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NYC Councilmembers Lincoln Restler and Chi Ossé speak to members of Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, who were in Williamsburg, Brooklyn to canvas passersby and offer tips on how to defuse antisemitic and other bigoted incidents, Jan. 4, 2022. (Julia Gergely)

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● NEWS

In Brooklyn, a Jewish Group Tries a Face-To-Face Approach to Fighting Antisemitism

By Julia Gergely

On Sunday, Dec. 26, in the Bay Ridge neighborhood of Brooklyn, Blake Zavadsky, 21, was walking down the street with his friend Ilan Kaganovich when he was punched, ostensibly for wearing an Israeli army sweatshirt. "He called us 'dirty Jews' and that's all I remember," Zavadsky said of his attacker, in an interview with CBSNewYork.

In the aftermath of the incident, dozens participated the following Sunday in a solidarity march through the nearby Bensonhurst neighborhood, led by the newly elected Republican city councilwoman Inna Vernikov. (The rally was moved out of Bay Ridge "out of respect for the neighborhood's large Pales-



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tinian and Muslim population,” Vernikov spokesperson Tova Chatzinoff-Rosenfeld told the Brooklyn Paper, although it still drew counterprotestors from pro-Palestinian groups.)

Local and state politicians, including New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, denounced the crime in tweets and statements, and the New York State Police opened an investigation. The Anti-Defamation League of New York/New Jersey offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individual responsible for the attack.

It’s a familiar pattern following the antisemitic incidents that occur in double-digit numbers every month in New York: An act of hate occurs, which is followed by a call for Jewish communities to rally for solidarity and protection. Politicians join the cause, either marching with their feet or denouncing antisemitism on social media.

But one group, the progressive Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, is trying a different approach. On Sunday in Bay Ridge, while other Jews marched in protest, JFREJ canvassers spread out in the neighborhood, offering bystanders tips on intervening when they see a hate crime and engaging in conversations in an effort to diffuse any future racist or antisemitic incidents.

“The organizers of the march were cynically exploiting a recent attack,” said Sophie Ellman-Golan, director of strategic communications at JFREJ, about Sunday’s rally. “For us, we’re taking the action that we regularly take because we take hate crimes seriously.”

(Vernikov’s office did not respond to the New York Jewish Week’s request for comment.)

On Tuesday, following yet another antisemitic attack — a Hasidic man was beaten with sticks Sunday evening in the Broadway Triangle area in Williamsburg — JFREJ canvassers were at it again.

From a central meeting point outside of a community fridge on Broadway and Whipple St. in Williamsburg, groups of two and three broke off in every direction to interact with community members.

Newly elected city council members Chi Ossé and Lincoln Restler joined the effort. Their two districts include the neighborhoods of Bed-Stuy and northern Crown

Heights, and neighborhoods along the Brooklyn waterfront, such as Greenpoint, South Williamsburg, Brooklyn Navy Yard and Brooklyn Heights.

“I’m looking forward to getting the word out about how we can be better people and citizens,” said Ossé, 23, a native of Brooklyn. “Spread love, it’s the Brooklyn way.”

“This type of response — where we come together, where we educate our neighbors so we all are looking out for one another and we all stop this violence together — this is how we can transform our community,” said Restler.

Marches and rallies, said Ellman-Golan, can be inflammatory or divisive. “They fuel division and fear among Jewish, Arab and Muslim New Yorkers,” she said. By contrast, JFREJ’s aim is to bring diverse stakeholders from every New York community together to promote safety, neighborly intervention and mutual respect.

“We’re never going to arrest our way out of antisemitism — that’s a failed approach,” said Ellman-Golan. “We fundamentally believe in the idea that our communities are the most effective way that we can address hate violence and issues like antisemitism.”

Facing Tuesday’s bitter cold, about a dozen JFREJ members led the community safety canvassing in Williamsburg, in partnership with community groups Los Sures and Wick Against Violence, Latino-led organizations advocating for affordable housing and anti-violence efforts.

After a brief explanation of what bystander intervention means to the community, participants were given stacks of flyers with tips and graphics on how to intervene.

The tips include a direct response approach, which involves confronting the attacker before or during the attack and delegating other bystanders to call emergency personnel or assist in confrontation. Other tips include distracting the attacker by asking for directions. The flyers also encourage checking in with the victims after the attack even if one is unable to intervene.

The same tips are also endorsed by the city’s Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, which was launched in 2019. Similar trainings are offered by the Center for Anti-Violence Education, a Brooklyn-based nonprofit.

Combatting antisemitism — and anti-violence work, in general — requires a range of tactics, Restler, the city

councilman, said. Social media campaigns and solidarity marches are important work, he said, but they don't reach every group in a community. What's more, he added, rallies and social posts are reactive. Educating community members with tangible, practical tips on bystander intervention, by contrast, can help defuse potential future violent situations.

"There is a profound sense of isolation [within communities] after an attack," Restler told the New York Jewish Week. "Being here in the neighborhood, talking to people on the street and offering support and guidance is one of the most potent signals to show that they are not alone."

The mood was light and friendly as JFREJ members handed out flyers at the Lorimer St. entrance to the J train, on street corners, and in front of the Food Bazaar Supermarket on Broadway. Many pedestrians steamed right past, but dozens were seen walking down the street holding the yellow flyers, reading them and stuffing them into their bags.

Community work, Ellman-Golan explained, is like "being on the subway and catching someone's eye and you know you're both thinking the same thing. They're a stranger, but there are little moments of knowing that you're in it together, you're experiencing something together and it is that warm feeling of community."

"Strangers are also neighbors in New York," she continued. "If people find that meaningful, we can actually translate that into genuinely caring for one another and making our communities places where people aren't being hurt and ignored. I just think there's a better way. It takes funding and support, certainly political support, but it's really meaningful."

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● NEWS

Frustrated by Haredi Leaders, Orthodox Activists Push for Stronger Response to Sexual Abuse

By Shira Hanau

On Friday morning, most of the people bustling through Beit Shemesh, a town in central Israel with a large haredi Orthodox population, were getting ready for Shabbat. Shoshanna Keats-Jaskoll had a different mission.

Keats-Jaskoll was handing out flyers with messages of support for victims of sexual abuse, in a public display of solidarity at the end of a wrenching week in many Orthodox communities.

At the beginning of the week, Chaim Walder, a celebrated haredi Orthodox children's book author in Israel, died by suicide after being accused by numerous children and young women of sexual abuse. The Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel visited Walder's family. Then, on Thursday, one of Walder's alleged victims, Shifra Horovitz, also died by suicide, her friends saying she had been distraught by the response to his death.

For Keats-Jaskoll, a cofounder of the Israeli advocacy organization Chochmat Nashim, which fights extremism and sexism in the Orthodox community, and for many other Orthodox women, the litany called for a coordinated, public response. So she, who is Orthodox but not haredi, and a network of haredi activists and volunteers printed 350,000 flyers and passed them out in haredi areas before Shabbat.

Most of the reactions she got were from mothers thanking her for sharing her message, she told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. But one man told her he didn't know anyone who had been hurt and questioned why she was giving out the flyers — keeping up the conversation for far longer than she expected.

"I think this is really hard for haredim, when you're told to trust leadership and there's a real cognitive dissonance: something is wrong, the leadership should be saying something, if they're not saying something maybe it's not true, but if it's not true what does that mean?" Keats-Jaskoll said. "So I think they're going through a real crisis of faith in a lot of places."

The flyers that Keats-Jaskoll and others handed out spoke directly to that crisis of faith, and to the religious values of those whose confidence in their leaders might be teetering. They offered information about the rabbinic court that heard testimony against Walder, quoted rabbinic sources about the seriousness of sexual abuse and answered questions about why allegations first reported in secular media should be trusted in religious communities.

Since the allegations against Walder first appeared in November, the case has taken an unusual trajectory in the Orthodox world. After Eichler's, a Jewish bookstore in Brooklyn, announced that it would stop selling Walder's books in response to the Haaretz investigation, many other repudiations of Walder followed, in a flood that advocates for survivors of sexual abuse said seemed to represent a watershed moment for the community.

But after Walder's suicide, it became immediately clear that any shift extended only so far. In a number of haredi schools, teachers reportedly spoke to students about Walder's suicide as an example of the dangerous effects of "lashon hara," or speaking negatively about another person, and parents were counseled not to discuss the issue in detail with their children.

At Walder's funeral, Dov Weinroth, a lawyer and friend of Walder, called out the journalists at Haaretz who first published the allegations against Walder as "murderers." And in the days after Walder's death, multiple haredi Orthodox publications published obituaries of Walder that ended with the phrase "may his memory be a blessing" while failing to mention the allegations against him.

Yet social media has given rise to a different kind of reaction: photos of Walder's books in the trash and poignant accounts of difficult conversations between parents and children about abuse and what constitutes inappropriate touching. A social media campaign Monday generated a flood of complaints to haredi magazines about

their coverage. And the crowdfunding campaign to print a second run of flyers has raised nearly \$70,000 in just a few days.

"There's a dissonance between how people are responding in their homes and the way the institutions are responding," Keats-Jaskoll said.

There are signs that the dissonance is having an effect on traditional institutions. After being criticized for visiting Walder's family, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau called for victims of sexual abuse to come forward. Weinroth, too, made an about-face, apologizing for criticizing the reporters who broke the story in a Facebook post Thursday that urged readers to "believe the complainants."

"I picked up the phone and called Aaron Rabinowitz," Weinroth wrote, referring to one of the Haaretz reporters who broke the story about Walder. "Truthfully this was the first time, and for a simple reason: to apologize. At the end of the day, I had never spoken with him but I got up at the funeral and demeaned him."

Rabbi Natan Slifkin, author and director of the Biblical Museum of Natural History in Beit Shemesh who writes the blog Rationalist Judaism, compared the reaction to the Walder story to the haredi community's reaction to the stampede at Mount Meron in April last year where 45 men were killed during an annual religious gathering.

"The fact that Walder, clearly emerging as a horrific predator, was glorified after his death by important charedi rabbis and politicians and newspapers, while those who attempted to scream about the dangers are being branded as evil gossipers who drove him to his death, is just too much for many people in the charedi community," Slifkin wrote.

While calling out those who blamed the victims for Walder's death and those who encouraged silence rather than shaming abusers, Slifkin noted the signs of change, including an editorial in Mishpacha magazine's Hebrew edition, which, in an unusual move, spoke directly about the topic of sexual abuse.

"They [the victims] are not the guilty ones. They are not the abusers," the magazine writes. "To them we say in the name of the entire haredi community: our hearts are with you. We support you and we believe you, unconditionally. And we will do everything in our power as

a community to build a safer and purer world for you.”

For Keats-Jaskoll and other activists in the haredi Orthodox community, the fallout from the Walder case is indeed a watershed moment — and one that has to do with a broader phenomenon of people taking matters into their own hands after questioning their religious leaders.

“I see more and more and more and more people come to that realization of we have to do this, we can’t wait around,” Keats-Jaskoll said.

“I think COVID helped with that, I think seeing what happened with COVID with leadership denying what was happening with COVID and watching people get sick and die, it kind of took a lot of people and shook them up and say maybe our leadership doesn’t know everything,” she said.

She’s doing everything she can to help activists within haredi communities speed the change — while fearing that it won’t come fast enough for victims of sexual abuse.

“We just can’t wait for the next suicide,” Keats-Jaskoll said. “We just can’t wait for more people to kill themselves to know that this is a massive crisis.”

● NEWS

Jake Cohen, Jewish Food Influencer, Named in Discrimination Suit Targeting Food Media Company Feedfeed

By Ben Sales

Jake Cohen, a prominent Jewish food personality, is named in a lawsuit alleging racism and sexism at Feedfeed, a food media company where he served as editorial and test kitchen director from 2018 to 2020.

The federal discrimination lawsuit was filed by former Feedfeed employees Rachel Gurjar and Sahara Henry-Bohoskey, both women of color, and alleges that they experienced mistreatment and verbal abuse at the company, according to The Washington Post. Feedfeed’s founders, Dan and Julie Resnick, are also defendants in the lawsuit. Feedfeed has offices in Brooklyn and Los Angeles.

Gurjar, hired as social media coordinator, and Henry-Bohoskey, who also did social media work, accuse Cohen of treating them like maids, shouting at them and making offensive comments. The lawsuit alleges that he discouraged Gurjar from having children and, near the beginning of the pandemic, said “Oh my god, I am so scared I am going to get the coronavirus because I have so many crazy rich Asians living in my building who keep getting packages from Korea and China!”

“My manager Jake Cohen bullied, nitpicked, harassed and screamed orders at me across the studio on multiple occasions,” Gurjar wrote in a statement on Instagram detailing the allegations.

Cohen, who has 599,000 followers on Instagram and 1.4 million on TikTok, is the author of “Jew-ish: A Cookbook: Reinvented Recipes from a Modern Mensch,” published last year. His Instagram feed is filled with photos of Jewish foods, he holds a challah in his profile picture and he posts frequently about Jewish celebrations and combatting antisemitism. Last year, the Jewish Week featured him in its “36 under 36” list of young Jewish “change-makers”; in recent weeks, both the Forward and Tablet selected him for shortlists of fascinating and inspiring Jews.

To The Washington Post, Cohen acknowledged making the comment about Asians and said he regretted it, but also said the report of the remark was embellished, and that he was referencing the 2018 film titled “Crazy Rich Asians.” He said the remark about children was about how he didn’t want to have children, and not directed at Gurjar. In a statement to the Post, he said, “I treated everyone at the Feedfeed equally and fairly and never demeaned or disparaged any of my co-workers in any way.”

The Jewish Week has reached out to Cohen for further comment. He left Feedfeed in August 2020 to work on his book and other projects.

According to the Post, the lawsuit also alleges that Giora Stuchiner, an Israeli former employee of Feedfeed, made racist and offensive comments to Henry-Bohoskey. The Resnicks said they fired Stuchiner for his obscene remarks to another employee, according to the Post.

In a statement, the Resnicks said the company was committed to diversity and the lawsuit misrepresented a number of situations.

"We are distraught that it has come to this," they said in a statement, according to The Post. "The number of falsehoods and inaccurate, misleading statements are too numerous to mention in this brief response but will be presented in a court of law."

● NEWS

Yeshiva University's 50-Game Winning Streak Ends With 73-59 Loss at Home

By Philissa Cramer

Yeshiva University's history-making, record-breaking basketball winning streak came to an abrupt end Thursday night as the Maccabees suffered a bruising 73-59 loss at home.

The Maccabees entered the game against Illinois Wesleyan University ranked No. 1 in Division III, a position it reached Nov. 30 when it was 44 games into its winning streak.

The streak stood at 50 as the team tipped off against No. 4 Illinois Wesleyan in front of a packed house at Yeshiva's Max Stern Athletic Center. Hundreds of fans were shut out.

Thursday's game was the first time Yeshiva faced a top-25 opponent since its streak began two years ago, and it became clear early on that the team was outmatched. Yeshiva players didn't hit a single three-pointer in the first half of the game, while Illinois Wesleyan nailed nine of 14 attempts beyond the arc. Illinois Wesleyan nabbed

21 rebounds, compared to just seven for the Maccabees.

At halftime, Yeshiva was down 49-29. Illinois Wesleyan led by more than 20 for a good chunk of the second half, as Yeshiva struggled to get back in the game. Even when the Maccabees got their trademark motion offense on track for a few possessions in the second half, they were unable to cut the lead to single digits.

The loss was the team's first since Nov. 9, 2019. It comes after an unprecedented swell of national attention to the Orthodox university's basketball program, helmed by a head coach, Elliot Steinmetz, who sought to take advantage of Yeshiva's unique recruiting potential to turn the school, which last had a winning season in 2007, into a powerhouse.

Students at Yeshiva University said they were excited about their team's unprecedented success. But for some at Yeshiva and its women's college, Stern, the streak was clouded by an anonymous allegation of rape against an unnamed player that appeared in the student newspaper, and by the university's response to it.

Yeshiva will have to wait longer than expected for a second chance to prove itself against top-tier competition. Shortly after Thursday night's defeat, the school announced that its Sunday game at home against Williams College, the 17th-ranked team in Division III, was being postponed. No new date has been announced.

● NEWS

From the Reverent to the Raunchy, Yivo's Vast Archives of Yiddish Life Are Reunited Online

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

The Holocaust all but destroyed a centuries-old Jewish civilization, while the war carved up nations and left the Continent divided between the allied West and the

Soviet-dominated East. The casualties of this upheaval included a monumental collection of scholarship and artifacts telling the story of Yiddish culture.

Before World War II, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, founded in Vilna (now Vilnius), Lithuania, collected millions of documents and hundreds of thousands of rare books. The Nazis, not satisfied with their war on Jewish bodies, also plundered their past, stealing documents for a planned museum of the vanquished Jewish race in Frankfurt and condemning the rest to destruction.

But much of the Frankfurt material survived. After the war, it was returned to YIVO and ended up at its new headquarters in New York City, thanks to the “Monuments Men,” the U.S. army unit sent to recover artwork and scholarship stolen by the Nazis. Meanwhile, Jews who were tasked with sorting the collections under Nazi orders in the Vilna Ghetto — the famed “Paper Brigade” — managed to hide a trove of materials. That tranche would again be threatened when the Soviets took over Lithuania, and only survived thanks to a Lithuanian librarian who managed to hide the material in church basement.

Like a family divided by the war, the collections found homes in two countries — Lithuania and the U.S. And like a child in a divorce, the Lithuanian trove was subject to a lengthy custody battle between YIVO and the Lithuanian government. The dispute was resolved amicably only in 2014, with a solution made possible only by modern technology: the digitization of all the millions of materials, uniting them online if not under the same roof.

This month marks the completion of the historic project, the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections. Professional and amateur researchers are able to access the entirety of the YIVO archive of 4 million documents, which are in Yiddish as well as dozens of other languages. The materials reflect the religious and cultural diversity of Yiddishland, from theater posters and youthful memoirs to illuminated synagogue ledgers and music scores.

The result, says Jonathan Brent, executive director and CEO of YIVO, is a “reawakening of YIVO’s historic mission, an important (and successful) experiment in international cultural activity, and an irreversible marker of YIVO’s future as a leading global Jewish institution.”

In a Zoom call, the New York Jewish Week spoke to Brent

and Stefanie Halpern, director of the YIVO Archives, about the diverse collection, the efforts that made the reunion possible and the ways a new generation of scholars and regular folk can use the archives to expand their understanding and appreciation of a vast and endlessly surprising Jewish past.

The interview has been shortened and edited for clarity.

New York Jewish Week: Jonathan and Stefanie, give me a sense of the significance of this project and how it’s a game changer.

Jonathan Brent: YIVO has never done anything like this in its history — a \$7 million project over seven years, involving 11 archivists. It is an international project that has social, historical and also political meaning. It is a step forward into the future for YIVO, even as it is a step backward into the past and the recovery of all of these extraordinary materials. It has demonstrated the viability of international cultural projects on the subject of pre-war Jewish culture, and what can be accomplished with the right spirit and the right focus and the right talent and the right leadership.

It is a project that establishes YIVO as a leading institution in various different ways, in terms of archival science, preservation, accessibility and the putting of a massive amount of material online — making it available, constructing the proper website, using all of the proper software, engaging all the proper specialists to make these materials available online around the world. But it’s also a step forward for us in terms of building the infrastructure of the organization.

YIVO has also become an archival training institution under Stefanie’s leadership, whereby we are training a new generation of specialists who can conserve, process and digitize this tremendous wealth of Jewish materials.

Stefanie, can you describe how researchers will experience the archive? And what’s gained and what’s lost if you’re working in a digital-only format and don’t have the documents to hold in your hands?

Stefanie Halpern: Part of what we try to do with our digitization method is replicate the experience as much as possible of sitting in the reading room. Of course, you can’t replace the physicality of touching a document, flipping it over, feeling the brittle pages, smelling

the leather. But we try to shoot the documents so that you see all of the edges. You see the bends, you see the tears. We don't sanitize the materials. As you're scrolling through the materials, we try to replicate what you would actually see in the reading room.

And so, this opens up research to a whole slew of people who just never had access to these documents before. It allows younger researchers or non-academic researchers to feel comfortable accessing them. We see a lot of family historians who are using these materials and wouldn't necessarily be in the reading room, and I think that's really great.

Can you give me an example of how people are using the archive?

Halpern: The music collections are just top of my mind right now, because they're the ones we've most recently gotten online and the ones that have been oftentimes least accessible. I've had a scholar from Israel email me every month for almost the past year, asking if handwritten manuscripts of operettas are available.

A collection that we're putting up this week is "Group 1.2," the YIVO Ethnographic Commission records. The materials that zamlers (amateur collectors) acquired included folklore materials, songs and children's games. All of those materials are often written on tiny scraps of paper that are extremely difficult to read. Online you can blow them up as big as you want. I know a lot of people are really excited to get their hands on these materials, some of which actually have never been made available to researchers.

We have the youth autobiographies that were collected by YIVO in the 1930s. We have several hundred of them, but sometimes a few pages are missing and archivists here and in Lithuania were able to connect and actually find the missing pages. Many scholars use the autobiographies because they are such a great snapshot of different types of Jewish life across Poland.

The raunchy stories, the pornographic materials in this collection, were hidden from view for a very long time. These materials were collected by YIVO. They were part of life. It's that kind of stuff that's going to create new scholarship and change the scholarship that's out there.

I have to ask: Who was creating raunchy pornographic

Yiddish materials in the 1930s?

Halpern: The context for these is a little fuzzy, but we think they were stories that zamlers collected. They went out and they asked people, you know, what stories do you know about Jewish heroes? What stories do you know about talking bears? What dirty stories do you know?

Brent: Binyamin Harshav [the late Israeli poet and translator] told the story of going out into the marketplace, at the instruction of Max Weinreich [a co-founder of YIVO and editor of the "Modern Yiddish-English English-Yiddish Dictionary"] in order to collect obscenities used by women in the marketplace. And he would do so by irritating them to the point at which they would curse him out.

Another example of the use of this is that we are now working in Vilnius with the Turtle Gallery on an exhibition of material that has been digitized by YIVO for display in May or June. It will be the first major exhibition of prewar Jewish materials in Vilnius since the Jewish Museum there was shut down by the Soviets in 1947 or '48. So these materials are not only igniting scholarship over here, but they will ignite a renaissance of knowledge of the Jewish world for Lithuanians and for the remnant of the Jewish community there.

Why is that important?

Brent: You have to be very careful about making assertions about another country and society. Of course, I remember very well, when the Polin Museum opened in Warsaw, everybody said "This is a game changer. It's going to change Polish attitudes toward Jews." But look where we are today. But I do know that our project is making it possible for young Lithuanians to discover their own past, whether they're Jewish or not Jewish. Jewish culture is part of Lithuanian culture; it was an inextricable part of what Lithuania became. What it will lead to, I don't know, but I do know that the YIVO project has been part of this awakening, and through our project people of goodwill, people with democratic instincts and desire for openness, are finding a way of further reinforcing their attitudes.

Are there underexplored parts of the collection you're hoping a scholar will at last be able to access?

Halpern: We have about, I don't know, 5,000 or 6,000 posters that have been digitized as part of the project, in-

cluding over 2,000 Yiddish theater posters that were collected by YIVO during the interwar period, not just from Eastern Europe but from around the world. Posters are extremely difficult to take care of and show to researchers, so a lot of these have never been seen. Theater posters, election posters, posters advertising lectures on health-related things, political things, even hypnotism.

Museums are always interested in borrowing posters, but many of them were in six or eight different pieces. Our conservators were able to piece everything together, so you see that digitization is not just an act of access, but preservation. You can look at those digital images as much as you want and know that you have as accurate a representation of these materials as you can get.

We have the papers of Zemach Shabad. He was a public figure and a private physician in Vilnius, and we have thousands of his medical records that have never been used by researchers. I'm excited for a medical historian to glean whatever information they can from records over the course of 30 years.

Brent: Remember that the culture was destroyed first by the Nazis, then by the Soviets. You cannot separate that history from these materials. But this project is a celebration of what has been preserved through the efforts of generations of Jews who take care of their history, to understand themselves, to pass that knowledge on to the next generation. I cannot tell you the pleasure that it gives me to know that young people are studying these materials. That knowledge of ourselves is not something that's 2,000 years old or 1,000 years old or 500 years old. It lives in all of us. And somehow we are connected to that past. And so this helps give us more self knowledge, and that's what our institution wishes to celebrate.

The history of trying to unite the two libraries was very sensitive and was caught up in a legal and diplomatic dispute over ownership with Lithuania, which believes the materials are part of its national heritage. I understand you have a strong relationship with the Lithuanian government, but is there some disappointment that these great collections are not going to be together in the same physical space?

Brent: There's disappointment for various people who would like to see it so united. I myself am not disappointed in the sense that I never expected it to be. I ac-

cepted the status quo. I accepted the historical fact that had not been altered after 20 years of litigation. But yes, there are many people around the world who would like to see all of these materials safe and sound at the YIVO Institute in New York City. But that's not something that we concerned ourselves with. That was not our job.

It is impossible to separate the centuries of Jewish life in Eastern Europe from its destruction in the Holocaust. Do you see YIVO's efforts as a memorial project, or one of preservation? Does a sense of mourning shadow your work, or are you able to see beyond the losses?

Brent: Yes, there is a pall of mournfulness over all of this and a sense of loss, but the power of this project, in terms of preservation and bringing forward the past into the present day, is something that I don't think we even know how to calculate. It will lead to all kinds of new energies. I didn't get into this business because of the destruction of this civilization. My interest has always been on the living culture, on all of the strange and interesting things that happened in Eastern Europe and how those came to America. My goal is to show the living culture, to change the narrative, to shift it from just the Holocaust and to actually bring these vibrant lives into the fore.

● EDITOR'S DESK

The 'New York Jew' Is Dead. Long Live the 'New York Jew'

What's wrong with fetishizing Zabar's, Fran Lebowitz and "World of Our Fathers."

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

In a recent review of cartoonist Edward Sorel's new autobiography, Sadie Stein's description of a quintessential New York upbringing is worth quoting in full:

Sorel came into the world as Edward Schwartz in 1929.

He adored his smart and beautiful Romanian-born mother; meanwhile his father, who'd immigrated from Poland, was "stupid, insensitive, grouchy, meanspirited, faultfinding, and a racist." Their working-class Bronx neighborhood was pretty evenly divided between card-carrying Communists, Communist sympathizers and New Deal Democrats; Aunt Jeanette, the self-anointed family intellectual, "felt compelled, when there was a band playing at one of her sisters' weddings, to use her long scarf to do a solo dance in the manner of Isadora Duncan — another fervent supporter of the Communist regime in Russia." His world was shtetl-tiny but filled with opportunity; provincial but progressive; jaundiced, but optimistic — "a city where being Jewish, far from setting you apart, was a reminder of just how ordinary you were."

I love the efficiency with which Stein, via Sorel, conjures up a familiar 20th-century Jewish New York archetype. The kicker is that last line by Sorel: "a city where being Jewish, far from setting you apart, was a reminder of just how ordinary you were." By the middle of the last century, when Sorel came of age, New York's Jewish population would peak at about 2 million, meaning Jews were one-quarter of the city's population.

There are still some 1.5 million Jews in the New York metropolitan area — nothing to sneeze at, but now only about 12% of the city's residents. The Jewish cultural and civic mark on the city is still outsized, which can be seen in the ways "New York" is sometimes used as a code-word for "Jewish" (often by dog-whistling politicians) or shorthand for a distinct way of being Jewish — and a New Yorker. Last week, during its fundraising drive, public radio station WNYC offered a New Yorker magazine subscription for gifts of \$180. If that is not the most Jewish offer you have ever seen, I don't know what is. (If you have any confusion about the symbolism of a \$180 gift, read my colleague Philissa Cramer's breakdown of the recent anonymous \$180,000 donation to City College.)

WNYC's offer is packed with New York Jewish markers, of the liberal, Upper West Side, NPR-listening, New Yorker-reading variety. It reminds me of "Annie Hall," when Woody Allen's character reduces a date to a Jewish stereotype: "You're like New York, Jewish, left-wing, liberal, intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, the socialist summer camps and... the father with the Ben Shahn drawings, right, and the really, y'know, strike-ori-

ented kind of, red diaper ... stop me before I make a complete imbecile of myself."

I am not sure how many of these cultural stereotypes register with anyone under the age of 40. In 1978, Alfred Kazin could write a memoir called "New York Jew," and most readers would know what he meant before opening the book. In 1976, Irving Howe wrote "World of Our Fathers" — about Eastern European Jewish immigrant life in New York City — confident it would be read and treasured by Jews whose fathers and mothers may never have set foot in New York, except for a brief touch-down on Ellis Island.

Today? The liberal, Central Park West labels certainly apply to a large percentage of Jewish New Yorkers, in spirit if not in fact, although the fastest growing segment of the city's Jewish population are Orthodox Jews who neither vote Democratic nor live in Manhattan. Russian Jewish immigrants and their children tend to be conservative voters as well — they hear "socialist" and think of Soviet oppression, not striking garment workers or the cooperative-housing movement.

Syrian Jews in Flatbush have their own Jewish story to tell, and Democrats can't assume that Jews on Wall Street will vote for them or contribute — at least not exclusively — to their campaigns.

And yet, the classic idea of a "New York Jew" hangs on in the widening gap between nostalgia and present-day reality. In an essay for *Alma*, 19-year-old Hanah Bloom, born and raised in Alabama, writes that she's a southerner who has "never been to a Jewish deli, nor did I have the big youth group experience with a large congregation." And yet, thanks to Fran Lebowitz (age 71) and the Netflix series "Pretend it's a City" — an ode to the city from perhaps *the* quintessential New York Jew — Bloom feels like "I, too, could be a Jewish New Yorker."

In her book "Beyond the Synagogue," Rachel B. Gross asserts that nostalgia is a powerful instrument for forming Jewish identity, going so far as describing nostalgia as "a central aspect of American Jewish religion." Traditionalists might agree with her when it comes to, say, remembering the Temples or "never forgetting" the communities destroyed by the Nazis.

But she is also talking about nostalgia for more recent

or seemingly ephemeral culture like deli food, the immigrant experience or the artifacts and stories preserved in Jewish museums. Finding meaning in these things can “establish really sacred relationships between people, the divine and ancestors,” Gross told me last year.

For New York nostalgists, then, “World of Our Fathers” is a holy text, Zabar’s is a pilgrimage site, and Fran Lebowitz is “America’s rabbi.”

“Nostalgia ignores the diversity that is fast coming to define not just the city’s Jews, but Jewish communities around the world.”

I know the temptation. I frequently write or edit stories pining for a lost or fast-fading New York. Fetishizing the “New York Jew,” however, is not without its dangers. It ignores the diversity that is fast coming to define not just the city’s Jews, but Jewish communities around the world. It puts the Ashkenazi experience front and center in a way that crowds out Sephardim. It preserves one way of being Jewish in amber. And it reduces proud Jewish communities around the country, with their own stories to tell, to footnotes in a story written by and about people who think you cannot get a decent bagel outside of the five boroughs. (Which is true, but shhh!)

In Stein’s review of Sorel’s book, after rhapsodizing about his upbringing in the Bronx, she writes this: “This was a depression-era New York of Third Avenue Els, Friday night chicken soup, Saturday matinees and — lest we get nostalgic — no penicillin. When 7-year-old Edward contracted double pneumonia, it meant an at-home oxygen tent and a year’s convalescence, during which time he started drawing on shirt cardboards.”

In other words, nostalgia ain’t what it used to be.

Andrew Silow-Carroll is the editor in chief of *The New York Jewish Week* and senior editor of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (@SilowCarroll).

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● OPINION

Too Many Chose to Look Away From Chaim Walder’s Crimes. We Can Make Other Choices Now.

By Rahel Bayar

During my first month as an assistant district attorney in the Bronx, I spent most of my time engaged in an intensive orientation. As part of that training, a senior ADA taught us the art of an effective opening argument. Whether you are prosecuting a child rape case, robbery or homicide, your ability to seek justice is affected by the words you choose to use.

To illustrate this, the ADA shared an effective and impactful opening argument in a case involving a drunk driver, which started like this:

Choices. Choices are what we make every day. We walk through each moment deciding what to do and how to do it. Choices are how we make it from point A to point B, they are why we are here. In the case of a DWI, the choices are your roadmap. The choice to drink. To leave the bar. To pick up those keys. To walk to your car. To open the door. To get in. To put the key in the ignition. To turn it. To shift into Drive. Those small choices are what led to this moment. To crash. To kill.

Every single person who has sexually abused a child has made a choice. So too have the adults, parents, teachers, coaches, role models, clergy, spiritual advisors or communal leaders who have chosen not to act – or not to act in the right way.

The recent scandal surrounding Israeli children’s book author Chaim Walder, accused of sexually abusing dozens of people, including minors, is rife with people making the right and wrong choices. The revelations inspired a surprising and welcome backlash within the Orthodox

Jewish community in which Walder was a celebrity, with retailers and media companies severing ties with him.

On the other side, too many rabbis, communal leaders and educators kept silent, chose to say little, or cautioned against “gossip,” especially after Walder’s apparent suicide in the wake of the allegations. Some publicly blamed his accusers for going public, appeared at Walder’s funeral and shiva house or, as the Jerusalem-based teacher and author Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller did on her Facebook page, spoke of Walder as having “lost his balance.”

He did not “lose his balance.” He preyed on children. And the choice to use such benign words only inflicts more pain, trauma and harm.

In all my years of prosecuting child abuse and sex crimes cases, the impact of choices was apparent in every case, every day. Choices made by others meant I could not indict a perpetrator or take them to trial because of the trauma inflicted on the victim, in many cases – a young child. Choices had an impact on every person who could not testify because the pain and trauma were too raw and real. Choices made by some meant a child could not disclose their suffering for years because there was no safe space to do so. Other survivors couldn’t come forward because they knew they would be ostracized in communities that choose to blame the victims.

It is a choice to remain uneducated about what a child’s experience of abuse might feel and look like. It is a choice to ignore red flags, boundary-crossing behavior or grooming tactics by adults in positions of power or trust. It is a choice to attribute sole authority to religious and spiritual figures to determine whether something should be reported, to whom and how. It is a choice when our communal leaders choose to impart — or withhold — knowledge about the reality of sexual abuse. These choices change lives, and many times, not for the better.

So now, we have another choice.

For communal leaders, the right choice means saying this: “We stand with and believe survivors and victims. We are committed to learning more, to reporting abuse to law enforcement and to educating our communities – the adults, teachers and rabbis who should bear the onus of preventing abuse. We are committed to providing the

tools to communicate and empower our kids, without placing the burden of preventing abuse on them. We are sorry. We must do better. We will do better.”

The wrong choices include suppressing effective talk and knowledge of sexual abuse by invoking the so-called dangers of “lashon hara” (speaking badly), false allegations, rumor-mongering or smear campaigns. The wrong choice is using your social media platform to share inaccurate information or play the “both sides have suffered” argument.

The wrong choice means leveraging the power of spiritual trust and guidance to downplay reports of sexual abuse. The wrong choices include spreading the harmful canard that a child adhering to the Jewish laws of “yichud” and “negiah” – sexual modesty — will be protected from sexual abuse.

Such choices are dangerous, erroneous and put the onus of child protection on the children themselves.

It is our communal responsibility to be the protectors. To be a protector, we must make better choices.

Effective abuse prevention is about the little moments. The choices we make in sharing information at the dinner or Shabbat table. The words we choose, especially when we think our kids aren’t listening. If a parent’s first reaction to these reports is “innocent until proven guilty,” or that “Walder’s books did so much good in the world,” their children, whether they have witnessed abuse, experienced abuse, or just want to understand more about it, are unlikely to come forward.

Anyone who does this work professionally will tell you that it won’t matter how often you tell children that they should let you know if something unsafe ever happens to them: They are unlikely to share if they sense that “I won’t be believed” or “I did something to cause this.”

So, make a choice.

Choose guidance from real experts in the field over spiritual leadership with no expertise.

Choose to use your platforms to convey accurate information.

Choose to be educated and informed, and to ask a professional when you don’t know enough.

Choose better.

Choose to save a life.

Rahel Bayar is a former sex crimes and child abuse prosecutor and the CEO of The Bayar Group, which works with schools, camps and faith based organizations on effective abuse prevention.

● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT BO

Don't Let a Plague Crush Your Ability to Tell Right from Wrong

If we give in to pseudoscience or political tribalism, we might as well have stayed with Pharaoh.

By Rabbi David Evan Markus

Pharaoh's plea to Moses in this week's Torah portion (Parashat Bo) could well be ours today. Battered by the first eight of 10 otherworldly plagues, destabilized and even disempowered by them, Pharaoh begs Moses to stop the onslaught: "Just remove this death from me!" (Exodus 10:17).

Pharaoh's suffering was real, yet ultimately blind to how Pharaoh himself and his people shared responsibility for their collective fate. Even if Pharaoh might have held the key to his best future by doing the right thing, that fleeting awareness faded as fast as each plague relented. Two more tragic plagues – darkness and death – would come before our enslaved spiritual ancestors went free.

Sometimes Torah is subtle. Other times, Torah booms. In this COVID-19 pandemic era of political darkness and tragic death, today's headlines roar from yester-millennium's scroll.

Perhaps that's because Torah is endlessly incomplete.

As 18th-century Rabbi Moshe Chaim Efraim wrote in his "Degel Machane Efraim," each generation must read its own soul story, its own Oral Torah, into the Written Torah – and thereby help complete the Torah. Biblicists call it "eisegesis," reading ourselves into sacred text, alongside the "exegesis" of our search for objective meaning. By reading ourselves into Torah, we help complete Torah for our time.

So we read ourselves into Pharaoh's plea – and it's not hard. How many of us have looked up and cried "Enough!" as our resilience wanes? How many are weary from this pandemic, the plague of disease and death, the cyclical classroom shutdowns and hospital overloads, the exhaustion of healthcare workers and first responders, the viral twindemic of physical pathogen and digital toxicity, the insidious sense that yet another shoe will fall, the galling fury that some corruptly self-serving "they" is responsible for preventable suffering?

If we're honest, probably most of us resonate with Pharaoh – and feel weird admitting it. It can seem heretical to imagine that we – the Children of Israel, spiritual descendants of slaves and prophets – might read ourselves into the desperate words of the Bible's most iconic slavemaster: "Just remove this death from me!"

Even more challenging is Torah's repeated reminder that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." If so, then was the God of Torah at least partly responsible for Egypt's suffering and Israel's prolonged bondage? If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, did Pharaoh really have free choice?

This notion of choice is a key spiritual lesson of the dramatic bondage and liberation of Exodus, and also today's pandemic moment. A slave is one who lacks the capacity of choice rooted in awareness of one's own agency. In that sense, bondage gripped both the Israelite slaves and also, provocatively, Pharaoh and Egypt's

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Shevat 6, 5782 | Saturday, January 8, 2022

- **Torah reading:** Bo, Exodus 10:1–13:16

- **Haftarah:** Jeremiah 46:13–28

- **Shabbat ends:** 5:30 p.m. (NYC)

slavers. As Rabbi Menachem Twersky (the Chernobyler Rebbe) wrote in his “Meor Eynayim” (“Light of the Eyes”), the essence of Mitzrayim (“narrowness,” the name of Egypt in Torah) is the dearth of da’at (knowing right from wrong). In that “narrow” place, by definition there can be no true agency, no choice and no release from suffering. Thus, he wrote, “God did not remove choice from Pharaoh: rather, choice did not yet exist.”

Liberation from Egyptian bondage was meant not only to forge a national identity of liberation by right living. Liberation from Egyptian bondage was meant to create agency – the awesome human power to choose right from wrong and live accordingly. If choice and agency didn’t exist “then,” they do now.

“Liberation from Egyptian bondage was meant to create agency – the awesome human power to choose right from wrong.”

When societal forces threaten to swamp our ability to act on our sense of right and wrong, our capacity to choose and act still distinguishes us from our spiritual ancestors in Egyptian bondage. When we surrender that da’at, then spiritually speaking we might as well be back in chains making bricks under the taskmaster’s lash.

When we cede da’at to the latest charismatic purveyor of pseudoscience conspiracy or feelgood political tribalism, we might as well be back in Egypt.

When we let da’at falter, crushing our hope and hobbling value-driven action however small, we might as well be back in Egypt.

We didn’t come all this way just to go back to Egypt. Let Pharaoh inspire us to press forward from here.

Rabbi David Evan Markus is spiritual leader of Temple Beth El in City Island, New York. He is board chair of Bayit: Building Jewish; and seminary faculty at the Academy for Jewish Religion in Yonkers, New York.

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● MUSINGS

When Nothing Goes Right

By David Wolpe

Every age brings its difficulties. It is true that with all the advantages of our age, it can still seem as if everything is going wrong. It may or may not help to know that this is not a new sentiment. From the beginning of time people sat themselves by the fireside and said, “Absolutely nothing worked for me today.”

If nothing is going your way, the least others can do is offer sympathy and company. You aren’t alone: Abraham Ibn Ezra, famed biblical commentator and poet from 12th-century Spain, lamented:

If I made shrouds
No one would ever die.
If I sold lamps
The sun would shine all night long.

We all have those times when the world seems magically arrayed against us. Don’t despair. Keep at it. After all, Ibn Ezra didn’t make shrouds or lamps, but poems – and they’ve lasted for centuries.

*Named the most influential Rabbi in America by Newsweek Magazine and one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world by the Jerusalem Post, **David Wolpe** is the Rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, California.*

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● ARTS AND CULTURE

When a Photographer Trains Her Lens on Her Jewish Family, the Personal Gets Political

By Sarah Rosen

For two decades, the photographer Gillian Laub, 46, has been photographing her colorful, larger-than-life Jewish New York family through weddings, vacations, Jewish rituals and, perhaps most potently, elections and the pandemic.

Her solo photography exhibit “Family Matters,” at New York’s International Center of Photography, which is on display until Jan. 10, includes 62 images along with Laub’s incisive commentary full of family stories. The project is expanded further in the accompanying book of the same title from Aperture.

Told in four acts, the exhibition shows a family criss-crossed by conflicts dividing many American families: privilege, race and Trump-era politics. The throughline of “Family Matters” is Laub’s ambivalence around her family’s wealth and privileged lifestyle. Laub writes in the text that opens the exhibit: “I felt gratitude for our life, but conflicted by our extravagance, especially as I became aware of its social and economic context and consequences.” This conflict culminates in a major rift as the 2016 election approaches and Laub discovers that her parents are full-speed-ahead Trump supporters.

The subsequent political divide threatens the loving closeness of Laub’s extended family. And yet, in today’s polarized America, the political strife also gives a universality to an exhibition that showcases a particular — and particularly theatrical — Jewish American family as they celebrate, argue, mourn and grow over the first two decades of the 21st century.

The photos are more than just political. They’re also intimate, warm, and bursting with eccentricity. The exhibit

begins with images of her grandparents, first-generation American Jews whose own parents fled Eastern Europe’s antisemitism. Laub’s grandfather, Irving Yasgur, built a successful real estate business that catapulted their family into wealth and privilege. In a photo titled “Grandma grabbing Grandpa’s tush,” her grandmother rests her hand on her husband’s backside. Their skin may be wrinkled and spotted with age, but her nails are manicured, red and sharp, and his bottom is covered by a zebra-print swimsuit. It’s all affection and humor.

But Laub’s signature irony emerges in the photo “Grandpa helping Grandma out,” in which she shines a spotlight on her perfectly coiffed older relatives as they get out of a limo, dripping in fur. The photo is both critical of its subjects (“look at their moneyed vulgarity!”) and loving (“look at their humanity; look at their tenderness!”). This internal tension, which Laub explores in every image, is what animates the project.

As a photographer, Laub is no stranger to conflict zones. Her photographs of scenes of American racism in the South became a book and an HBO documentary, both called “Southern Rites” (2015). She photographed the bloody toll of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in her project “Testimony” (2007). She has photographed myriad public figures that could intimidate anyone, from the Obamas to Annie Leibowitz, and she brings this same fearlessness to “Family Matters.”

The exhibit follows Laub as she builds a family of her own with her Israeli husband, whose discomfort with Laub’s family wealth is even greater than her own. The tension reaches its apex when Laub’s parents and her sister’s family become fervent Trump supporters. This horrifies the liberal Laub, who tells her family that she thinks Trump is a racist and a misogynist. Alas, no minds are changed. As she says in her commentary accompanying the exhibit, “it was like screaming into a void.” She keeps photographing: her family at Trump’s inauguration, her nephew in a Star of David necklace and a Trump mask.

In “Mom after yoga,” Laub’s mother lies supine in a luxuriously decorated den in her home. The pandemic has now arrived, and she wears a face mask. Fox News broadcasts Trump’s face on the TV above her. Laub’s anguish is palpable and her relationship with her family becomes strained.

It's an experience to which many Americans — and specifically Jewish Americans — can relate. Trump is an especially divisive figure for American Jews, said Herbert Weisberg, an emeritus professor of political science at Ohio State University and author of the 2019 book, "The Politics of American Jews."

"In 2020, about 70% [of American Jews] voted for Biden and 29% for Trump," he told the New York Jewish Week via email. "The biggest distinction is denomination — about 68% of Orthodox Jews voted for Trump versus 35% of those in the Conservative movement and 17% of Reform Jews."

The Orthodox Jewish support for Trump, he explained, could be attributed primarily to Trump's alignment with former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's hawkish position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Still, the majority of American Jews opposed Trump.

"Surveys showed that most American Jews were more upset by Trump's statement that there were 'very fine people on both sides' of the Charlottesville march that included neo-Nazis, and many viewed Trump's rhetoric as partly responsible for the synagogue shootings in Pittsburgh and Poway," Weisberg added.

Of course, when the stakes are this high, the divisions are bound to be strong. And yet, against all odds, after Biden is inaugurated, the worst of the conflict in the Laub family seems to have blown over. The exhibition ends with measured hope. There are photos of the family reuniting outside for a masked, COVID-safe Thanksgiving. And after Biden's decisive victory, Laub is surprised by her father's good mood.

"What did you expect?" he asks. "That I would be upset and march in the streets? No, I don't cry or yell. Life moves on, and I go back to work."

In her closing commentary, Laub says, "The world still feels so broken to me. But I don't think the way to fix it is to shatter it into more pieces. Family is complicated precisely because, if done right, it both molds and challenges us. I think the trick isn't to give up on your own beliefs, or on the people you love. The trick is to end up with both."

Laub offered further insight into "Family Matters" via email.

New York Jewish Week: These photos are so sharp and

theatrical. Can you talk about the process of taking them over the last 20-plus years?

Laub: I have taken and made over tens of thousands of photographs of my family over the years. They have all happened in different ways. Some are candid moments and others have been recreated snapshots or are choreographed and directed to some extent. I like that the viewer may not know which is which.

The exhibit can be viewed as a series of smaller differences between you and your family that snowball into one big war over Trump. Is that how you see the narrative of the show, as many smaller conflicts around money, lifestyle and politics that build towards something deeper?

I see it connected as one larger narrative about family and how we navigate difficult issues with the people we love the most in the world. Although this is very specific to my own family, it has been amazing to see how many people have felt this connected with their own stories, which is what I was hoping for. Stories are what connect us all. I have always worked in narrative and I believe that time reveals the narrative, which is why "Family Matters" kept unfolding over 22 years. Finally I realized this wasn't a narrative about just my family — my personal story became a microcosm of what so many people were experiencing and could relate to. There were larger themes that transcended the specificity of my own family.

The photos powerfully communicate a paradox. They are intimate and loving, but also can be glaring and unforgiving, almost like police photos of a crime scene. You seem to be saying, I see you — do you see yourselves? Was there something therapeutic about taking these photos? Does the act of photographing a paradox somehow make the paradox more tolerable? Does it change your perception of it?

Making this work was certainly therapeutic for me. That's one aspect of the work. It forced me to look inward in ways that were very uncomfortable and unsettling. I think when we go to those difficult places and face them head on, that is where real growth can happen, which is what I think happened throughout this process. The camera and writing have always been how I process, digest and reflect.

Your photos tell a universal story about America, but they are also so specifically Jewish American. There's a photo of your nephew's bris and one of a Yom Kippur break fast spread. There are photos of your wedding, which your parents wanted to be opulent and your Israeli husband and his family wanted to be modest. Your family won and your Israeli mother-in-law had a biting line: "This is what happens when you raise your children in America." But I could imagine your parents, whose ancestors fled antisemitism, saying the same words but with pride. What do your photos communicate about the Jewish American story?

That's a big question! I can say that I feel like my family is a typical aspirational Jewish American story, a story that I've been thinking a lot about for many years. The image of my grandparents coming out of the limo all dressed up is a prideful image... It symbolizes to me, "We've arrived. We've made it in America!"

One pivotal story in the book highlights this: I can remember as a teenager growing up in Chappaqua, the local country clubs in our town had a known and mostly unspoken tradition that Jewish and Black people were clearly unwanted. Many of my friends' parents belonged to those local clubs and I am sure there were a couple of tokenized Jewish or Black members, but when the Trump National Club opened up over 20 years ago my father joined right away. He said it was open and welcoming to anyone.

My family came here as Jews and immigrants seeking their American Dream. They reached a level of success, but never felt accepted fully into white, Christian America. For better or worse, in a way Trump allowed [my dad] access to this American Dream. The Trump National Club accepted Jewish and Black people and all minorities when nobody else did, which is pretty ironic. But perhaps one of the reasons Trump resonated with so many disenfranchised Americans is their hope that they'd have access to this "American Dream."

The photos depict an emotional bloodbath in your family during the Trump years, the pandemic and the racial justice movement. But the exhibit ends on a hopeful note after Biden's inauguration. In the exhibit's epilogue, you conclude, "...Goodness can always be found. The closer you look at people, the more miraculous – and complicated – they become... People can change."

Has your family changed? Or have you made peace with an element of your family that you cannot change?

I didn't make this work in order to change anyone. So much of the frustration and problems we [my family] had were because of our unwillingness to see the other person's views. I can say with confidence that we have had more transparent and open conversations since my family has read the book and seen the exhibition. It has enabled us to have an open channel. Nobody is looking to change anyone's point of view anymore, but I think we all realize the importance of respecting the other; agreeing to disagree and honoring that.

"Family Matters" is on view at the International Center of Photography at 79 Essex St. through Jan. 10.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 11 | 11:00 a.m. Free

Poetry of Yehuda Amichai

Dr. Regina Stein leads a course on how to read and explore the poetry of Yehuda Amichai, the most popular Israeli poet of the second half of the 20th century. The classes will be held over Zoom every Tuesday through Feb. 22 and may be taken separately.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3mFOlri>

January 13 | 7:00 p.m. Free

RBG's Brave and Brilliant Jewish Women

During the last year of her life, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg sat down with Moment editor-in-chief Nadine Epstein to discuss the Jewish women she found inspiring. In Epstein's new intergenerational book, "RBG's Brave and Brilliant Women: 33 Jewish Women to Inspire Everyone," she profiles the women Ginsburg identified. Join the Museum of Jewish Heritage and Moment for a program featuring Epstein in conversation with author and journalist Abigail Pogrebin.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3q1M6AB>