

# What have I been turning to during this time of Covid?



## the elul project

Who would ever have thought that a pandemic can produce potential pearls?

I return from Israel in early February. My Jerusalem-based son, daughter-in-law and six-month-old grandson are due to visit in April to introduce our gorgeous little Maor to his two Melbourne great grandparents. I plan to return to Israel after Pesach. In late May my London-based son is scheduled to visit his two grandparents (the same two afore-mentioned 'grand' people.) It is going to be a wonderful 2020. Until it isn't.

As the weeks unfold, it becomes apparent that our family visits and travel plans will be delayed. Then derailed. We are going nowhere. No-one is coming here. The seriousness of the Coronavirus is being grappled with by the whole world. It is classified to be a pandemic. There is talk of a lockdown. My brother and I discuss what we will need to do to take care of our 95-year-old Holocaust Survivor father. Dad lives around the corner from me. When Mum and Dad moved there, about fifteen years ago, my kids counted the steps from their place to ours. Seventy-one. Mum is no longer alive. She passed away at the end of 2013. Dad has lived at home, on his own, ever since. As already outlined, my kids do not live here anymore. In fact, I don't even totally live here anymore. My husband and I have a home in Jerusalem. In the last four years, we have begun spending substantial time in it. Living another life.

However, we are now grounded. Dad's many activities are cancelled. He has few friends left. He no longer drives. He is not on-line. I fear for his mental health. What can I do to alleviate Dad's boredom and inertia? We begin to spend every afternoon together at my place, on the couch in the lounge room. We need to get comfortable. We are in it for the long haul. I bring out blankets. Dad wants to sit up straight with a cushion behind his lower back and a footstool upon which to stretch out his legs, covered by a blanket. I like to sprawl along one length of the couch with my pillow behind me, covered by two blankets. Our ritual begins.



Almost every single day since 17th of March, I have been reading to Dad. Holocaust memoirs. Perhaps this does not appear to be an appropriate genre, but for us it is. Reading about pre-War Jewish Polish childhoods induces Dad to remember and talk about his own. Listening to the War ordeals of others, triggers his recollections. He spontaneously comments on the experience of others in relation to his own. Much is familiar to me. Much is not. Some of what I know is being fleshed out, clarified and layers of meaning are being augmented in Dad's present telling.

Dad's eyes are closed most of the time. They open and turn to me when he wants me to repeat something. Or if he wants to add an interpretation, or comment in any way, shape or form. I welcome these so-called interruptions. After all, for me, they are the main game. It is his imprint and overlay that I am truly seeking.

One afternoon, after we settle into our usual positions on my spacious couch, Dad says, "Maybe we are masochists?" I say, "Who?" He says, "Both of us." We laugh together and begin the day's reading.

Would this be happening without the Coronavirus? Would we be sharing this daily rich mixture of other people's lives, Dad's instinctive reminiscences and our resultant conversations? The answer is painstakingly obvious. I have been provided with a gift. The gift of time with my elderly Dad.



## FRANCES PRINCE

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She was a Jewish Educator at Mt Scopus College for nearly 30 years and is a co-founder of March of the Living. She is also a recipient of NCJWA's Sylvia Gelman Award for 'Outstanding Woman Educator in the Area of Jewish Studies' 2011.

## ABOUT THE ELUL PROJECT

**An initiative aiming to share stories and teachings from Jewish women leaders in our community. Whilst many of us are stuck at home, or isolated from family over Elul and the High Holy Days, we hope this project will serve to inspire, nurture, and uplift during this difficult time.**

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