was able to get some great exposure from her baking via social media, and she soon found herself busy fulfilling orders which she sent across the country – individually wrapped and packed securely in boxes so that they don't break. Closer to home, she has even had interest from some The Only Way Is Essex cast members, who must have been 'well jel' of her baking skills.

Although Kirsty had always been a keen baker, she never thought that it could lead to an actual business. She is determined to make it a success, and has even quit her day job in order to concentrate on pursuing her baking dreams.

Alongside this, she is also training to become a Pilates instructor, and hopes to qual-

ify in February, and then her clients can reward themselves with a delicious treat after a hard pilates session!

CONTACT DETAILS

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ZOE ROSS

TAKE A SCENT



A sweet smell of success

With theatres and live performances not taking place at the moment, staying in has become the new going out. For trained actress and children's entertainer Zoe Ross, this has made things difficult for her in many ways professionally, not only as a performer but also through her other business, running a discounted theatre ticket company.

Trying to find other avenues to make money during this quiet time, she discovered a company called Stone Glow. As a fan of candles and diffusers herself, the products that they offered seemed ideal for her; and she knew that many of the 12,000 members of her theatre list would also love the chance to purchase luxury candles and beautifully scented diffusers for their homes.

Zoe set up her online shop, Take A Scent, selling a wide range of Stone Glow products, and was really pleased with the response she received from customers. As well as selling online, Zoe had been taking her products to local markets and fairs; but with the new restrictions that came in at the end of October, this is no longer an option for the foreseeable future.

Despite this, Zoe continues to remain positive throughout, and encourages people to champion those starting businesses at this difficult time.

She says: "This year has made me realise how important it is to support our local high streets and small businesses. So, I would ask that people try and shop locally where they can and see what you might discover."

CONTACT DETAILS

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Virtual activities at Jewish Care in Redbridge



SINCE the start of the pandemic, Jewish Care has expanded its offering of online and virtual programmes to help members of the community stay connected, active and entertained.

Though the charity's Redbridge Jewish Community Centre is temporarily closed, the community centre members are enjoying the full virtual programme of activities online.

With a regular offering of Zoom calls, virtual events, entertainment and quizzes, activities that took place before the pandemic have also continued online.

Social group Chaps That Chat has continued to meet regularly via Zoom. Now in its fifth year, nothing has stopped this group meeting online to discuss current affairs and enjoy each other's company.

Alison Smardina, Supportive Communities and Befriending Officer, said: "It's incredible to see how much the Chaps That Chat group has grown. It's gone from five men sitting round a table five years ago to over 50 men who meet regularly once a month. They have adapted so well to meeting online. It's amazing to see how genuinely happy they are to see one another on Zoom and to be able to stay in touch."

Redbridge Supportive Communities Tea Parties have also continued regularly online, having recently won the Mayor's Community Award for Caring for Others in Redbridge.

The Tea Parties, which have been running for six years, give isolated, older members of the community the opportunity to socialise and make friends.

They now take place via Zoom. Volunteers regularly call members of the group every week to check if there's anything they need in between Zoom Tea Parties, so that they continue to feel connected and supported.

Jewish Care has also launched JC Presents ... which is an opportunity to join in with a series of online, live events. These include talks by guest speakers, virtual tours and Q&A sessions. Guest speakers are ex-

perts in areas such as art, history, politics, entertainment, religion and more.

JC Presents recently hosted TV and radio presenter Nick Ross in conversation with David Dein MBE, former vice-chairman of both Arsenal Football Club and the Football Association.

With exercise playing such an important part in wellbeing, there are also a number of online exercise classes in which members across the community can take part.

At Vi & John Rubens House, residents have been enjoying sessions with specially trained musicians from Wigmore Hall's Music for Life project, and who are running stimulating, interactive music sessions virtually.

The group sessions are delivered to all residents, and there are one-to-one sessions that are specifically tailored for residents living with dementia. One resident, Louise Brewer, who really enjoys the sessions, told the *Essex Jewish News*: "It's very good and I love singing."

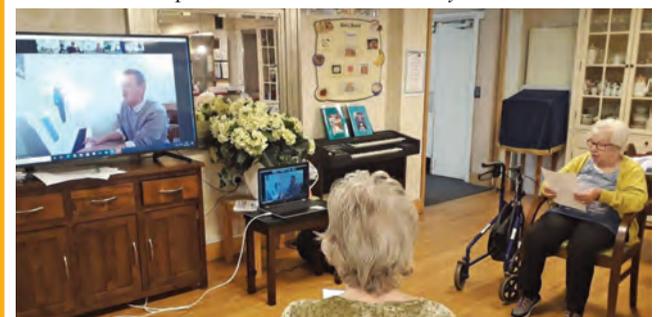
Activities coordinator Jacklin Stephenson added: "These sessions leave everyone who participates in them on such a high, it's just fantastic to see. We're so happy that we are able to continue the Music for Life programme online, and our residents are getting used to the new way of doing things."

"Residents in the one-to-one sessions will still recognise the musician who they met in person and now see on the screen, so it's really personal to them and they really enjoy taking part. It certainly has a very positive effect on everyone's wellbeing and we can't thank the musicians enough".

There will be a Jewish Care Presents Chanukah concert on Tuesday 15 December. It starts at 2.30pm, and ends at 3.45pm. Candle lighting by Rabbi Steven Katz is at 2.50pm. To register for this, or other events, contact simber@jcare.org.

You can find out more about how to access Jewish Care's community services and online activities at jewishcare.org/community-services

The Essex Jewish News is honoured to have been able to showcase just a few of the local businesses that have been set up during lockdown. We hope that all businesses that are run by, employ members of and are enjoyed by our Essex Jewish community are able to thrive in these times.



Vi and John Rubens House residents enjoy Wigmore Hall Music for Life project

A new cast of Jewish stars

IT SEEMS THAT LOCKDOWN HAS BEEN A TIME TO TRY NEW THINGS, WHETHER THAT'S BAKING, LEARNING A LANGUAGE OR, FOR SOME, STARTING A PODCAST. **MICAELA BLITZ** CHATS TO **RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG** AND **RACHEL CREEGER**, WHO BOTH LAUNCHED JEWISH-RELATED PODCASTS DURING LOCKDOWN.

WHEN Woodford Forest Synagogue, along with many others, closed during lockdown, Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg wanted to find a way to stay connected with his community and provide something interesting for people whilst they were at home.

As he explains: "I realised that we have so many great people with so many amazing stories and I really wanted to share these to help people through the unusual situation we found ourselves in. I thought a podcast would be a good way to reach out."

He got in touch with many of his contacts to see who might be interested in taking part in his Extraordinary People in Extraordinary Times show and was pleasantly surprised with the response. The first episode was launched back in April and featured Essex-boy Daniel Carmel-Brown, CEO of Jewish Care. Since then, Rabbi Wollenberg has produced more than 100 episodes and has even taken part in one himself, along with his wife Blima.

One thing that Rabbi Wollenberg has really enjoyed is being able to speak to people from across the wider Jewish community. Even though many of the interviewees have been people that he knows personally, he has still be surprised by some of the conversations that have been shared.

He told us: "Doing this podcast has actually taught me that you should never judge a book by its cover, and that everyone has a story to tell. I initially invited one guest, Steve Colman, to take part as he is a seller of Arber Minim (lulav and etrog for Sukkot) and I thought that it would be of interest to the audience. During the interview, I found out that he had been a kidney donor, which is something that was very surprising to me, and probably something that many others within the community did not even know about. It blew me away!"

Rabbi Wollenberg plans to continue producing the podcasts and is always keen to find new and interesting guests to take part from across the Jewish spectrum, so if you have any suggestions contact him on rabbiiw@gmail.com.

If *Essex Jewish News* readers tune in sometime soon to Rabbi Wollenberg's page on Soundcloud - <https://soundcloud.com/user-385969515-752323737> - they may even hear some of our team chatting about their lives and experiences.

Comedian, writer and performer Rachel Creeger is another who can now add podcast presenter to her CV, having launched *Jew Talkin' to Me?* in June.

The show is hosted by Rachel, along with her comedy writing partner and fellow Jew Phillip Simon. In each episode, they chat to two different Jew-

found them, along with many in the creative industries, unable to work they started thinking about this in more detail.

A chance meeting by Rachel with her new neighbour, Russell Balkind, helped make this idea a reality. As a fellow Jew and comedy producer with credits including *Mock the Week*, *The Mash Report* and 8 out of 10 cats, Russell was able to use his production and comedy experience to help create a podcast with a chat show feel.

When planning the style of their podcast, Rachel and Phillip were going for a distinct style, as Rachel explains: "We wanted it to feel like being invited to sit on the sofa with Graham Norton and Mrs Maisel. We hope we have achieved that, and that the audience has as much fun listening as we have making it."

When it comes to their guests, the first series featured a wide range of Jewish personalities, including comedy writer

Ivor Baddiel, actress Debbie Chazen, writer Anthony Horowitz and Lynn Ruth Miller, the world's oldest performing comedienne and Britain's Got Talent star.

For the second series, which started in September, Rachel has stayed close to her Essex roots with some of her guests by chatting to journalist Boyd Hilton and actor and puppeteer Simon Lipkin, who are both ex-Ilford Jewish Primary School boys. They reminisced with Rachel about growing up in the area and attending IJPS - just don't mention the viennas!

Rachel and Phillip have high hopes for the podcast and hope to eventually do live recordings of the show with an audience once venues are open again. In the meantime, if you would like to listen to the podcast, it is available on Spotify, Apple, Acast and other podcast platforms with a new episode released every Friday. Just search for *Jew Talkin' To Me*.



Rachel Creeger and Phillip Simon. PHOTO BY RUTH BLOCH PHOTOGRAPHY

Judge Rinder Zooms in on his new JBD mishpacha



TENANTS at Jewish Blind & Disabled's Essex buildings were delighted to be joined on Zoom by the legal professional and TV personality Rob Rinder.

Over 60 tenants took part, asking a wide range of questions ranging from how court rooms have been affected by

Covid-19 to Rob's time on *Strictly Come Dancing* and what really goes on behind the scenes at his hit TV show *Judge Rinder*.

He also spoke from the heart about his personal and recent contact with Jewish Blind & Disabled and how he has found a new mishpacha (fam-

ily) there. Rob said: "I have to say it's been one of the great privileges of my life to see the great work of JBD."

The talk formed part of Jewish Blind & Disabled's wide-ranging programme of daily Zoom activities keeping tenants connected and engaged during this difficult time.

ASK THE RABBIS

POPULAR *ESSEX JEWISH NEWS* COLUMNIST **RENEE BRAVO** HAS COME UP WITH A NEW IDEA FOR THIS PAPER - PUTTING A QUESTION TO TWO OR MORE OF OUR LOCAL RABBIS TO ANSWER. THIS ISSUE, SHE POSES A QUESTION ABOUT GOING ONLINE DURING SHABBAT TO RABBIS AT THE OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE JEWISH SPECTRUM.

RENEE ASKS:

In some Jewish homes, Shabbat meals are prepared beforehand, and the oven is timed to come on and off as required. This way the meals are enjoyed hot, without breaking the traditional Orthodox laws of the Sabbath. Why cannot this principle be applied to a Shabbat service, by Zoom or live? The participants do not have to touch any of the controls. They are programmed to come on and off, just like the oven. The comparison between food for Shabbat and a Zoom service are not compatible.

RABBI ARYEH SUFRIN MBE, DIRECTOR OF CHABAD NORTH EAST LONDON & ESSEX, ANSWERS:

There are clearly halachic issues with regards to Shabbat and the technology of 'Zooming', which constitute 'melacha' (forbidden works) on Shabbat. This includes how the technology works, with amplified voice and screen illuminations at play whilst using this medium.

However, let's consider the sanctity of Shabbat itself.

Throughout the lockdowns, both the first and the second, mandating the closure of our synagogues for communal worship, we have used the additional time afforded to us by taking walks in our local park. This past Shabbat, my wife Devorah said to me: "More so than ever before, we can enjoy the break from technology on Shabbat and concentrate on personal and family interaction without interruption."

Modern technology is indeed a gift, especially for those who are living alone and in isolation under the current pandemic conditions. However, living in a time, when our lives are governed in an ever-increasing way - with Zoom, Facebook, mobile phones, WhatsApp chats, to mention but a few - we seldom get a few minutes to ourselves, let alone hours, and a 25-hour period break from the fast era of technology.

Regarding the sanctity of Shabbat, there is indeed an advantage to communal prayer and a social get-together but, in the current pandemic and Government-mandated lockdown, we can concentrate on the singular you, the personal I, the unique individual self, created in the image of the unique Creator.

To quote the wise King Solomon: "For everything there is a service, and a time for every purpose under heaven ..."

We have indeed lost the communal connection but we gain the individual connec-

tion to G-d. Yes, you can pray to G-d on your own, without the rabbi and chazan, without our fellow congregants sitting next to us. Perhaps this is not ideal; however, if G-d put us in this situation, this is what He wants from us right now. This is the TIME now, during which we need to find a new perspective in our relationship with G-d, without transgressing the traditional, sacred laws of Shabbat.

G-d cherishes you and me not only because of the "us" but, because of our individuality, G-d craves a relationship with us on a very personal level.

We pray for an end to this pandemic and a return to communal worship but, when it does, we should keep this message of a singular connection in our hearts.

RABBI RICHARD JACOBI, OF EAST LONDON AND ESSEX LIBERAL SYNAGOGUE, ANSWERS:

This is a very interesting question, though as a Progressive rabbi I would have to question your starting premise. I doubt if the majority of *Essex Jewish News* readers actually observe Shabbat in the manner suggested and this does not make them bad Jews, in my opinion.

However, the core of your question is about how synagogue communities can continue during the crisis caused by the Covid-19 virus.

We at ELELS hold Shabbat services via Zoom, because we value Shabbat as a time for gathering, praying together, reflecting and refreshing ourselves. In the 21st century, human ingenuity enables us to have all these means of connecting when we must be physically distanced in order to fulfil a long-time Jewish imperative to 'Choose Life' and work for pikuach nefesh - to save lives. Using these technologies in these ways is not work; it can be a lifeline.

I firmly believe that if the great scholar Moses Maimonides were alive today, he would respond to your question by saying "Yes!"

We should use what is available to us to connect, to enable Kaddish to be said in the presence of a Zoom (other platforms are available!) congregation, to enable us to share Shabbat worship together, to reduce loneliness, nurture community during a crisis, and to reinforce our Jewishness through tough times.

This is what we shall continue to do, and we welcome anyone and everyone who is willing to participate in a modern and relevant 21st century approach to Judaism.

DIDN'T THEY DO WELL!

Community delight as Jeffrey Leader gets an MBE

BY MANNY ROBINSON

WARM tributes have been paid to Jeffrey Leader on his being awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Jeffrey, 73, who lives in Buckhurst Hill and is a member of Cranbrook United Synagogue, told the *Essex Jewish News* that he was "absolutely surprised, delighted and honoured" by the MBE which has been given for services to general education and Jewish education, including running Pikuach, the Board of Deputies' Jewish schools inspection service.

He added that the tributes, many from former pupils that had appeared on social media, had "moved me more than getting the award".

One pupil wrote on Facebook: "Sometimes you are lucky. You get a teacher who is inspirational, creative, kind, exceptionally intelligent and just born to do the job. Jeffrey Leader was one of the above. From his Woody drawings to the way he made learning so much fun, his beyond brilliant oratory skills. He made going to shul so much fun and taught us so well that most of us could take a service ourselves. He was such a hero to so many he taught for so many reasons. Mr Leader is an absolute rock star."

Board of Deputies president Marie van der Zyl said: "This is a fitting tribute to Jeffrey whose work on Pikuach has created an inspection service which is widely admired and ensures religious



Jeffrey Leader ... his MBE is for services to general education and Jewish Education

education teaching at Jewish schools is rigorously tested. We are very proud of his achievements."

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis said in a recent speech that Jeffrey "was a legend and trailblazer in the world of Jewish education".

Jeffrey also led many synagogue services at Beehive Lane. He said: "I was always

known as the 'second chazan'. I am not in the same class as some of the recognised chazanim but I am pleased to say that I can hold a tune."

His roles have included running the services at the former Ilford United Synagogue in Beehive Lane (now Cranbrook United) and was a teacher at Ilford Jewish Primary School, but was sacked



Tributes moved me more than the award

after going to Israel at the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War.

"The head teacher at the school had a very Victorian attitude to life and couldn't understand me with my Cavalier approach and long hair," he revealed.

His roles have included headship of a London Jewish primary school, directorship of Jeffrey the Agency for Jewish Education, initiating Jewish leadership programmes in partnership with Bar Ilan University, leading Ofsted inspections and creating courses for Jewish Studies teachers, leading to qualified teacher status, in collaboration with Roehampton and Hertfordshire Universities. He is currently supporting student teachers at Hertfordshire University.

Jeffrey was told he had been awarded the MBE in June. "I was told not to say anything to anybody," he admitted. "Another letter came in October and I was then able to tell my family and friends."

Because of coronavirus, it is not known when he will go to Buckingham Palace to receive his award.

Genizah Unit founder Reif is awarded an OBE

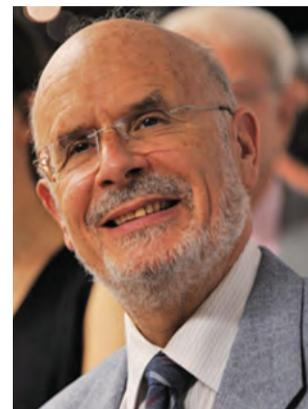
BY MARK HARRIS

PROFESSOR Stefan Reif, founder-director (from 1974 to 2006) of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit at Cambridge University Library, was awarded an OBE in the Queen's 'Birthday Honours' List this year for "services to scholarship".

Many *Essex Jewish News* readers will have participated in synagogue, community or other group visits to the unique 'Genizah' collection – or, indeed, treasure trove – of around 140,000 manuscript, largely vellum fragments (a considerable number in Judaeo-Arabic) from the eastern Mediterranean area of, generally, the early medieval epoch up to a millennia ago; but with some dating back to the 9th century CE.

These ancient parchments, a substantial number in then poor condition, were discovered in the 1890s at the 'genizah' (store room) of the 9th century Ben Ezra Synagogue (the shul of Moses Maimonides, the 'Rambam') at Fustat in 'Old Cairo'. They were brought to England from Egypt – sea-transported in crates – by Rabbi Dr Solomon Schechter, Reader in Talmudic Studies at Cambridge University, and heralded a new era of Jewish learning and historical study. The items comprised not only biblical, rabbinical and liturgical texts and commentaries, but also a significant amount of more everyday, and often enthralling, written material.

Professor Reif, who was born in Edinburgh in 1944 and has many academic responsibilities, subsequently became the much-



researched (and now digitised) Genizah Unit's project consultant, and made aliyah. He returns to Cambridge – where he is also Emeritus Professor of Medieval Studies at, and a Fellow of, St John's College, as well as being a trustee of the Cambridge Traditional Jewish Congregation – from Jerusalem quite frequently in normal times. In Israel, he holds senior research posts at Haifa and Tel Aviv Universities.

Professor Reif has authored and edited many academic works, including 'A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo' (published in 2000), his absorbing history of the 'Genizah Collection' in Cambridge. Of the transformational, manuscript legacy of the Mediterranean Jewish communities concerned, he has observed: "Some 120 years back, we knew virtually nothing about their scholarly works, religious practices, cultural and social activities and interaction with their Muslim neighbours. Now, with the 'Genizah', we know a great deal and this helps us to understand from where we're coming."

20 Year Service award for Rev Gary Newman



REV Gary Newman (pictured), of Cranbrook United Synagogue, has been awarded a 20 Year Service Certificate for his outstanding

work with the Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Trust hospitals. He is seen here with his certificate.

Martin gets his BA degree ... at 84!

MARTIN Greenberg has become one of this year's oldest university graduates after obtaining a 2.1 in English Literature and Creative Writing – at the age of 84, writes Manny Robinson.

It took him six years of study with the Open University to obtain his BA (Honours) degree, and he said: "I did it to keep my mind occupied. I really enjoyed it, with lots of tutorials in London and also on-line."

Alongside studying Shakespeare and Jane Austen, Martin wrote about his childhood experiences growing up during the Second World War.

Martin was a member of Clayhall Synagogue and editor of that shul's magazine, 'Shalom'. When Clayhall merged with Newbury Park shul, to become Redbridge United, he became co-editor of the magazine with Phillippa Stanton.

He then joined Chigwell Synagogue when Redbridge United merged with Ilford United to become Cranbrook United Synagogue.

Martin began his drive for a

degree at the same time as his twin grandchildren – a boy and a girl – went to university. He said: "We encouraged each other. When my granddaughter found things particularly tough she would phone and say: 'Can I come home?' and when I found it tough I would call and say: 'Can I come home?' She used to say 'You're already at home'."

Most of his fellow students were much younger, but Martin said age is no barrier. "I was treated equally," he said. "They accepted you for what you were. There were all sorts of people there, and we were all treated fairly."

He added: "A couple of times I was mistaken for a tutor and not a pupil."

His graduation ceremony has been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic; but he has his BA certificate to prove that, at 84, anything is possible.

Martin's final comment: "The only person who doesn't have a degree in our family is my wife, but she is cleverer than all of us!"



Martin Greenberg with his BA degree

Schmoozing by Zooming!

WATCHER has discovered something really extraordinary! The word 'schmooze' – derived from Yiddish of some centuries ago – has long been incorporated into the English language, and is much used colloquially ... including by those not necessarily professing the Jewish faith. Watcher's fairly ancient copy of the Oxford English Dictionary contains an entry for this evocative expression (and which is inserted just after "schlep", "schlock" and "schmaltz" and immediately before "schmuck").

■■■■■
The notion of 'schmoozing' conjures up the traditionally close, real and humanly social contact of togetherness, whether by

warmly conversational chit-chat or unrepentant gossiping; and in a comfortably communal, family or friends-united context. But much has changed in this part-and-parcel of Jewish (and other) life connection during 2020, a grim Covid-19 year; especially during 'full lockdown' and particularly for numerous elderly and vulnerable, self-isolating (frequently alone and lonely) Jewish folk.

■■■■■
Although much credit is to be given to those care and welfare organisations and dedicated individuals who've done their level material best – by whatever means, for whatever purposes (and where, for whatever reason, family are unable to help) – to make life easier and less depressing for our communi-

WATCHER IN THE RYE



ties' senior citizens. But something really splendid has burst into this

somewhat unprecedented and potentially desolate scene; and which has now given much joy, or at least much needed contentment, to large numbers of solitary, lonesome and often forlorn OAPs (and others) by that something's capacity to get people together and schmoozing again, albeit in a 'virtual' visual/audio sense.

In a way it's quite surprising, according to Watcher's sensitive personal researches, how so many of these boobas and zeidas, grandmas and granddads, nannas and poppas – who hadn't previously seen any advantages for themselves in, or felt (and almost fearfully) that they lacked the ability to cope with, digitised communication of any sort (other than maybe a landline telephone) – have taken up



So what is Watcher in the Rye's astonishing revelation about Schmoozing and Zooming?

'Zooming'!

It's probably true to say that not all of these new generational adherents to this now widespread and popular means of social interaction (or, indeed, 'schmoozing') have needed their primary school grandchildren to offer advice or to expertly set up novel laptops, tablets or mobiles for them. Watcher is unaware of the actual statistics; but anyway wishes to return now to the first sentence of this feature.



So what is Watcher in the Rye's rather astonishing unearthing? Well, Watcher had studied (and with a concentrated focus) the word 'schmoozing' ... initiated in the Yiddish-speaking shtetls of way back a while; and has perceived a certain something from its early origin text, perhaps a then amazingly prophetic and inherent vision of the future of 'schmoozing' in our 21st century, post-modern world.

Though some could believe that the literary originator of the old word may've got things upside down or the wrong way round, Watcher senses that the written Hebrew expression of the Yiddish word 'schmoozing' – reading from right to left, naturally – says it all! So that Watcher can now indicate or, rather, reveal that the central four letters of the word 'schmoozing' – 'mooz' – when appropriately read as expressed in Hebrew characters, spells – you've got it – 'zoom'!

So the next time you're 'Zooming', why not also be 'Schmoozing' a little about Watcher's fantastic revelation!

WATCHER IN THE RYE



ANY READERS HAVING COMMENTS ON THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THIS ARTICLE SHOULD EMAIL THEM TO THE ESSEX JEWISH NEWS (SEE PAGE 2)



The twin passions in Pamela's life: the silver screen and the stories



PAT LIDIKER MEETS VETERAN FILM CRITIC AND PROLIFIC AUTHOR PAMELA MELNIKOFF

ALTHOUGH best known for her high-profile role as the *Jewish Chronicle's* film critic, this has been just one facet of Pamela Melnikoff's extraordinary writing career. Alongside her lifetime in journalism she has written acclaimed plays, children's historical fiction, poetry, a libretto and cantata, and even the words for a Jewish prayer. "When the then head of Reform Judaism was compiling a new book for Yom Kippur, he

asked me to write the words for a special prayer which is still used today as part of the service," Pamela says with her usual delightful modesty.

Having just celebrated her Golden Wedding and about to turn 90 next month (sadly no parties due to coronavirus), she is now working on a memoir, entitled *A Century of Jewish Films*.

"I use a Biro and exercise book, just as at the start of my career, and my sister types it up," she told me when I visited her in the garden of her home, during the period when such meetups were still possible.

"As a newspaper journalist I learned to progress from a lovely little Olympia manual typewriter to electric then electronic versions and a word processor – and now I'm back with my trusty Biro!"

Born in the East End, Pamela met her husband of 50 years, Dr Edward Harris, during the Blitz. They married in Edgware in 1970 and, when he was offered a position at Chadwell Heath Health Centre, they bought this same house in

Clayhall Avenue where they live today.

Because of the pandemic, both are now shielded with carers at home so no longer go out. The 'new normal' means missing out on regular visits to Sinclair House and other venues where Pamela was much in demand to speak to different groups about her career.

Working under four different editors at the *JC*, she began as a teenager in the general office and library before being offered the coveted title of film critic. It was a gateway into another world.

Remembering that period with nostalgic affection, Pamela told me: "I went to all the previews and was always honest about the films, whether I liked them or not. And there were launch parties, receptions, lunches and other events where we critics got to meet each other and the stars."

The very nature of her job meant seeking out the Jewish angle; but with so many in the industry from both sides of the camera to choose from, where

to start?

Memorable film favourites include *Schindler's List*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and *The Ten Commandments*, with Pamela revealing: "Topol and I became good friends, and he asked me to write a song – my name was on the film credits!"

She readily admits she was never really into Hollywood blockbusters, preferring instead *The Kings Speech* and *The Beatles* films. Plus there were memorable long lunches with the likes of Mel Brooks and Ron Moody.

Pamela's first children's book, *The Star and the Sword*, published in 1965, was originally written as a play, *The Ransomed Menorah*, which had earlier opened in New York to acclaimed reviews, winning her a prestigious Golden Pen Award.

"My mother had 30 cousins there, so I flew over and we all went to the opening together," she remembers.

Other books followed including *Plots and Players* and *Prisoner in Time*, blending myth and reality to lead young



Pamela and her husband Dr Edward Harris on their wedding day, with (centre) the late William Frankel, editor of the Jewish Chronicle at the time

readers into learning about important aspects of Jewish history and persecution.

Pamela was just nine-years-old when her first poem appeared in a national newspaper; and at 14 she was submitting her poetry to *Children's Hour*, where they were read by actors, and won several major awards, including the Greenwood Prize.

An original dream of becoming a theatre critic ("maybe I could be another Shakespeare!") was side-lined when she started writing about the world of the silver screen instead.

It was obvious from the

way her eyes constantly lit up, during our fascinating meeting, that she has relished every writing opportunity that has come her way. Now, about to turn 90, she and her trusty Biro are as busy as ever, albeit without the glittering parties.

Her thousand-page *History of Jewish Films* was originally commissioned 30 years ago but is still "work in progress".

So we have to be patient, knowing that nobody is more qualified or talented than Pamela Melnikoff to produce a definitive work which could become the perfect Chanukah gift to treasure for years to come!

VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

MANNY ROBINSON



I'm sorry, I'll write that headline again

Exclusive To All Newspapers

DIANA WAS STILL ALIVE HOURS BEFORE SHE DIED

A SERIES of previously unseen CCTV images have revealed that Diana was alive and well before she was tragically killed in Paris, ten years ago.



County to pay \$250,000 to advertise lack of funds

BY MATT COOPER

One-armed man applauds the kindness of strangers

The other afternoon, a man and a

Some of the more bizarre headlines

ate colleagues know of it, and the rest of the world is left in blissful ignorance.



The **** choir will be giving a concert which will be hell at Sinclair House

– EJN Typo

A NEWSPAPER called *The Sentinel* has made an abject apology for a typographical mistake. It read: “Due to a typing error, Saturday’s story on local artist Jon Henninger mistakenly reported that Henninger’s band mate Eric Lyday was on drugs. The story should have read that Lyday was on drums...”

I bet the editor of *The Sentinel* went ballistic because this could have been a costly libel case, typing error or not.

At the *Essex Jewish News* we are fortunate, in a way, that we publish just three times a year, which gives us plenty of time to check for typos; although when publication day nears there is a real risk of a mistake slipping through.

I well remember an article in the *EJN* which stated that “The **** choir will be giving a concert which will be hell at Sinclair House.” That, fortunately, was spotted in time.

Another blooper was when we wrote about the Jewish Historical Society instead of the Historical Society; and I will recall another story, where a rabbi ‘was induced’ in a local synagogue instead of ‘inducted’. Again, both typos were spotted in time.

The biggest risk is in headline writing. It is an art; and a sub editor who can write a good, clever headline is worth his or her weight in gold to a newspaper. But it

hasn’t always happened. Even the best journalist in the world can write a headline and groan when it is seen in the cold light of day. Headlines like “Diana Was Still Alive Hours Before She Died”, one of those featured here.

I remember when I was a cub reporter on the *Stratford Express* having such a terri-

ble experience when I wrote a headline that proclaimed: “Weight Lifter Arrested For Shop Lifting.”

That’s the problem with working on newspapers. Make a mistake and the world and his wife will write or phone in, pointing out the error. If you work in an office and make a mistake, no one but you or your immedi-

How do you wish a 96-year-old ‘Long life’?

MY column at Pesach, describing the characters and personalities who trod the pavements of the old Jewish East End, produced an amazing response. Clearly, the older generation is looking back with some sentimentality and, indeed, affection at those far off days.

The reaction by *EJN* readers reminded me of an article I wrote several years ago, not about the Jewish characters of the East End, but about the Yiddish sayings.

I remember being at a funeral, before the lockdown prevented all but a handful of people attending, and the service held outside the prayer hall, when a 96-year-old man had the task of burying his 73-year-old daughter – not the happiest of events because, in the normal cycle of life, it should have been the other way around.

But afterwards, some people approached the frail 96-year-old and wished him ‘long life’. The sentiment was sincere, of course, but a little incongruous. How do you wish someone ‘long life’ when they



I have never encountered this custom before coming to these shores

– Rabbi Naftali Brawer

have had exactly that?

Rabbi Naftali Brawer, chief executive of Tufts Hillel, who was ordained as an Orthodox rabbi in the United States, wrote an article in the *Jewish Chronicle* some years ago discussing the ‘long life’ phrase. He stated: “I never encountered this custom before coming to these shores.” A number of Israelis I have spoken to also said they were unfamiliar with the saying. So clearly it is of Eastern European origin.

“I wish you long life” is one of the few phrases that has survived the move by our long departed relatives from the shtetls of Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Germany and the like. I can think of a few others, including “from your mouth to God’s ears” and “please God

by you”, usually uttered by some well meaning aunt to an embarrassed single boy or girl at someone else’s wedding.

But it set me thinking about some of the other beliefs that were so prevalent in Jewish circles when we ourselves were children. I remember some of them very well. Most are not superstition or customs. I prefer the old Yiddish word ‘boobameiser’, meaning old wives’ tales.

For example, when my mother was sewing a button on my shirt I was told to stand still and chew a piece of cotton (to stop my memory being blocked up). What calamity would have happened had I not chewed (or, indeed, swallowed) the cotton, I do not know.

Of course, every religion has its traditions. It is not exclusive to the Jewish faith but we do have a longstanding belief, that if a particular custom is continued by a community for a long time, then that custom becomes law for that particular community.

Maintaining some of these acts – unbelievable though some of them might appear to be in this modern day and age – has resulted, ironically, in many people maintaining their commitment to Jewish tradition even if they rarely, if ever, attend a synagogue service.

One person who has made a study of Jewish superstition and custom is Rabbi Emily Ilana-Ostroy, minister of Sinai Reform Temple in Bay Shore, Long Island, who reported that, as a student in Cincinnati, there was a debate over a forthcoming meal.

A woman who had recently been widowed had donated some of her untouched leftovers from where she had been sitting shiva. Two of the women wanted to use that food for a synagogue function but the other two said that they wouldn’t dream of eating it,

declaring “you never take food from a shiva house”.

Was this a real Jewish custom, a superstition or a boobameiser? Indeed, one could argue whether it was even food from a shiva house, since the widow was no longer sitting shiva! “As you can imagine,” said Rabbi Ilana-Ostroy, “there were more opinions than people taking part in the debate.”

So how do we Jews look at superstitions? Clearly, not all of them were Jewish: many were borrowed from Christian surroundings in ‘de heim’. For example, as a child I was told by an aunt to pull my ears after I had sneezed. I did it because she told me to do it. So what other boobameisers/traditions/customs do many of us embrace? Some say you should never buy anything for a baby before it has been born. In fact, many people refuse to say ‘Mazel Tov’ before the birth.

If a child is lying on the floor and you step over the baby, you must walk back over the baby or he or she will not grow any more. According to the Jewish Encyclopaedia, this supersti-

tion originated in Russia and is widespread among some communities; although, personally, I had never heard of it.

Here are some others:

- A pregnant woman should not visit a cemetery.
- Don’t put a hat on a bed or there will be a death.
- Throw salt over your shoulder if you have spilled some.
- Pin or put a red ribbon on the cot or clothing of a new born child to ‘warn off the Evil Eye’.
- If you eat an olive, you have to eat at least two (a lone olive is only eaten as part of a meal after a funeral).
- Never put shoes on a dressing table or you will get bad luck.
- When you move into a new house, make sure you have a broom, salt, sugar, loaf of bread and, of course, a mezuzah.
- Spitting three times (really saying puh, puh, puh) after any compliment.

I am sure that many readers will be quick to point out factual errors/omissions from my piece. That could mean I might be in trouble. Oy Vey! (whatever that means!)

Let's lose the lockdown blues!

CHANUKAH is known as the Festival of Lights and it is a celebratory holiday – commemorating, as it does, the victory of the Hasmonians over the tyrant Antiochus, who had sacked and burned the Temple in Jerusalem. It's a traditional time to eat latkes and doughnuts, primarily because they are fried in oil, which reminds us of the miracle of the Menorah light burning for eight days on oil only enough for a single day.

However, there is also a tradition to eat dairy foods. Although this year we cannot celebrate around the table with family and friends in the usual way, there is no reason why we cannot indulge in some specially prepared delicacies to cheer ourselves up! So I am sneaking in a recipe for a calorific cheesecake which definitely hits the spot! Plus a lovely lamb winter warmer and an easy-peasy cheesy fish dish. So light your candles and sing your songs, spin your dreidl and have some fun.

CHEESECAKE DE LUXE

This cake can be decorated in any way you choose and with any fruit of your choice – strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants, passion fruit etc. Or you can use sliced fruit such as mangoes, kiwi fruit, or grated chocolate or roasted nuts.

Base:
200 gr digestive biscuits
75 gr butter melted
1 tabspn caster sugar

Filling:
3 x 250 gr tubs of full fat cream cheese
30 gr plain flour
4 eggs
200 gr caster sugar
Pinch of salt
2 teaspsns vanilla essence
2 tabspns lemon juice
250 ml double cream

Preheat oven to 180°C
375°F Gas Mk 5

Crush the biscuits to rubble in a plastic bag with a rolling pin or in the food processor. Tip into a bowl and pour on the melted butter and sugar and mix well. Spread over the base of a 9 inch/ 23 cm springform tin and press down well with the back of a spoon. Bake at 180°F for 12-15 minutes then cool on a rack.

Put the cream cheese, flour and salt into a large bowl and beat by hand or machine until smooth. Add the sugar then beat in the eggs one at a time until combined. Add the lemon juice, vanilla essence and the cream and mix thoroughly until the mixture has no lumps and is velvety smooth. Turn the oven up to 240°C 475°F Gas Mk 9. Do not use the fan feature – use the conventional top and bottom heat. Pour the mixture onto the cooled biscuit base. Bake at 240°C for 12

COOKING FOR YOMTOV

SHELLEY POSNER



minutes, then reduce the temperature to 100°C 200°F Gas Mk 1/4 and bake for 60-65 minutes.

The cake should be set at the edges but still have a wobble in the middle. Leave to cool on a rack for 5 minutes then gently run a knife around the edge to loosen it from the sides of the tin. Leave until completely cold then cover with cling film still in the tin and refrigerate overnight. Remove from the fridge half an hour before serving, unmould from the ring but leave it on the base, and transfer to a serving plate.

SPICY CINNAMON LAMB

I always think you can't beat a good warming casserole on a cold night, and this recipe is a firm favourite in our house when it's cold, dark and miserable outside.

Serves 4

2 onions
1 inch of fresh root gin-

ger (you can use bottled but NOT ground ginger)
2lb cubed lamb
2 garlic cloves
2 tabspns oil
2x400 gr tins of chopped tomatoes
2 tabspns dark soy sauce
2 teaspsns dark muscovado sugar
¼ teaspsn freshly grated nutmeg
1 teaspsn ground cinnamon
Salt & pepper
Red wine – see below

Peel and finely chop the onions, garlic and ginger. Check over the lamb and cut away any fatty pieces. Heat the oil in a large sauté pan. Add the onions, garlic and ginger and fry gently for 3-4 minutes until softened. Remove to a plate. Add more oil to the pan if necessary, then add half the meat and cook briskly over a high heat well browned on the outside. Remove and repeat with the remainder of the lamb.

Replace the vegetables and lamb back into the pan. Stir in all the remaining ingredients together with 150 ml (½ pint) of water. If you have some red wine hanging around then by all means use it instead, or use half wine and half water. Bring slowly to the boil then cover and simmer gently for an hour until the meat is meltingly tender. You can also transfer it to a casserole dish and cook it in the oven at 150°C if you prefer.

Serve with plain basmati rice or some little new potatoes.

This dish benefits from cooking in advance and then reheating, which seems to intensify the flavours. It also freezes particularly well.

HADDOCK AU GRATIN

I find we are eating more fish and less meat at home these days. I usually make this dish with haddock but you could use another white fish, such as cod. If you use a flat fish like plaice or lemon sole, you will need to reduce the cooking time accordingly.

4 thick haddock fillets skinned
2 tabspns olive oil
2 shallots
1 teaspsn finely chopped fresh tarragon
200 gr cherry tomatoes thickly sliced
2 tabspns drained capers
200 ml crème fraiche

30 gr grated Parmesan cheese – or strong cheddar if you prefer
Salt & pepper
Snipped fresh chives – optional

Heat the oven to 200°C or Gas Mk 7

Peel and finely slice the shallots and heat one tablespoon of the oil in a small frying pan. Add the shallots and fry gently until soft and wilted. Take a baking dish large enough to hold the fish in a single layer and brush it well with the remaining oil. Scatter the cooked shallots over the base of the dish. Pat the fish dry then arrange the fillets over the shallots and season well with salt and pepper. Scatter with the chopped tarragon then thickly slice the tomatoes and cover the fish with the slices in a single layer. Pat the capers dry with some kitchen paper and dot them over the tomatoes. Mix the tub of crème fraiche well to break up any lumps then spoon it evenly over the top of everything.

Sprinkle generously with Parmesan cheese (refrigerate at this point if you don't want to cook it immediately). Bake in the oven for 15-20 minutes or until the fish is cooked through and the top is a sizzling golden brown. Scatter with some freshly snipped chives before serving.

DEAR ZELDA

EJN's Agony Aunt Zelda answers another reader's question

Dear Zelda,

I am a 42-year-old woman, unmarried and living alone. For the past 18 months, I have developed a crush on my dentist. He is not part of the NHS and has a practice in the West End.

It is costing me a fortune as I have been going for checkups every two to three months, despite the fact that he says my teeth are perfect.

I know he is happily married with a couple of children, but I can't get him out of my mind and dream about him in a way that would embarrass my mother.

What can I do to help myself out of this situation?

Sandra

Dear Sandra

By writing to me you are already realising that you are in a no-win situation. Apart from the fact that he is happily married, this dentist/patient relationship cannot develop.

If I were you, I would change dentists and go to a local practice that is cheaper, particularly one where there are female dentists.

You sound quite lonely, so my recommendation is that you should consider joining a voluntary organisation where you can help others as well as helping yourself.

Once you get over the initial pain of leaving your West End dentist, things will improve, believe me, especially your bank balance and well-being.

Zelda

Have a beautiful virtual Chanukah

BEAUTY

PAT LIDIKER



THIS year sees a must-have accessory which, unlike other passing fads, looks as if it's here to stay whether we like it or not. I'm talking about the ubiquitous face masks we're snapping up in truckloads – whether in plain blue, white and black or quirky, floral, polka dots or splendid animal prints.

Mask-wearing has inadvertently boosted sales of make-up as our carefully applied foundation, concealer, blush and lipstick rubs off onto the fabric, needing continual touch-ups.

Our eyes are the only feature on full view for much of the time, so beauty gurus have been putting their main emphasis on dramatic shadow palettes. Unfortunately, even these tend to smudge, thanks to steamed up specs, yet another hazard.

However, whether in this awful pandemic or in wartime, we stalwarts always try to put our best face forward, just like in the Blitz, when Woolworths

had to fight to keep up with demand for powder and paint.

Lip colour is a major casualty, requiring yet another slick of colour every time we take off our mask. But yet again there's a downside to using too much, as certain ingredients, mainly lead, can seriously damage our health. Please don't just take my word for it, look up what 'the science' has discovered.

Lead can be present without being listed as it's usually a constituent of other additives; and is in many trusted brands, from the most posh and pricey to budget buys.

Do investigate before you buy, but researchers have listed the following among the safest: Smashbox Legendary, Revlon Orange Flip, Clarins Jolie Rouge and Maybelline Superstay.

The softest and creamiest are the safest, so look for this season's flattering rose, coral, beige, fuchsia or orchid. Honestly, do you really want to be scrubbing red or plum stains off your favourite mask?



You'll need more exfoliator, serum, moisturiser and primer than before to replenish the skin, while foundation and blush will stay put for longer when brushed with powder.

Now for the main item on the agenda ... eye make-up. Though sadly we're not talking about glamming up for big parties, simchas or weddings this time. But you may be seeing lots of friends and family at Zoom events and gatherings instead, so go for it.

The trend is vibrant or subtle purple blended with smokey grey shadows, black waterproof mascara and charcoal liner. Thicker brows are still big news for eye defini-

tion, so feather on with a soft pencil or brush and use lighter shadow below to shape the brow bone.

Depending on your skin and hair colour, you may prefer to follow the same rules using pink teamed with brown, bronze, taupe and papaya shadows and pencils. Most brands have put together collections in one palette to take away the guesswork and help you get it just right.

It seems certain that sales of expensive perfumes will fall dramatically this year – they are pretty ineffectual on social media. Hopefully, it will be a different story this time next year, but meanwhile have a beautiful Chanukah.

FASHION

JAN SHURE

CO-FOUNDER OF
www.SoSensational.co.uk
THE FASHION SITE FOR WOMEN OF 50 PLUS



VIRTUAL VELVET

CALL me wildly optimistic, but when, in mid-October, I agreed to write a fashion feature for the Chanukah edition of *Essex Jewish News* on what to wear for party season, I thought it was possible there would be a party season.

Back then, remember, life was slowly returning to some-

thing approaching normal: many of us were beginning to see friends – carefully, obviously; some were going out, albeit masked, maintaining social distance and neurotically dousing our digits in hand-sanitizer. But it seemed that glamorous parties might somehow still take place.

That was mid-October ...

Since then, there've been regional lockdowns and discussion of 'circuit-break/fire-break' lockdowns. As I write this, in mid-November, there's national lockdown so we know there will be no parties – or no legal ones. Because even after the national lockdown is lifted on 2 December, pandemic restrictions mean the best we can hope for is an intimate celebration for six (eight if the government relents), or a 'virtual' party online.

So, the big question on all our lips – okay, on my lips – is what to wear for a real-life gathering that says I made an effort but didn't want to look as if I tried too hard. And if the celebration is online, how to impress when only our top half is on view?

Velvet is a key fabric in winter 2020 and could definitely provide the solution. If you follow the convoluted meanderings of fashion trends, you will know that velvet first reappeared on catwalks in 2017. Its progress then stalled, but now, thanks to its use by influential designers, led by Saint Laurent's Anthony Vaccarello, Tom Ford, Isabel Marant and Balmain, it seems to be having its moment, meaning lots of velvet at High End and on the high street.

Not only is it perfect for any kind of party but a velvet blazer is a good investment piece right now, as it will work for daytime as well as for evenings – especially when paired with jeans for a cool off-duty look.

The real-deal Saint Laurent velvet blazers (at Net-a-porter and Matchesfashion.com) cost an eye-watering £1,755, but there are gorgeous velvet blazers at all price points, including M&S Autograph £119; Zara, £59.99 and Next, £55. Boden has excellent velvet blazers in different cuts, at £160, as well as a belted version at £170.

For something less classic, Monsoon has a braid-trimmed military jacket in velvet at £80, while Boden has a velvet coat embellished with floral embroidery at £250.

There are velvet tops across the brands, too: Zara has lots, including cropped with V-neckline at £25.99, and long, wrap-front at £29.99. Boden, too, has various cuts including long-sleeve with tie neckline and cut-out (£65), and short, puff-sleeve (£55). Whistles has a simply styled one in dark green at £59, while Hush has one embellished with sequins at £69. Next has a pretty one that mixes velvet

with chiffon, £20, and a V-neck at £22. Anthropologie has a velvet shirt in pastel shades at £98. A purple, crushed velvet 'blazer-dress' at Zara (£79.99) is not, strictly speaking, a top, but could work as one if worn with trousers or jeans.

And, of course, there are dresses in velvet, too. If you have curves to flaunt (or would like to look as if you have curves), try the velvet wrap dresses by Bombshell (Bombshellhq.com) with straight or flared skirt, £159, as worn by Nigella. Their new 'robe' (£199) in velvet or sequins, with defined waistline and shoulder pads and exuding Hollywood glamour, is perfect to party at home.

Hobbs has an informal shirt-dress in velvet at £119, while Boden has a pair of velvet midi dresses, available in various colours, at £110. At M&S, there's a long sleeve velvet dress with shirred neck at £29.50 and an Autograph midi, in a velvet-silk mix, at £99.

Velvet trousers are around, too. One option is to buy them to match a velvet blazer for a trouser suit. Boden has them at £90, £120 and £170 to match their jackets, while Me & Em (meandem.com) has an entire trouser suit in red Italian velvet

at £520. Velvet trousers and velvet jeans (John Lewis, £39.20; Anthropologie, £90) also offer an alternative to denim, leather or faux leather as a bottom half.

Where the celebration is online, with all the focus above the waist, I am forced to abandon my usual strategy for dressing, which rarely, if ever, features pretty blouses or glamorous shirts – both of which are exactly what are needed for a virtual gathering on Zoom.

The velvet tops mentioned previously would work well. Other Zoom-perfect tops include a long sleeve, off-the-shoulder top lavished with frills at neckline and cuff (in striking monochrome or in red, £32); a statement fuchsia top with long, pleated sleeves, £32; a black 'pyjama' top with feather cuffs, £40, and a black taffeta top with bardot-frill, £36, all from River Island.

An animal-print satin shirt, in muted neutrals or cobalt (M&S, £29.50), an emerald silk blouse with oversized tie at neckline (Hobbs, £179), and an apple-green satin blouse with full sleeves, deep cuffs and tie-neck (Boden, £85), would look appropriately glamorous and on-point at an online gathering.



Black taffeta top, £36. River Island



Blouse, £95, from a selection. Hope (hopefashion.co.uk)



Velvet top, £65. Boden



Sparkly top, from a selection, reduced to £15, Wallis



Velvet blazer, £160. Boden



Velvet jacket, £80, Monsoon

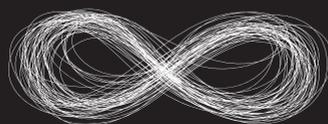
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