



# Elul Stories

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National  
Council  
of Jewish  
Women of  
Australia

**24 PERSONAL  
STORIES FROM  
AUSTRALIAN  
JEWISH WOMEN  
ABOUT COVID-19  
+ HIGH HOLIDAYS**



ncJwa

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***At NCJWA we believe that sharing our stories helps each of us to see the world a little differently. When you hear other people’s stories you don’t feel so alone. You can relate to their experience even if it is very different from your own.***

***We’re hoping that this series of Elul Stories will nurture you and encourage you to think and write your own stories. This year will be different. It is scary. It is lonely. So we need to do whatever we can to support each other.***

***Shana Tova uMetuka – May you have a wonderful and sweet New Year. May we transcend the traumas of 2020 and the personal travails in our lives. May the future be one of good health.***

***Melinda Jones***

***National President***

**Melinda Jones, the NCJWA National President, is a scholar, feminist, human rights lawyer, disability advocate and Jewish educator who identifies as Modern Orthodox Jew.**

**She's engaged in research and social action towards justice for all vulnerable people through law and policy development.**

**In an earlier life, Melinda taught law and political science at Melbourne, Monash, La Trobe and the University of New South Wales. She was a Senior Lecturer in Law, the Editor-in-Chief of the Australian Journal of Human Rights and the Director of the Australian Human Rights Centre.**

# **ROSH HASHANAH WITH A DIFFERENCE**

Thinking about Rosh Hashana this year is daunting. How do we make it special with no guests, no Shule, no Shofar? I'm not alone this year – on the contrary so many people are living in my house that we often fall over each other. But I really feel for two of my daughters. One in London would have come home for Yom Tov.

She's living with wonderful non-Jewish people in a non-Jewish part of London. She can't stay with relatives either. Another daughter lives a half hour walk away. She has a complex disability and a number of carers. That means she is with too many people to be allowed in my house, where we have people with immune deficiencies who are at great risk. Both will be alone.

When I think of it, the Rosh Hashana I imagine as the normal Rosh Hashana is not really all that normal. Having big dinners and lunches with 20 people, all close family and friends, has happened most years. The normal event goes like this. Everyone needs new clothes – with five children that was challenge. Then the shoe shopping. Of course, they are difficult to fit – too long, too fat, too thin. The menu and cleaning, a frenzy of activity – everyone having multiple jobs, getting in each other's way, shouting, setting the table, cleaning candle sticks, peeling potatoes.

Then there's the Rosh Hashana Seder, a Sephardi tradition adopted by my family after my sister married a Palestinian from Bnei B'rak. This is basically a series of "dad jokes" said over different foods – blessings and curses in the hope that we will prosper in the new year. This leads, in my family at least, to more bad dad jokes and sometimes some equally shaggy, very Australian hairy dog stories. See – I'm already reminiscing.

The truth is, that these Yom Tavs really are the norm – but only just. They've been evolving over time and there have been many unusual Rosh Hashanas for my family. Back in 1989, my fourth child was born 6 days before Rosh Hashana. We certainly didn't have guests. We went to dinner at my machatonim straight from the hospital, via home to pick up the other children (who were 3, 5 & 7). But then disaster struck – my baby did one of those motions where clothes, legs and little feet are covered in brown liquid. We were used to this, so that wasn't the disaster. What was bad was that we had forgotten one crucial thing in preparation for going out. Nappies and spare clothes.

That Rosh Hashana was memorable also because we named our daughter Shoshana. We were thinking of Shoshana Tova, but decided it was a little twee. So she ended up being named Shoshana Leah. Saying "shana tova" has had an extra dimension for me ever since.

I'm sharing this story with you because at NCJWA we believe that sharing our stories helps each of us to see the world a little differently. When you hear other people's stories you don't feel so alone. You can relate to their experience even if it is very different from your own.

We're hoping that this series of Ellul Stories will nurture you and encourage you to think and write your own stories. This year will be different. It is scary. It is lonely. So we need to do whatever we can to support each other.

We are publishing stories one at a time. Then, just before the New Year you will be able to download the collection and have it to read over yom tov. This is our New Year Greeting to you.

*Shana Tova Metuka – May you have a wonderful and sweet New Year. May we transcend the traumas of 2020 and the personal travails in our lives. May the future be one of good health.*

# MEETING GOD ONE ON ONE

During Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we are used to getting together with God in a crowd. The common experience is exactly that – common. We usher in the holiness together and farewell the fast as a community. However, this year we will be spending more time alone or at home than in the fray. From where can we draw guidance and inspiration to pivot our perspective and still meaningfully encounter Hashem?

First, we have to acknowledge the change to our perspective that is required. Rosh Hashana is the day that we crown Hashem our King. The liturgy of the day provides the song sheet for Hashem's coronation. The focal point of the service references Hashem's sovereignty – malchuyot. We follow up with the fanfare heralding the King's arrival – we blow the shofar.

The principle underlying the public celebration is expressed in the idiom “In the multitude of the nation is the King honoured”. Jewish law prioritises the performance of certain mitzvot in as large a group as possible in order to honour Hashem. It is not surprising that we may feel at a loss about how to meaningfully mark the beginning of the Jewish year. We have thousands of years of history and tradition that have hardwired us to expect a very public celebration. Shifting our perspective to try and meet God alone is challenging.

Perhaps we can find a path to a personal connection with Hashem by looking to the experiences of Sarah and Hannah. The Torah and Haftara readings for Rosh Hashana tell their stories. Both encountered God in very personal ways.

The prophesy of Sarah occurs 'behind closed doors'. Sarah eavesdrops on the conversation between Avraham and the Angels and learns she is to have a son. Later, she receives the prophesy and then acts on it by advocating for her son to take on the legacy of the Jewish people. This all occurs within Sarah's tent. Furthermore, Sarah and Avraham's success in bringing the message of ethical monotheism to the world was largely achieved through their openminded conversations with others – by literally and figuratively bringing people 'into their tent'. Sarah teaches us, amongst other things, that we can converse with Hashem, harness our potential and then act on it by influencing others, all without leaving the front door.

While Sarah is about action, Hannah is about reflection. She offers the ultimate model of personal prayer – her lips moved but no sound came out. Hannah's infertility is a catalyst for her to pour out her heart to God. Our Rabbis recall that not only does she express her sorrow, but she shows her anger and argues vehemently with Hashem. However, ultimately she acknowledges the gifts bestowed on her. Hannah's story gives us a sense of the torment and passion that she shares with Hashem. This year we may want to 'pour out our hearts' to God about a lot of things. We may want him to know of the myriad of our losses, that we are angry and that we are sad. Hannah gives us a model of how to do this and to keep our relationship with Hashem intact.

As we gather together but apart this year, we can shift our paradigm away from looking for Hashem in the crowd by drawing inspiration from Sarah and Hannah to make the most of our 'one on one' with Hashem.

**Rabbanit Judith Levitan is a lawyer with over 15 years' experience in the social justice sector, currently working at Legal Aid NSW.**

**She is one of the first Orthodox women to receive smicha (rabbinic ordination) in Australia.**

# MY WONDROUS ROSH HASHANA

Recently, I shared a photo on Facebook of the moonlight hitting the ocean. For me, the significance of this photo was not that it was a brilliant specimen of photographic talent or luck (in fact it barely did the scene justice) but rather that it captured a light bulb moment for me when I finally found the words to articulate a feeling I'd had for some time. This was the feeling that those 'small things' in life I'd been going on about being grateful for, are actually not small at all, they're massive and wondrous!

I realised in that moment that I wanted people to understand that when I tell them that despite the myriad challenges I'm working through, today was a good day because I got to see the sparkle of the moon over the ocean - that's not a 'small,' throw away compensation - it's a legitimate acknowledgement that I have managed to find an awesome source of happiness, energy and positivity, no less significant than a night out dancing, a party, a show, a trip or all of those things which bring me happiness and I miss as much as the next person.

Not long after being able to articulate these thoughts in my personal life, I began to recognise the same patterns in my professional life. As the Chief Executive Officer of Access Inc, an organisation that partners with adults with disabilities, leading an organisation that impacts people's lives on a daily basis through an unprecedented pandemic has been challenging.

As an organisation where everyone knows each other by name and cares about each other's wellbeing, we were devastated when we were forced to suspend services due to Covid. However, in true Access style, we didn't dwell for long and looked to turn this challenge into an opportunity. From this Access Online was born – a new suite of online services which gives people with disabilities the chance to continue building their lives during the pandemic.

While I kept hearing from participants and families as well as staff and volunteers about how important these services have been to their Covid-survival, admittedly it has only been recently that I have been fully open to seeing through my 'crisis goggles' the gains being made through Access Online.

Perhaps more importantly, I have made the realisation that these gains are not compensatory – they're not advancements despite the situation - they're genuine circumstances of growth and development, which in many cases are because of this new way in operating.

None of these thoughts or realisations are profound. However, it is my observation that for many they are still abstract thoughts somewhere in the subconscious, as they had been for me.

I am thus so thrilled that for me, these thoughts are now not only conscious but are solidifying into my mindset each day and that it is so apt that my journey to this point has come in time for Rosh HaShanah.

What a sweet new year gift I have received to stop comparing the joys before Covid with the joys during Covid; to stop comparing the gains made pre-Covid with the gains made during Covid - because when I stop comparing...I start living.

Wishing everyone Shana Tova U'Metukah!

*May we all be blessed with good health and may we all receive the gift of recognising the wondrous moments around us.*

**Sharon Malecki is the CEO of Access Inc and an experienced not-for-profit professional specialising in the Jewish community.**

**She is also a life-long volunteer, driven by making an impact and loves dancing and eating – always in that order!**

# WHEN OUR LIMITATIONS BECOME OUR STRENGTH

As the President of the ACT Jewish Community, I'm acutely aware that we are a small and isolated community. Many of our community members are away from loved ones in Sydney or Melbourne, and with travel limited due to COVID-19, our sense of being cut off has been acute over these past few months. Strangely, this very isolation has also helped protect us against COVID-19. We have no active cases in Canberra at present, and I am incredibly grateful for the measure of normality that allows us. We're lucky to be able to gather again for synagogue services, youth and adult education classes and even some small-scale social events.

This has led me to think deeply about how we approach our limitations, both as a community and as individuals in our community. Sometimes we have a tendency to focus

too much on what we cannot do, rather than on what we can. Especially in a small community like ours, where resources are limited, we often worry about not doing enough particularly when we're used to doing so much! We can become disheartened by the challenges we face.

But when I consider how much we do, this gives me much pride or as we say in Yiddish, nachas! Even when the COVID-19 lockdown was at its strictest, with only 10 people permitted to gather, we adapted our traditional Limmud Shavuot, holding it at three separate locations, with two speakers in each place. For Pesach, we held a Seder over zoom before the holiday began. We moved our Cheder and our adult education classes online, with great success, even though we had never done anything like this before. And we

massively scaled up our outreach and support to elderly and vulnerable members of our community, thanks to a network of new, young volunteers. In the middle of it all, we opened the beautiful new wing of the National Jewish Memorial Centre, and though we've had to delay the official opening, the building is already being used and very much appreciated.

Our ability to adapt, and to cope with challenges, inspires me. I feel that these skills are particularly Jewish: throughout history, persecution, displacement and changing circumstances have forced our forefathers and foremothers to be flexible, resourceful and, above all courageous in confronting whatever challenges were faced. I see us doing the same today, as we face the unprecedented challenge of a global pandemic. I think it has made our community stronger: we need each other more than ever, and we value what we have more than we did before. I'll never again take for granted the ability to attend shul, or hug another human being (I sincerely hope this will eventually be allowed again) or to see our youngest members running around the synagogue grounds. It doesn't matter to me any longer that we're small or isolated: we know that we can rely upon each other in our time of need. And so as we welcome the month of Elul, I am thinking about those things that matter the most.

**Veronica Leydman was born in Buenos Aires and came to Sydney as a child. She has lived with her husband and her three children in the nation's capital since 2003.**

**Like many people who were not raised in Canberra, her first port of call was the ACT Jewish Community Centre which is located adjacent to Parliament House. She has volunteered in many capacities over the years for the Community, as a Cheder teacher, administrator, events coordinator and caterer and served on and off the Board for a number of years before becoming President of the ACTJC in 2018.**

**In her work life, Veronica is a government lawyer for the Department of Home Affairs within the immigration and citizenship law branch.**

# 'AN APPLE A DAY KEEPS THE VIRUS AWAY'

We all know the old adage that 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away'.

Where did that saying come from, and does it have any relevance to us right now?

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away" is an old English proverb that basically means that eating nutritious food will make you healthier. As a result, you won't need to go to the doctor very often.

The phrase can be traced back to 1866, when Notes and Queries magazine published the first-known example of the proverb: "Eat an apple on going to bed, and you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread."

By the turn of the 20th century, several variations of the rhyme circulated around England, including the now-popular "an apple a day keeps the doctor away."

So what was it about apples that the English thought was so healthy? As it turns out, the English of that time used the word "apple" to describe any round fruit that grew on a tree.

Essentially, they believed that eating fruit daily promoted good health.

We are about to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, which is symbolised by apple and honey. There are many

different explanations as to why an apple is used. One explanation is that it comes from the Garden of Eden:

The apple symbolizes Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden), which according to the Midrash has the scent of an apple orchard, and in Kabbalah is called "the holy apple orchard." When Isaac commented regarding his son Jacob, "Behold, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field, which the L-rd has blessed" (Genesis 27:27), the biblical commentator Rashi explains that this refers to the scent of an apple orchard, the scent of Gan Eden.

Furthermore, when Solomon depicts the love G d harbors for His nation, he writes (Song of Songs 8:5): "Beneath the apple tree I aroused you[r love]." Eating an apple on Rosh Hashanah is an attempt to remind G d of our age-old love.

There are many other mentions of the apple in our tradition:

- The Maharil explains that the apple is connected with "חקל תפוחים קדישין"; when Yaakov came to get the brochos from Yitzchok, he had the smell of an apple orchard upon his clothing. As well as the Kabbalistic explanation, (according to one opinion) this episode happened on Rosh Hashana (GR"A O.C. 583:8)
- There are three types of benefit derived from an apple; taste, sight and smell. This is symbolic of our appeal for

sustenance in the three aspects of children, health and livelihood for the entire year (Ben Ish Chai, first year Parshas Nitzavim).

- It is written in Zohar (Parshas Shmini 4a) that after one drinks wine, they eat an apple in order that the wine should not harm them. Wine represents gevurah (severity) and thus the apple calms the severity. Therefore, on Rosh Hashana we eat apples to pacify the harsh judgement.

- The Zohar in the same place states that the source of all fruit is from the Divine aspect of malchus (feminine), other than the apple which is sourced from the aspect of Tiferes (male). The Arizal says that the summer months represent malchus and the winter months (Tishrei through to Nissan) are Tiferes. Therefore, at the start of the “male” months we eat an apple which comes from “male” source.

- According to Rabbeynu Yona (brought in Rosh Brachos Perek 6 Siman 35), the nature of honey is to change everything that comes into it – even something impure – into honey. (Therefore, one can consume honey even though the legs of the bees may be mixed in). The holiness of Rosh Hashana should convert all bad to good. (Shem Mishmuel Mo’adim Rosh Hashana 5674). Some add that the sin of Adam haRishon and the Tree of Knowledge was with an apple, and we therefore dip an apple into the honey to rectify the original sin.

Whichever of these explanations is preferred, there is link between the apple as being seen as a key to good health, and as being symbolic of a righteous and contented life.

Today we are confronted by the global pandemic of the Coronavirus. We see people’s lives and livelihoods being thrown into disarray. We read harrowing stories of families being kept apart, of loved ones being unable to grieve or pray together. It is a time of anxiety and pressure.

We know that an apple itself cannot counter this virus – hopefully we will, through the god-given talents of our dedicated medical researchers, soon have a vaccine that will do that.

In the meantime, however, we can counter the despair, and the fear, brought by the virus if we look to the apple – that age-old symbol of good health and of a coming joyous New Year – to give us hope for the future.

**Gail Paratz is a retired High School Art teacher, and a mother to two adult sons. She was raised in Melbourne but is a staunch Brisbane of 33 years. She is Vice President of the NCJWA Brisbane section, and has a deep interest and is active in interfaith activities. She was the NCJWA Miriam Stein Award recipient in 2019.**

# JEWISH, PREGNANT, AND STRANDED IN THE TIME OF COVID

It's safe to say that this is an Elul that none of us could have ever imagined. A year ago, it would have been unthinkable that many of us might not attend services on the next set of High Holidays, or that spending those holidays with our families would be impossible.

For me, there's an added extra set of unexpected circumstances — I'm pregnant with my first child, due right after the holidays, and, as an American expat from New York living in Sydney, half a world away from my family.

All of this makes for a complex High Holiday experience this year.

On one hand, my due date is just six weeks away — barely the blink of an eye. On the other, I have to get through all of the holidays in that time: I have to cook for Rosh Hashana, figure out how to make Yom Kippur meaningful without fasting or davening in shule, direct my husband (a tall and wonderful mensch, but not quite as handy as I am) in putting up and decorating our sukkah, cook for another two sets of two-day yontifs, all the while growing increasingly rounder, less sure on my feet, and probably more tired than I've ever been. It's certainly possible I could go into labour before my due date, which would complicate things considerably, especially if it happens on a chag. Everything is uncertain.

That's one level of what's happening in my brain. And on another level, I'm thinking about what the holidays will actually be like. By now we're all familiar with the

COVID-19 precautions synagogues are taking — limited services, social distancing, masks, no choirs, no communal kiddushes or meals. It will be a total shock to our collective Jewish system. So much of what makes the holidays meaningful has been taken away.

But the differences don't end there. Both logistically and spiritually, I feel the entire experience of the High Holiday season has turned on its head.

Last year on the High Holidays, I knew what I could pray for, what would make sense, what I could reasonably expect. I was newly married and wondering if I'd be pregnant the next time the Yamim Noraim rolled around. I was in shule, surrounded by hundreds of other worshippers and immersed in an atmosphere of communal prayer and spiritual energy. I prayed that the coming year would be one of growth and positive change. I prayed that we would be welcomed and embraced by our new community at The Great Synagogue in Sydney, where my husband had just begun his job as Associate Rabbi. I prayed that I would learn and do my duty as a so-called rebbetzin, whatever that meant.

This year, I get to be thankful that many of last year's prayers were answered, and bountifully. I'm pregnant, and we're about to start our family; we enjoyed a wonderful first year in our new home, and we finally feel settled; we are happy, healthy, and ready to face the future.

But that's just one side of the story.

While the past year was certainly one of the best of my life, it was also a time of transition, fear, uncertainty, and chaos, both for me and for the world at large. I grew into my identity as a married woman and the partner of a community leader, but I also had many doubts about how I was doing in this complicated role. I became pregnant, but I was also terrified of something going wrong. I finally got used to the idea that we were going to be parents, and then the world abruptly shut down, and an impenetrable barrier sprung up between me and my family.

While I was preparing for my life to change in the most drastic way, suddenly all of life changed, and all of the expectations I had had were gone.

To some extent, this is true for everyone. I doubt the pandemic neatly fit into anyone's plans for 2020. For me, COVID-19 challenged every assumption I had made about my pregnancy and my baby. Most painfully, it means that none of our parents or relatives will be able to visit after the birth, and in fact, we have no idea when they will meet the first grandchild/niece/nephew to be born on either side.

I think that we're all facing something like this now. We all thought we knew what life would be like, and we were all wrong. There's clearly a lesson in this: we're not really in control, and we have to have faith that it's all part of a larger picture. In one sense, that's always been the central theme of the High Holidays: it's a moment when we bow to the bigness of divine destiny, when we acknowledge that we are at the mercy of God. COVID-19 has thrown this lesson into stark relief.

What I wish for all of us — and myself — is that with all of the uncertainty swirling around us this holiday season, we can find strength, and stay rooted, in the bedrock of our traditions, altered as they may be this year. Things are different, no question, and in ways we never saw coming. But there's comfort in the idea that whatever is going on in the world, we know who we are and before whom we stand. I don't know when I'll go into labour, when my newborn will meet his or her family for the first time, or what life will be like a month from now. I don't know what the holidays will feel like, or how the collective Jewish experience will be affected by this pandemic year. I do know, though, that some things won't change. We will be called to account, as we are every year, in moments of deep introspection, fervid prayer, fear and joy. The holidays will come, sweep us up with alternatively breathless momentum and endless tedium, and they will go. We will face the seemingly insurmountable heap of tasks to be done, and we will do them.

**I'm going to hold fast to this message at the center of it all: I may not be in control, but I trust the One who is.**

We don't know what will happen this year. But here's the thing: we never do. COVID-19 has simply removed the illusion that we, and not God, are the masters of our own universes.

So I'm going to plunge into this year's High Holidays, and my impending motherhood, with that in mind. I'm going to face the differences, the disappointments, the confusion and limitations, and I'm going to hold fast to this message at the center of it all: I may not be in control, but I trust the One who is.

*Shana Tova u Metukah*

*Have a happy, sweet New Year.*

**Abra Kaplan is a New York-born writer and blogger living in Sydney with her husband Rabbi Phil Kaplan, Associate Rabbi of the Great Synagogue. She has degrees in English literature from Binghamton University and Hebrew University.**

# WHOEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT?

At the beginning of the year, life just seemed to be going along very nicely with my work as a Cruise & Travel Advisor – business was booming and 2020 was shaping up to be a bumper year as people were booking far ahead and getting ready to travel to amazing places in this fascinating world of ours. Cruises were at a premium with the whole world being covered by a variety of options and the future looked exciting.

In early January, I led a delegation of over 45 people on a Tour of Israel culminating in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the formation of WIZO at an Enlarged General Meeting, where 1000 people attended from over 50 countries of WIZO Federations.

On the 26th January I was officially advised that I would be receiving an OAM for services to the Jewish community. As I sat at Tel Aviv airport waiting for my flight back to Australia, the messages of Mazel Tov began beeping on my phone. It was a very exciting time and I personally was still high following the success of the touring, the wonderful celebration and camaraderie of the centennial celebrations, all capped off by my award.

Already on the flight and in Hong Kong where we were in transit, there were signs of many more people wearing masks, passengers looking at each other warily and the feeling of something in the air – little did we know that what was in the air was the coronavirus that would bring down so many countries and decimate so many of our older people, world-wide.

I know this is to be about what I am thinking, what is inspiring me and what am I turning to, but gradually this COVID-19 has seeped into Australia, impacting and changing our very comfortable lives in such a way that we never could have imagined.

However, this time of various types of lockdowns has given me time to reassess my life. I was always so busy and exhausted with so many different commitments. I would have meetings at night, travel functions and a 'life' outside WIZO and work which kept me constantly so busy. I find that working from home has given me a new perspective on important things and spending more time with my husband of nearly 57 years has been one of these. I find that cooking a meal, baking a cake, and other simple things are not the chores they once were.

During this time, I have been able to reach out to friends and contemporaries who I never really had the time to just sit and chat with, and ask 'are you OK?', particularly some of my friends who are now on their own, as well as some of our older members.

WIZO has been my passion and saviour at this time. I have always had a passion for this work and a true belief in what WIZO stands for, and during this time I have been able to really become even more involved, with so much that needs to be done and I have the time to do it. This opportunity to do more WIZO work has truly inspired me. Many Zooms both local and with international people certainly keep me busy – almost too busy.

I feel I have more time to sit in the sunshine in the middle of the day and listen to some music instead of being in a lunch room wolfing down my lunch. My weekends are just that, for relaxing and so many simple things that could never get done previously. One thing I am not happy about is having to do the housework (not my Gesheft!). There are so many areas of change in my life, but when I analyse them, I see the benefits. Of course, not having to keep changing outfits every day to go to work is much easier (even though I do get up in the morning and get dressed as if going to work) - no one notices or cares if it the same outfit for a couple of days.

The most I have missed is hugging my grandchildren and being with them and my kids. This has been extremely difficult even though we are all constantly in touch, there is nothing more inspiring than a huge hug from our little people and spending time with them.

As said by many, but here I quote Abraham Lincoln – 'THIS TOO SHALL PASS'.

**Paulette Cherny OAM was born in Brisbane and moved to Melbourne on her own as a teenager. She was a founding member of the WIZO Masada Group and has been involved in all levels of WIZO in Victoria including President for 6 years. She attended the first ever WIZO AVIV conference in 1979 and has attended many more over the years. In 2016 Paulette was elected as President of WIZO Australia.**

**Paulette has been married for nearly 57 years to Ernie, has 3 children and 5 divine grandchildren.**

# SAVE ONE CHILD SAVE THE WORLD

Children and babies are the inspiration behind my professional work, my support for Jewish non for profit charities and Jewish community organisations and my view on how to celebrate the Yomim Noraim during Covid.

As Chairman of the Australian chapter of the Kindertransport Association, I bring the plight of refugee children and babies to the forefront, giving speeches at a wide variety of forums, including a talk on the ABC program Our World hosted by Beverley O'Connor. I have three members of my family who survived WW2 because they went on a Kindertransport. My mother, Regina Morgenstern was on the first train out of Vienna on December 11th, 1938 and eventually was able to give something back to the country which saved her life, and to make a significant difference to the War effort. At the age of 18, she was enlisted by the secret agency, MI6 to serve on the Enigma project based at Bletchley Park. Her cousin married Max Unger, a Kind from Frankfurt who eventually migrated to the USA with his parents, served in the US Airforce. Suddenly at age 36, Captain Unger died of scarlet fever and is buried at Washington's Arlington Cemetery. The third member of the family, Franzi Rapin got off the Kindertransport train in Holland and was soon after smuggled into Paris. Her life was one of sadness, alcoholism and seclusion, a common trait among many Kinder, their minds darkened without parents. Hidden in a parcel, child survivor Henry Buch was born in the Warsaw ghetto, was smuggled out, and is one the War's youngest child survivors. In all its chapters the Kindertransport Association fights for the rights of refugee children and babies regardless of race, creed or religion. Every day we must ensure that no child should ever be caught up in the horrors of War.

Let's be happy during the Yomim Noraim for the sake of our children. Covid restricts our homes to 10 people and in some states, no one at all. Being without all our friends and families during Rosh Hashanah can be upsetting for children. Let's all make our children happy by doing fun things like decorating the table with soft toy bees and carved apples. We read in the parsha on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, that Abraham aged 100 and Sarah aged 90 had a son which they called Yitzchak, meaning "will laugh." Isaac was their surprise and joy, so let's draw inspiration from them and laugh.

I wonder if we all stood on our balconies on Rosh Hashanah evening and laughed, whether we could hear our Jewish neighbours laughing too!

**Janet Merkur is a descendant of survivors of the Holocaust who arrived in Sydney in 1951. She works as an educator of teenagers with disabilities in regional schools, and is author of over twenty history textbooks and biographies, including a family biography, 'Sunflowers', which is held in many libraries across the world. She is the Chairman of the**

**Australian chapter of the Kindertransport Association, and a trustee Governor of the JCA. She is Co-President of the NCJWA NSW Section and is a Board member of the NCJWA.**

# LEARNING A LESSON

“Whoever preserves a single life is considered to have saved a whole world” is the Talmudic quote used by Magen David Adom as our mantra, our philosophy, our dictum. From a literal perspective we save lives and offer humanitarian assistance worldwide. At this time of COVID however, we are not only saving lives literally but through small acts of kindness and by reaching out to others.

With the High Holidays upon us and a world where we have never experienced the Chagim quite like this, it’s a time to put into action the words of our forefathers in the best ways we can. We won’t be experiencing our community through shules or family meals but reaching out and letting our friends and family know we are there for them is just as important.

As leaders in the world-wide Jewish community, MDA represents the best in what people have to offer. It is built on the backs of individuals who put others first and who realise the importance of each and every life. Through our Israeli Blood banks and volunteer programs, through our training centres and COVID testing stations, through the fact that our name is synonymous with what is best and good in

**Having worked in Catering for 24 years, Sharon Unger moved into the Not for profit sector in 2015. At Magen David Adom Australia, Sharon works in the field of Events and Fundraising using her extensive experience in dealing with people on a personal basis. She has particularly enjoyed visiting schools and Aged Care Facilities over the years, and is passionate about maintaining positive donor relations.**

**Sharon is proud to be a part of MDA Australia which is represented, by a full female staff in our office, led by Chairperson Glynis Lipson.**

**Sharon has travelled extensively and tries to visit Israel as part of each trip she makes.**

people, each time we give a little of ourselves, we are saving lives and potential lives. This knowledge is spread through the MDA Friends Societies throughout the world.

Inspiration comes in all forms, and at this time, the Talmudic quote could not be more accurate. Every time each one of us reaches out to another it is an act of kindness and we may not even realise the impact it is having. During these unprecedented times, many of us feel alone and helpless. If we can offer a glimmer of hope through personal contact – by phone, zoom, by a letter or message, by a bunch of flowers or by just ensuring that others know we are here, and more importantly here for them, we are potentially saving a whole world.

These difficult times, in many ways, are bringing us back to basics - to a time where we know the importance of family and of having each other. Out of darkness often comes good things and an appreciation of what we have, what we are capable of and of each other.

# TOGETHER, APART

I realised last week that the Yamim Noraim are not far away and I felt a small wave of anxiety wash through me. How are we going to do it this year? How are we going to celebrate these special days when we've been siloed into singular households? Will there be as much meaning and joy if I can't watch my kids interacting with their cousins while chomping on apple dipped in honey? Is there any point building our sukkah this year? How much guilt will I feel for the relief of being spared having to feel guilty about going to shul? If I dry out the brisket, will my longing to be at my auntie's dining table be more pronounced? For me, like many others, the chagim are characterised by big family gatherings, meals and related activities. What will these festivals look like without all of that engagement and interaction?

Here in Victoria, as things stand, we're unlikely to be able to get together this year with anyone who doesn't live with us. We thought at Pesach that it would be a one off. That hasn't come to pass. As the wave of anxiety beaches inside of me, I am bracing myself. Yep, I'll be catering entire meals for my little family instead of simply bringing a plate. Yep, the vast majority of the storytelling and the conveying of an immersive experience to the kids will fall to me. Yep, there'll be no fun wine and cheese nights with friends in our sukkah. Yep, I'll be whispering yizkor for my late father in solitude, without the security of a surrounding community of people who have lost their parents. It's amazing how the repetition of customs and the way in which we perform them becomes so ingrained over time. That's not to say that many of us don't try new things or interrogate our choices. But once we've settled on something that feels right, it's hard not to feel aggrieved by being restrained from accessing it.

Access versus restraint are, of course, bendable concepts. So, whilst we won't be sitting around a table with all of the usual suspects and, more to the point, we're prevented from doing so (albeit for good reason), we can choose to tap into the idea that we are all together in our performance of ritual.

There is comfort to be elicited from the knowledge that each siloed household is marking the chagim. We are not restrained from that. And that freedom is to be celebrated.

We will find ways – new ways – of making these chagim special and of ensuring that all family members and friends are looked after. We will modify our rituals, but we will be doing so as a community. As the pandemic wears on and it becomes more challenging to lift our spirits, we are well served by buying into the mantra of “this too shall pass”. And so long as it doesn't, we can still be together, apart.

**Gabi Crafti is a Melbourne barrister practising in commercial law. She is the President of UJEB. She is the founder and immediate past President of the Jewish Professional Women's Network.**

# ONE FOR ALL

From the moment COVID hit and I realized the seriousness of it and its implications for society around me, my thoughts were for others.

Personal safety has naturally been a consideration at all times, but because I am in the fortunate situation of having everything I need and living in Perth, I feel an obligation to do what I can to make life easier for others in tangible ways.

My magnum opus was a return to Bridge teaching – I wrote and emailed lessons in Bridge to members of my club, which were much appreciated. Somehow I think I might have been my best student, because I often took my own advice when playing online!

It has been astounding to see the ingenious ways people have found to bring joy, distraction and company to others. A violinist or an operatic duo perform on their balcony to an audience of neighbours. A symphony orchestra plays Ravel's Bolero on Zoom. Friends begin sending messages - inspirational, diverting, amusing or of great beauty through social media, and we make contact with people we might otherwise not think of, just to make sure they are okay.

**We will say 'we' instead of 'I' in the penitential prayers with even more conviction, because such is our solidarity.**

Fortunately we have most of our family around us, so it was only a few long weeks while under lockdown that we didn't see the children and grandchildren. I feel for friends and relations whose family members live far away, and whom they might not see again for a very long time.

Everyone I talk to has the same words of gratitude that we are, for now at least, in a safe haven. We comment on how hygiene standards have held colds and flu at bay: these habits should stay with us for a lifetime – such a simple way to slow the spread of contagious illnesses.

The Yamim Norayim will be different this year. We must apply by ballot for seating at the services of our choice, rather than taking our seats in a Shul for granted. A small price to pay, given that we will be celebrating Rosh Hashanah and breaking the Fast with family who live in nearby suburbs.

And the rest of the time? To daven at home. To sit in a comfortable chair, perhaps in the sun, and read the machzor with all the sincerity one would apply if in a Shul (or more, given the level of chatter that happens in Shul). Like the Anzac Day message the buglers spread on the street corners we can feel the bond with others who are doing the same as us – especially those who live in places where they cannot go outdoors at all.

We will say ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ in the penitential prayers with even more conviction, because such is our solidarity.

If we miss the sound of the shofar, then please G-d we will hear it next year.

*Shana Tovah to you all! May the coming year bring good health, happiness, peace and fulfilment to all.*

**Sue Levy is a lifelong member of Jewish community organisations. She has been an NCJWA member since 1990, a State Board member from 1994 to 2014 and previous Section President of WA, and a National Board member during the tenure of Robyn Lenn. She is currently the Vice-Chair and Secretary of Netanya Group and works for Menora Charity.**

# T'SHUVAH AND RECONCILIATION

For over forty years there has been a Progressive Jewish congregation in Brisbane, Queensland, growing over just a few years from a small group meeting in homes and then halls, to a group large enough to purchase a property and create a synagogue from an old church building. Part of the purchase of this property was funded by the sale of donated coins, which had been rescued by a Holocaust survivor after the war.

Over the years this congregation saw many ups and downs in its activity. At one time there was only one Erev Shabbat (Shabbat welcome-Friday evening) service per month, then it grew in activity and numbers so that there was a regular Shabbat service and many other functions.

About fifteen years ago the congregation split into two congregations. A new congregation split away and they met in halls in different parts of the city. This group did grow to an active congregation for some time, while the original congregation sat and existed or at least that is how it seems. During this time the Synagogue building fell into a state of disrepair due to lack of funds and people to keep it going.

About three years ago the leaders of the two congregations met together and started talks between the two congregations re uniting - 'returning' to one another, or reconciling. I was privileged to be part of the committee involved in these talks.

As a result, in 2017 the reunification was finalized when a memorandum of understanding was signed.

This reunification of the congregations has enabled the congregation to grow, providing an environment for more people to return to their Jewish roots or to experience Judaism for the first time in their lives, including the opportunity for them to 'repent' and 'return' to a life renewed – the concept of 't'shuvah'.

The congregation is now gathering funding to repair and renovate the building. Some of these repairs have been done by volunteers and some by employing professionals. During this time we continue to grow together as a community, sharing a space and lives and experiences with one another.

How has Covid-19 affected the community? During the initial lockdown, no services were conducted from the Synagogue, however, I along with the president managed to keep in contact with the people via email, phone, messaging and on our private Facebook. Early in June we were able to restart services, although with limited numbers, which have been very well attended. Interest in attending services, in some ways, has grown even more than before the lockdown. Recently we started Zooming our services for those who are unable to attend in person – a COVID change that will continue for those who need it. This has been well received.

We are living in a difficult time however we will survive and grow. As a result of the reunification of this congregation in Brisbane, the congregation has earned the reputation of being a warm, welcoming, inclusive nurturing family. People come first for the religion/spirituality and return for the relationships.

**Mavis Rudd is Treasurer of NCJWA Brisbane Section and Secretary and former Treasurer of Beit Or v'Shalom Inc.**

**Mavis, is a wife, mother, grandmother and great grandmother.**

**Mavis is a retired, Herbalist, Naturopath and Bowen Therapist.**

**She operated her own health food store along with her husband for some years in Bundaberg and later worked with other Natural practitioners and Health Food Stores.**

**Mavis is also a carer for her 102 year old Mother-in-law.**

# A SILVER LINING OF COVID

As we move through the month of Elul I am sure we are all reflecting on the Yamim Noraim to come and what 5781 will look like. So many of the symbols of this time - G-d's testing of Abraham in the Akeda, the sound of the shofar, the opening of the book of life and the closing of the gates take on new meaning after our experiences of COVID-19. When we celebrated Pesach in April we probably did not contemplate that once again we would be facing having to adapt to marking the high point of the Jewish year without being able to gather with our family, friends and communities.

How many times over the last six months have you exchanged comments with friends and colleagues about the strange times in which we are living? I suspect many. New expressions have come into our everyday lexicon - "stay safe", "lockdown" and "iso". Each of us has adapted to our new reality in different ways - some have found it more challenging than others but for all there is definitely a new version of normal. Many of those with children living at home have commented that one of the few silver linings in this often bleak reality has been the increased time they have spent with family.

For my husband and I, we have gone from being empty nesters, who had become very used to our own space, to welcoming back our adult daughter and her partner who moved in with us to escape a very small and cold apartment, to give them both more room to work from home and to keep the family together in these constantly changing times. They too have had to temporarily give up their own familiar home environment, space and independence to make life easier for the family as we traverse these new grounds together.

As we adapted to being a household of four adults, I have had the privilege of watching with admiration how these two young adults have modified their working style to fit our new realities. Other than parents who have their children work within a family business, it is rare for a parent to have the opportunity to watch their children work on a daily basis and get such an insight into what they do for a living. We know that our children grow up and establish their own careers, but they will always be our children and it can be hard to envisage them in a professional environment.

The two lockdown periods during which we have shared our house have allowed me to experience their work and pressures first hand. We have talked more than ever before about what they do and the challenges that they face. I have seen the maturity that they bring to their work in areas often very foreign to those I have faced in my career. We have brainstormed problems that each of us are encountering in our work situations and, through doing so, have each gained a greater appreciation of each other's work.

We have been thrown together due to unprecedented circumstance however, I think, we have all learnt so much more about each other as adults and while we hope and pray that we will be able to return to some degree of normality in the near future, we will all come out of this period with a greater degree of understanding. The month of Elul is a time for reflection about the year that has been and the year to come. For me, I come out of this year with a greater understanding and appreciation of my children and their professional lives. They will always be my children, no one can ever change that for me, but they are children who have grown and developed. My hopes for 5781 are that they and each of us will once again be able to pursue our dreams fully, spend precious time with family and friends and embrace all the wonderful vitality of our community and the wider world.

**Sharene Hambur is a practising lawyer and has had a long involvement in the Victorian Jewish community holding a number of Executive positions. She is married to Sam and has two children.**

# THIS TOO

Yamin Noraim- ימים נוראים "Days of Awe", commonly referred to as the High Holidays – Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur - are composed of two themes; a new beginning and self-examination. Providing us with an opportunity for change, Rosh Hashana marks a new Jewish year. Along with the new year, we are given the ability to begin on a new slate and leave the previous year in the past.



However, during these challenging times, it may seem as though this year, beginning on a new slate seems unrealistic and perhaps even impossible. And yet, it was King Solomon who asserted that “this too shall pass”, which acts as a reminder that everything in life is transient - nothing lasts forever. Thus, with optimism and hope, we can look forward to the upcoming year, and take the opportunity to be grateful for all that we have.

# SHALL PASS

A week after the new year, we reach the crescendo of the High Holidays with Yom Kippur - a day of repentance, introspection and reflection. This unique time provides us with an opportunity to right wrongs in order to sculpt the best versions of ourselves for the future.

I encourage you to use this lockdown period as a chance to dig deep within yourselves to come out the other side prepared to take on the year ahead.

COVID-19 has taken us on a rollercoaster, with many ups and downs. However, we must be thankful for what we have learnt in the past year, and what we have been able to achieve individually and collectively as an organisation of diverse and amazing women. After intense introspection, and with newfound goals and perspective, we can now look forward to being reunited with loved ones, surrounded by health and happiness.

During Rosh Hashanah, the days where we begin to plan the coming year, we decide what we want to achieve and the obstacles we want to overcome. We use our 'rosh', meaning 'head', to actively create goals and agendas, looking toward the future. On the other hand, Yom Kippur is the day of repentance, introspection and reflection, a day to look inside ourselves and engage with our hearts.

So, this year, I encourage you to appreciate these times, and to lead with your head and your heart. And hopefully, we will soon return to the days where we can meet each other face-to-face, and unite for our shared goal of making the world a better place while advancing the status of women, children and families in Israel.

This year's yamim noraim will look drastically different from every other. Nevertheless, the combination of the days and our new reality, provide us with an opportunity to look back on our actions over the past year and assess where we will be heading in the coming year. During this time, particularly in isolation, we are able to think and re-plan our personal, familial and communal lives.

And hopefully, we will soon return to the days where we can meet each other face-to-face, and unite for our shared goal of making the world a better place while advancing the status of women, children and families in Israel.

As a wife and a mother of four children, I know I will take the time these holidays to be eternally grateful for what I have, and I encourage you all to reflect on what you may be thankful for too.

*Wishing all of Am Israel a Shanah Tova U'metuka and a Chag Sameach.*

**WIZO Victoria President, Ronit Chrapot, was born and raised in the Jewish homeland, Israel. Arriving in Melbourne 22 years ago, Ronit met and married the love of her life, Marcus. Together they have four children.**

**Ronit is a hypnotherapist, business-woman and philanthropist.**

**Ronit believes in empowering women, assisting Israeli society and those in need, and found that WIZO allows her to express her passions.**

# LOOKING FORWARD

At a time like this, when everything has been disrupted in ways we could never have imagined only a few short months ago, I think it's more important than ever to look forward and think of new possibilities.

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the negativity, stresses and anxieties of this period. I find it helpful to think of others who have faced even greater challenges – through wars, the Holocaust and personal loss – and am inspired by those who used that as a catalyst for positive change in their own lives or in making an important contribution to our society.

I also think of Israel – a country that for most of its existence has faced existential threat and significant adversity – but despite that has become a successful country recognised globally as an innovation powerhouse that has contributed to the advancement of our world in so many areas. When you ask in Israel how this has been possible – and why such a tiny country, in such difficult circumstances, has been able to achieve so much, the short answer is necessity or “no other choice” – and we all know the old adage that necessity is the mother of invention. Perhaps we can be inspired by this determination to move forward and achieve – against the odds – drawing on our own inner well of “chutzpah” to stare down this tough time and imagine what might be possible and then make that happen.

I draw inspiration from the miracle of Israel and the stories of others who have overcome terrible challenges to not let the threat of the pandemic and the crisis impacting our health, our economy and the well-being of our community overwhelm us. This pivotal time in our history will undoubtedly change us all in some way. The challenge is to think about using this time as a period of reflection and reinvention. As they say, you should never waste a good crisis. So as we approach Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, a period of reflection for all of us, let's take the opportunity to think how we as individuals, as organisations, as a community and even as a country might emerge from this time as a better version of who we were before COVID-19 struck.

**Michelle Blum is Chief Executive Officer of the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce (AICC). Michelle is passionate about fostering bilateral collaboration and applying insights from the 'Start-Up Nation' to support the development of Australia's innovation and entrepreneurial eco-system.**

**Michelle's background spans a range of management roles in the financial services, not-for-profit and education sectors. Before her appointment as CEO of the AICC in September 2016, she was General Manager, National Operations at the Australian Institute of Management, and before that, Director, Marketing & Business Development at the Financial Services Institute of Australasia. Her career has included stints working in Canada and London.**

# INSIDE/OUTSIDE

‘Perspectives of those most marginalized offer unique and important insights otherwise not possible but also that we are all insiders and outsiders at different times, places, and contexts.’

When looking for inspiration for this article I went searching through my ‘notes’ application on my computer and found this quote. It’s probably ‘copy-and-pasted’ from a university reading that I liked. It further reminded me of an interview RuPaul did, where he explained that he was always the outsider growing up, until he realised it was all a ‘hoax.’ He wanted to fit in very badly, and tried to find an entry into the insiders club, but came to realise it was all made up. He realised we live in a world where some have more social status than others; where some seem innately more important than others; that there feels like there is a secret and an unspoken handbook of how to fit in; but that ultimately this is all made up, it simply does not exist. Therefore, following on from the original quote, the idea that one is consistently an insider or an outsider is a fallacy. At some point we will all experience life from both perspectives.

That is why when Jews talk about refugees, the point of ‘don’t forget, after the Holocaust Jews were also refugees,’ will be made. In many ways, though, we have in terms of citizenship transposed over time from outsider, to become the insider.

Growing up I never felt like an insider. I was a 12 year old with an unusually deep obsession with Queen music and, as my teachers described me, ‘an active participant’ in class. However, being an irreverent outsider gave me those ‘important insights otherwise not possible.’ Subconsciously, my role models were also outsiders - Freddie Mercury, and Miriam (from the Bible), among others. I learned that being an outsider didn’t mean I had to work towards being an insider; being

an outsider gave me the opportunity to embrace and learn who I was because everyone thought I was unique anyway, so I might as well really go for it. In saying that, in other contexts I am the insider. I don't know what it's like to be judged by the colour of my skin or to be uncertain where my next meal is coming from. Thus, it is my responsibility to recognise my privilege and not invalidate those who experience life from a different perspective.

COVID in combination with the lead up to the Yomim Noraim, results in an unparalleled time to gain perspective. A time where we can take our past experiences of being both insiders and outsiders and use that to contemplate who we want to be, instead of where we want to be - seeing as the future feels so unpredictable right now. And then after the pandemic, we can take those moments when we are insiders and invite those on the outside to speak; because it's not that people don't have a voice but rather are not given the opportunity to share their 'unique and important insights.' If the pandemic has imparted anything it is that life is not to be lived in singularity but rather that community is important, and that we all have our own unique role to play.

**MICHAL SIMSON STUDIES HEALTH SCIENCES AT  
LATROBE UNIVERSITY. SHE IS THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE  
AUSTRALASIAN YOUTH ZIONIST COUNCIL (VICTORIA)  
AND A BNEI AKIVA MADRICHIA.**

# THE PANDEMIC FROM ACROSS THE BORDER

Reading the contributions for the Elul Project so far, I feel very fortunate living in Queensland. We have emerged from the very restrictive regulations in July, so albeit with a great deal of regulation, we have resumed going to shule and carrying on our lives in as normal a way as possible.

The difference between our experience and that of other states has led me to reflect on my life at the moment. My children are grown, and I am working only part time as a tutor at the University of Queensland Medical school, so I now have the time and energy to give back to my community – the Jewish community of Brisbane.

Living in a small Jewish community has offered me the opportunity to feel I make a difference for the community and also it gives me a sense of achievement. My role models are my parents, especially my father Lance Phillips, always supported by my mother Jill. Dad started communal roles in his early 20's just after he was married to Mum. Eventually Dad received an OAM for his services to the Brisbane Jewish Community. He was involved in many different facets of our local community, but died suddenly in 1994 at the age of 59, leaving many unfinished goals.

Over the past 5 years I have had the opportunity to step in and follow on from his amazing legacy. I am sure I will never get to such heights as he did but I can only try!!!!

So like Dad, these days, I am wearing many hats as do many others in such a small community as we are in Brisbane.

The Brisbane Hebrew Congregation (“Margaret Street shule”) is my passion. I am currently Treasurer, tour and baking coordinator.

Our beautiful 134 year old heritage Synagogue is one of the oldest in Australia. I had my Batmitzvah there, my parents and grandparents were married there, and it has been the site of many family simchas. The shule is full of wonderful memories for me and many other people.

One of the positive outcomes of the COVID closures is that we have been able to do some restoration and cleaning, and our beautiful shule is sparkling and ready for the Chagim. Our shule has not only been rejuvenated physically, though – the community is actively increasing the involvement of women in the community and the new renovations reflect this in an expanded area for women downstairs.

Just before COVID hit, we had a new board with new ideas. We have held focus groups of men, women and younger members. We are struggling with falling attendance and hoped we would be able to act on these groups to rejuvenate our community. COVID has made people realise how important community is, and so we now find ourselves in a community with a really positive energy, that we can continue to work on.

We now have a Sunday Morning Cooking Club, and a group of men and women baking for Kiddushim. There will hopefully be many more new ideas and programs to come.

I am very proud of the huge work of our forefathers to keep this small community well-resourced and hope that my efforts will help sustain these resources for many years to come.

My involvement in my local Jewish communal organisations has enriched my life, and I hope that this rejuvenation of our community, and the realisation of the importance of being connected to each other, will mean others' lives will be enriched similarly. Hopefully we can use this new inspiration and energy to continue to evolve, develop and to grow.

*L'Shana Tova to you and your families.*

**Dr Leah Phillips was born, raised and lives in the Brisbane community.**

**She is a General Medical Practitioner now tutoring in Medicine at University of Queensland. She is currently Treasurer of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, Property Officer with the Brisbane Chevra Kadisha, a committee member of the Jewish Communal Centre retirement and an NCJW (Qld) committee member of the Brisbane section. She has grown children, a daughter and 2 sons.**

# WHAT MATTERS MOST

During these uncertain times of COVID-19 it has been easy to feel overwhelmed by the unprecedented health, social and economic upheaval surrounding us. However, it has also provided us with a unique opportunity to focus on what is really important to us, what matters most, and where our priorities lie.

We all have busy lives as we rush around from one commitment to another, often not taking the time to appreciate the things or the people around us, and as cliché as it may sound, not finding the time to smell the roses...

The lockdown has forced us to slow down and has given us the time to reconnect and to fall in love with some of life's simple pleasures. Many of us rediscovered the value of things we had long taken for granted, those which had not provided the consideration they deserved.

I have been trying my utmost to focus on the more positive aspects of the lockdown. Family dinners often played second fiddle, interrupted by different family members dashing off to sporting or other commitments, and weekends would be filled with a sense of achievement if we managed to successfully juggle our children's activities with our own. Now we eat as a family every night and spend quality time together, connecting in a way that provides us such contentment and an element of gratitude for these simple and profoundly important pleasures.

There has been more opportunity for family board games, communal cooking and walks in the park, coinciding with uninterrupted conversation.

When we stop to take in these moments, rather than letting them rush by, we see a shift in our perspective, which provides an opportunity to reframe our circumstances in a more positive light. I have also been inspired by the rejuvenated sense of community and social cohesion that the pandemic has re-ignited. Do you

recall seeing the Italians leaning out of their windows breaking out into song to lift their neighbour's spirits? Or the New Yorkers lining the streets and erupting in loud applause to show gratitude for their health care workers?

Philanthropists have donated money to assist scientists develop a vaccine and communities have given care packages to their neighbours in need. These small acts of kindness can seem so insignificant but provide such comfort.

To lift my spirits I try to focus on other COVID-19 outcomes that could have a long-term positive impact on the planet and humanity. Carbon emissions are down globally and the planet has had a chance to rejuvenate. The United Nations have called for an end to all wars in the face of the pandemic as the world combats a common challenge. There has been a massive transformation in education through the digitalisation of the classroom and we have seen a new wave of corporate social responsibility.

One of the gifts that COVID-19 has given me is a heightened sense of appreciation and gratitude. When I go to sleep at night, I now consciously reflect on three things in my life that I am grateful for, and whilst this strategy may seem naive or even childish, it has positively contributed to a genuine feeling of optimism and a deep sense of contentment.

No doubt there may be moments when one feels totally overwhelmed and it's during these times that we should look to reach out, as there are so many in our community who are able to offer support. Let's come together and be here for each other during these challenging times and strengthen our sense of community and belonging.

*Wishing our precious community Shana Tova Umetukah!*

**Kate Beaconsfield is President of the Bialik College School Council and is a passionate believer in the power of social causes. She is Co- Founder and Managing Director of Ripe Maternity.**

# WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?

Tell someone you care about one thing that makes you happy. Go ahead, I'll wait.

Did you say money, awesome stuff, getting a good job? Or was that one thing actually someone? A special moment you remember savouring? Doing something you love doing so much that you lose track of time?

When I saw the wave of the current pandemic coming our way in February, I was calm and collected. I had a plan. You see, I was made redundant last year. It was the week before I was due to return to work after having our second child—I'd done the post-mat leave shopping for breastfeeding workwear, planning meals, scheduling meetings with my colleagues and reaching out to my staff. Then, suddenly, all that stopped. My career trajectory, so desperately foundational to the last twenty years of my life, wasn't off course. It hit a wall at 100km an hour.

I had options. I could freak out: I was my family's main breadwinner. I could try to drum up a job, any job, and as soon as possible: that seemed like a road to misery. I chose a third way: to consciously assess what made me happy and do it.

I thought of Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology and a former Thinker in Residence in South Australia (incidentally Jewish), whose research has shown using your strengths makes life have meaning. I love learning, so I started courses I'd been wanting to do for years as well as some consultancy, but only for gigs I found interesting, the sort of work in which I knew I'd lose myself. Leadership is my second key strength. I realised the joy sparked by supporting my teams and mentees over the years. Suddenly my diary had all the space they wanted to chat and it left me feeling great.

I looked at other research about happiness. I made weekly key performance indicators (seriously), including a daily gratitude journal, exercise and meditation targets, connecting with people I admire and sending letters of gratitude. Elizabeth Dunn from the University of British Columbia has shown that kindness to others makes us happy, so I consciously tried to be radically kind in daily interactions.

Did all that non-Elul reflection and effort pay off? Undeniably. Is 2020 a great year? Not for me or anyone I know.

Harvard psychologist Dan Gilbert (Jewish by the way) has shown that we mis-predict what will make us happy in the long term. We also mis-predict what will make us miserable. Our brains simply grow accustomed to good things—and bad things—and we rebound to neutral. But we are smarter than our hard wiring! We can override the default to neutral by savouring what we love, by seeking to find awe in our lives. How lucky we are that our traditions have carved out time to consciously reflect. As we prepare for the holidays, may you find the space to think about your strengths and your happiness and share those sparks of joy and gratitude with others.

### **Annetay Henderson-Sapir**

**Originally from Appalachian America, it has taken Annetay Henderson-Sapir 15 years in Australia to be able to pronounce “bin” and “mate” properly. She calls Adelaide home following stints in France and Israel. Annetay is President of the Jewish Community Council of SA, the peak Jewish organisation in SA, and a Vice President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. If you send her a complaint, she will address your concerns then send a gratitude letter to someone who deserves recognition.**

# HOME

2020 has been a hard year for everyone, and as the high holydays approach, I like many, am reflecting on a year of change and of loss. Covid has left me very far from the home I grew up in, in London. Instead of being only a plane ride away I'm not sure when I will be there again. The concept of home, as a safe place, a shelter is a very primal and basic need for all of us and one enshrined in Judaism. The practice of our religion is largely based in the home, but not limited to it, and like Abraham we need to be prepared to welcome visitors at any time.

My work as a forensic medical examiner in sexual assault, brings me into contact with so many for whom the concept of home as a safe haven is so very far from the truth, especially as Covid shuts down our worlds and brings us into the stark reality of our pared down lives. For those living with domestic and family violence, home is rarely a safe place. The Covid pandemic and associated social and legislative changes have led to a range of domestic stressors that contribute to an increased risk of domestic and family violence, including unemployment, financial strains, home schooling children and loss of the usual routines and social supports for both victims and perpetrators of violence.

Critically, these stressors, coupled with enforced isolation as a result of the pandemic, lead to people who experience DV being in almost constant close proximity with the person who is abusing them, leading to real psychological as well as possible physical harms. If children are not at school, they don't have access to friends, trusted teachers or a school counsellor. Parents miss out on opportunities to check in with each other at the school drop offs, at the gym or at work. Without the "safety valve" of a reason to leave the house, for work, leisure or to do the shopping, pressure can build.

Many formal support services have gone on-line and health care is increasingly being provided via telehealth, this adds flexibility but sometimes creates another barrier to disclosing violence or asking for help as finding a private space to make or receive such a call can be a real challenge in lockdown.

Although you may not feel you are in a position to ask about domestic violence outright, there may be clues that things are not right when you are on a call with friends or colleagues, such as short responses to questions, shutting down the conversation, a partner or ex-partner repeatedly answering the phone or having a sense someone is controlling the conversation in the background.

Asking some general questions about how friends are coping with changes can be used to start a conversation and to indicate that help is available. Examples of such questions include 'How are things at home right now?' or 'How are you coping with the extra stress of having children/husband etc. at home?'

Domestic violence services are considered essential and are available, but for many having a friend checking in on them is the step they need to make that call.

So as we enter Elul, we are drawn to home, to celebration with our loved ones. We use this time of year for teshuvah, repentance or return. This is a time to return to our physical and to our spiritual core, to examine the essence of relationship with G-d and with society. We need to find a way to make our homes big enough to encompass the stranger, welcoming and accepting of difference and of need. Whilst this may not be possible in a physical sense, we can still offer support, love and acceptance into the New Year.

**Dr Ellie Freedman is the medical director of Northern Sydney Sexual Assault Service and the medical forensic staff specialist at the NSW Education Centre against Violence (ECAV). In these roles she works with victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.**

**RESOURCES ARE LISTED  
AT THE END!**

# OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS SUPPORT MORE THAN EVER

This year will go down as one of the most memorable in our lifetime, with many struggles and challenges. It is a year we would never have expected and hopefully one that we will not see again.

The challenges have included running our lives from zoom, working from home, remote learning for our kids and my Facebook activity reaching a whole new level to keep in touch with family and friends. Many of these changes would be similar to most families and career women and men and it has been remarkable how we have all adapted in these difficult times.

As a leader of a community organisation this has presented a number of additional challenges. I know that many working in community leadership roles do a wonderful job in sometimes difficult situations with limited resources. This year has been particularly difficult to run events and fundraise with many annual activities and milestones being sacrificed.

In my role as the President of UIA Victoria we were excited to have BIG celebrations for our 100th Year of supporting the national priorities of the State of Israel. We were fortunate to have our Gala with Rivlin, President of Israel but had to cancel many other events.

Like many community organisations we have pivoted to a number of online zoom events.

It has been a year full of unexpected changes. I had recently taken over as Manager of our family's office furniture business, a business that was started by my late grandfather and his brother following the Holocaust. This has been a huge learning experience for me and although it hasn't been the best year to run a retail business we are doing our best to keep people employed and the business going. Our son started his first year of a Law degree at Monash University and hasn't seen a day on campus and our daughter has spent countless hours on zoom learning at home instead of being in Boarding School for Year 11.

As a person who has always seen life as a 'cup half full', there have been a number of positives and learnings from these times.

During normal times I spend very little time at home, so this has been a real change for me. I have learnt to appreciate the small things, a trip to the supermarket, a walk and a coffee, a distant view and wave to a friend, an online sale.

It's a joy for me to wake up knowing that both of our children are at home. Every morning my daughter, very happy dog Sammy and I head off for an early morning walk and coffee which has certainly been a highlight for me, that time to chat and connect.

People who know me, are aware that I have trouble boiling water, so lucky I have a husband who cooks for all of us while my daughter makes me watch teen Netflix shows.

No matter what, we are lucky to live in a caring community that looks out for one another. The upcoming Jewish Holidays will be a challenge but like everything this year we will have to adapt.

No matter what, we will get through this and I look forward to seeing you on the other side of COVID whatever and whenever that is.

**Hayley Southwick is a married mother of two. A career woman who strives to give back to community and Israel through her role as UIA Victoria President.**

# TIKKUN OLAM

By the time our daughter was three years old she had lived in South Africa, immigrated to Israel, spent a month in America and relocated to Australia. Our second child had lived on three continents before she celebrated her first birthday. We arrived in Australia without jobs, sight unseen and having sold most of our possessions to pay for the flights.

On this journey of uncertainty, and isolated from family and friends, a relationship with one of my (current) Mum for Mum volunteers, with their skills in active listening, non-judgement and their role of delighting in me and my children, would have been life-changing. Someone who would have listened to my fears and helped me find my voice when I was so insecure.

These experiences now inform my dedication and passion for the continued growth of this unique program. The impact of the quality relationships that Mum for Mum (Caring Mums in Melbourne) provides with highly trained and supervised volunteers engaging with pregnant and new mothers facing challenges in the first year of their baby's life, contributes significantly towards a resilient and healthy community.

Witnessing the ripple effect of a mother who is able to better parent her child, and manage her emotions and her relationships; plus a volunteer who through her participation in the program develop a sense of meaning, growth and connection is the ultimate reward. And this is multiplied by 130 active volunteers in Sydney supporting approximately 200 families in a year.

During the period of Rosh Hashanah we are encouraged to be reflective, to be self-aware and to be constantly curious about what the best practise in each situation should be, living with integrity and honesty. This spirit of reflection and adopting a model of discovery rather than of perfection is something that I live my life by and on which our Mum for Mum program is based.

I strive to live mindfully – best described by neuroscientist Daniel Siegel using the Acronym COAL; with Curiosity, Openness, Acceptance and Love. It is a path that requires regular practise. I strive to be assertive rather than arrogant, and humble rather than timid and to trust “in the rightness of the moment,” to interpret my challenges as opportunities for growth and for deepened empathy and understanding.

To quote one of my sources of inspiration, therapist, doctor and author of *My Grandfather’s Blessings*: Rachel Naomi Remen:

*“Seeing yourself as a fixer may cause you to see brokenness everywhere, to sit in judgement of life itself. When we fix others, we may not see their hidden wholeness or trust the integrity of the life in them. Fixers trust their own expertise. When we serve, we see the unborn wholeness in others, we collaborate with it and strengthen it. Others may be able to see their wholeness for themselves for the first time.”*

This is what I aspire to in my journey towards Tikkun Olam.

**Nadene Alhadeff is the CEO of Mum for Mum NCJWA. She has a background in corporate and relationships training, counselling and early childhood. She serves on the global Women’s Health Advocacy board, and the Jewish Suicide Prevention board.**

# WHAT HAVE I BEEN TURNING TO DURING THIS TIME OF COVID?

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 is Vice-President of the JCCV. She holds the Multicultural and Interfaith Portfolio, is a Board Member of the JCMA (Jewish Christian Muslim Association) and the FCCV (Faith Communities Council of Victoria). She is Vice-President of the Australian Jewish Historical Society (Victoria.) 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 NCJW's Sylvia Gelman Award for 'Outstanding Woman Educator in the Area of Jewish Studies' 2011.**

# COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS.

When I was a little girl, The Joint rescued me from the ashes of Europe. Along with 25,000 other Jews, they brought me to Australia at the age of six. I grew up not knowing my father, who perished in the Holocaust, yet with a loving mother who taught me old school Hungarian values whilst I learned the Aussie way.

Life was not always easy growing up in Strathfield, far away from our roots and history, and I became an adult very quickly.

I joined communal service in the growing Australian Jewish community, to help those less fortunate, to engage and commit, to pay back in abstract for being saved; and importantly to prove to the anti-Semites, who would have seen our race destroyed, that Jews were strong and resilient. We would rebuild and reconnect our people in all nations where the remnants of Jewish communities could be found or built from scratch.

The Joint, which has been around for 106 years, was instrumental in rescuing and rebuilding World Jewry after both world wars, and still does every day to this day. I developed experience and leadership, being involved with many communal organisations including Jewish Care, which was established in Australia by The Joint. I was President of Jewish Care for 15 years.

I never dreamed that one day I would lead The Joint Australia, in its return to Australian shores, to assist Jewish communities in Israel and in 70 countries around the Globe.

In Hungary, where the Danube ran red with the blood of Jews, now, The Joint organises Judafest – a celebration of Judaism in an annual street fair of 10,000 people. The largest Jewish youth camp takes place every year in Hungary, known as “Szarvas” organised by The Joint.

I visited Szarvas, and I saw and heard young children and teenagers singing Jewish songs, celebrating Yiddishkeit, proudly Jewish and proud of Israel. I shed a tear as I saw the antidote to assimilation in action, witnessed new Jewish leaders being created and felt a grim satisfaction as they trained in Krav Maga and learnt resilience and security alongside the Hatikvah and the HaMotzi.

In Israel, where The Joint is the largest NGO in Israel, I see the nation that is a light unto others, being supported by the Jews of the world; at the same time that Israel supports the Diaspora, by being strong and giving us the moniker of “Israelites”, for any Jew that chooses.

Starkly different to “stateless”..... that appeared on so many travel documents organised by The Joint as we came by boat 10,000km from our origins, discarded by our countries of birth. After wearing the Star of David, we now wore the Shame of Stateless – the unwanted.

Australia makes me feel wanted. It has been a tolerant, loving and vibrant home, where Jews now have an outstanding communal tapestry of religion, education, welfare, security, culture and friendship.

Every day, when I arise or retire, I count my blessings that from hiding in cupboards, The Joint found me and gave me a new life. I have a loving family, friends and a strong and welcoming community.

As a woman and a Jew, I can lead this great organisation in Australia and play my small part in easing the burden of my less fortunate brethren.

COVID-19 must be taken with the utmost seriousness. Yet, I know that as a people, we have faced and overcome worse. We will do so again.

**Eva Fischl OAM is President of JDC Australia. She was previously President of Jewish Care New South Wales and President of Jewish Care Australia. In 2011, Eva stepped down as President and was appointed Patron of Jewish Care. In her position as President of Jewish Care, Eva was a member of the Board of Governors of Jewish Communal Appeal and served as a Deputy on the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. She has also represented Australia on the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Eva’s other extensive communal activities have included United Israel Appeal, General and Women’s Divisions.**

Legal advice:

- LawAccess NSW 1300 888 529  
[www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au)
- Domestic Violence Unit 02 9219 6300  
[www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/family-law/domestic-violence-unit](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/family-law/domestic-violence-unit)
- Family Violence Law Help  
[familyviolencelaw.gov.au](http://familyviolencelaw.gov.au)

Helplines:

- 1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732
- Child Protection Helpline: 132 111
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 18 00
- Lifeline Australia: 13 11 14
- MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 78
- NSW Elder Abuse Helpline: 1800 628 221
- NSW Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511

National	1800RESPECT	1800737732	<a href="https://www.1800respect.org.au/">https://www.1800respect.org.au/</a>
National	Relationships Australia	1300364277	<a href="http://www.relationships.org.au">http://www.relationships.org.au</a>
ACT	Canberra Rape Crisis Centre	6247 2525	<a href="mailto:crcc@crcc.org.au">crcc@crcc.org.au</a>
NSW	NSW Rape Crisis Centre	1800 424 017	<a href="http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au">www.nswrapecrisis.com.au</a>
VIC	Centre against sexual assault (CASA)	1800 806 292	<a href="https://www.casa.org.au/">https://www.casa.org.au/</a>
SA	Yarrow Place Rape and Sexual Assault Service	1800 817 421	(08) 8226 8777 <a href="https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au">https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au</a>
TAS	Sexual Assault Support Service Helpline:	1800 697 877	Office: (03) 6231 0044 <a href="https://www.sass.org.au/">https://www.sass.org.au/</a>
NT	Sexual assault referral centres	Darwin: (08) 8922 6472 Tennant Creek: (08) 8962 4361 Alice Springs - after hours: 0401 114 181	Katherine: (08) 8973 8524 Alice Springs (08) 8955 4500 <a href="https://nt.gov.au/wellbeing/hospitals-health-services/sexual-assault-referral-centres">https://nt.gov.au/wellbeing/hospitals-health-services/sexual-assault-referral-centres</a>
QLD	Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline	1800 010 120	<a href="https://www.health.qld.gov.au/sexualassault">https://www.health.qld.gov.au/sexualassault</a>
WA	Sexual Assault Resource Centre	(08) 6458 1828	1800 199 888 <a href="https://www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Statewide-Services/SARC">https://www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Statewide-Services/SARC</a>