



## AU REVOIR, ALEX BY ELI RUBENSTEIN

It was a Friday afternoon, three days after Yom Hashoah, when I first heard the news. Holocaust survivor Alex Buckman had died that morning on the 2023 March of the Living program. He passed away shortly after speaking to the Coast to Coast Canada March of the Living delegation at their hotel in Warsaw, while fielding questions from his young students.

I had known Alex since 2010, when he came on his first March of the Living program with a delegation of Vancouver students - and I had been in touch with him ever since. His heartbreaking story was made even more poignant by the gentle way in which he imparted his traumatic childhood experiences.

Here is an excerpt from the book, **Witness: Passing the Torch of Holocaust Memory to New Generations**, which tells part of his story:

*Au Revoir, Maman*

Alex Buckman was only four years of age, when he was hidden by Mademoiselle Andrée Geulen, a 20-year-old teacher in a Brussels, Belgium school, who also saved many other Jewish children during the Holocaust.

On that fateful day in 1943, before he was handed over to Mademoiselle Andrée, his father kissed him for the last time.

Alex asked his father, "Where is Maman?" His father pointed to the bedroom. Alex ran to the bedroom, but the door was locked. Alex did not know why, since there were no locks inside the house. He was never to see his parents again. They were both murdered in Auschwitz. "So in my mind, as a child, I never said good-bye to my mother."

We're back in 2010 [on the March of the Living] in that room (the former gas chamber in Auschwitz-Birkenau) where my mother and her sister were waiting for the showers. And obviously there was no water or shower as the Nazis placed poison above the shower heads. They [the guides] told us that the women became hysterical because they did not see the water, so they ran toward the walls and scratched the walls with their fingernails. And I turned around and caressed the walls so I could still feel the scratches these women did...maybe my mother did the same thing. And as I caressed it, I said: 'Au revoir Maman,'... because I never said good-bye when I was a child."

Many years later, Alex reunited with Mademoiselle Andrée and found out from her that indeed the bedroom door had not been locked. His mother was holding the doorknob and wouldn't let go. "She didn't want to see you because she was afraid she was going to keep you. Instead of that, she let you go and saved your life," she explained.

## AU REVOIR, ALEX (CONT.)

In 1989, Yad Vashem declared Mademoiselle Andrée a Righteous Among the Nations. She said, "I deserve nothing for what I did. I am not a hero. I did not seek recognition and medals."

(Incidentally, when Israel radio reviewed the Hebrew version of **Witness: Passing the Torch of Holocaust Memory to New Generations** Alex's story was the one they chose to feature from the 100 plus page book.)

I still remember Alex on the 2010 March of the Living, speaking to the Canadian students in his soft yet compelling voice, following their arrival in Israel after their week in Poland. He reminded the students of their duty to remember when they returned home, saying in part:

"What will happen when we will go home?... How will we deal with injustice? How will we continue to do all the things we have to do? How will you continue the legacy? How will you remember?"

I know I will remember you always..... We spent a week in Poland together. I don't think I would have made it if it wouldn't be for you. Some people tell me I was there for them – but most of you were there for me."

When I was struggling with coming to grips with the difficult news, I was reminded of Holocaust survivor Dr. Victor Frankl's view on how to cope with life's most challenging moments.

Frankl attributes his surviving the Holocaust to the love he felt for his wife who was always in his mind. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, he describes how he and his fellow prisoners were able to endure the daily beatings and brutal marches by thinking about their wives, hoping they would not be struggling as badly as they were. It was those moments of love and empathy that helped the suffering prisoners through the most trying times in Auschwitz. After the war he came to understand that finding meaning even during the most extreme suffering was the key to overcoming adversity.

And it is these thoughts that provided a measure of comfort in the wake of the tragic news I had just heard. Virtually everyone I spoke with in these past few days, expressed how deeply moved they were by Alex and his story, how much they appreciated, adored, admired and loved him. During the first few years of his life, Alex had seen perhaps the worst in humanity. In turn, for the rest of his life, he brought out the best in others. And surely in this, there is great meaning.

A few days following Alex's passing, I had a chance to

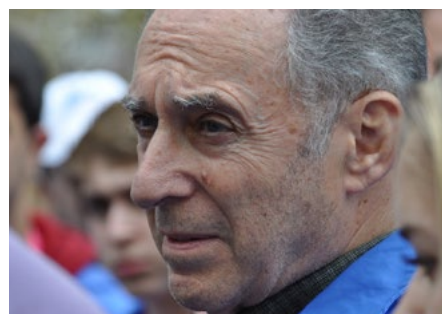
speaking to his son Patrick, who had been with his father in Poland on the March of the Living.

He shared with me that, on the morning his father passed away, his father was speaking to the students after breakfast in Warsaw. A few days prior, he had addressed the students in one of the prisoner barracks in Birkenau – other visitors stopped by to listen as well – but there was insufficient time for question and answers. So that morning Alex invited them to ask any questions they might have about his story and the Shoah. The students obliged. One of the first questions posed, unsurprisingly, was about his faith in God after the Shoah. Alex related his difficulties with believing in God, considering all the suffering he witnessed during the Shoah. But he finished his response, in his characteristic eloquent and gentle manner. He believed in religion, in the religion of kindness. That is where you would find God, he answered.

Shortly thereafter, he passed away, while still answering the students' questions.

Alex will always be remembered for his gentle manner, his kindness and his eloquence, and in the way he profoundly touched the hearts of so many.

And in reflecting on his inspiring example and his life's experiences and message, that is where you will find God.



## FROM OUR PRESIDENT

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As I approach the end of my 3 year term as President, I can't help but to reflect on the many challenges we faced, and be incredibly proud of what our clergy, staff and Board of Directors has accomplished. I accepted the position reluctantly (as most shul presidents do), but I cared deeply about Habonim and felt I was up to the challenge. That was in January 2020. By the time the transition was complete and I officially took over in June, the pandemic was well underway, and it remained with me for most of my term.

Managing through the pandemic required constant attention and adjustment. Just when we thought we had a safe protocol figured out, a new variant would emerge, and the restrictions (and our policies) would change yet again. This happened over and over again as the pandemic continued to evolve over the next 2 ½ years.

As for our building, there was still work to be completed and deficiencies to be corrected throughout 2020. While this is to be expected in any new building, Covid restrictions made access difficult and delayed repairs. Our Jewish Heritage School went online, and enrolment dropped dramatically. Fundraising ground to a halt. The daycare, which had just opened and provided revenue that was critical to our financial stability, faced its own challenges getting off the ground in an incredibly restrictive environment. And of course, we had to figure out how to safely stream meaningful and musical Shabbat and High Holiday services with our clergy and band separated into different spaces throughout the building. All of these presented significant operational and financial challenges.

Then of course there is the human element. Funerals and shivas lost the very important human connection as everything moved to zoom. People at risk were shut in and isolated from their families, and our clergy were not able to visit and provide comfort to those who were ill or grieving. The families who had planned Bnei Mitzvahs and weddings also had to move to zoom, with only 5 or 10 people sitting 6 feet apart in attendance. We were all masked and unable to hug, with no opportunity for celebrations or even small gatherings of friends and family for the better part of 2 years. Our young people struggled to learn and build social connections from their bedrooms and dining room tables. Many people suffered financial hardship. And, as most of you know, it is during this time that Eli fell ill, and faced a difficult and prolonged recovery.

At times it just felt like it was one insurmountable challenge after another. But, as most of us discovered, we are far more adaptable and resilient than we think. I look at where we are now, 3 years later, and it is really quite remarkable.

We are hosting weddings, parties and Bnei Mitzvahs most weekends, and dancing, live music and shared meals are back on the table. We recently hosted a well-attended music night featuring Aviva and Tom and the band, a successful cooking class, and an art show. All of our services are being held in-person and followed by a kiddush, and the daycare is filled to capacity. Our Habonim Jewish Heritage School has a new Director of Education and is thriving with record attendance. We have made improvements to the building, including the beautiful new stained-glass windows in the main Sanctuary and lush replanted garden. We have implemented additional financial management and reporting procedures, supported by new accountants and a new bookkeeper, and continue to maintain a balanced budget and prudently manage our debt. Our day-to-day operations continue to be superbly managed by Robin, Michelle, Silvio and Patsy, all of whom work diligently to support the constantly changing needs of the congregation. We have admitted almost 100 new members, yet still retain a 100+ strong wait list. And we are fortunate to be led by the most talented clergy team in the city, with Eli, Aviva, Noam, and Kim enriching us with their beautiful voices, knowledge, wisdom and wit.

We are also very fortunate to have an incredibly talented and committed Board of Directors who generously devote their time and expertise to ensure the success and long-term viability of Habonim. They work behind the scenes, along with volunteers such as former board member Dianne Erdos Rush and member Jackie Ruderman, often without recognition or thanks. So, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone, including my family, who has supported me in this unexpectedly bumpy ride as your President. I think it may finally be safe to say the worst of the storm has passed.

*Cheryl Grammer,  
President*

## DON'T WORRY, JUST COOK

On March 23rd, 2023 Habonim hosted a very successful program with the legendary Bonnie Stern and her daughter Anna Rupert.

Bonnie and Anna joined Habonim member Charissa Levy for a discussion about their newly published cookbook "Don't Worry, Just Cook". They shared how they managed to write a cookbook together in the middle of the pandemic lockdown and that "recipes are more than just something to cook. They're stories tied to history, experiences and relationships."

Attendees then discussed cooking and kitchen related questions with Bonnie and Anna as they watched them prepare delicious Passover-friendly recipes from their new cookbook. The samples from the cooking demo were as delicious as they looked! It was a wonderful evening of laughter, learning and community.

As always, if you have program or speaker suggestions, please contact Michelle at [michelle@congregationhabonim.org](mailto:michelle@congregationhabonim.org) or by calling the office at (416) 782-7125.



Bonnie Stern, Anna Rupert, Charissa Levy

## UPCOMING SERVICES

Friday, May 26th, 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

**KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE**

Saturday, May 27th, 10:00 am

**SHAVUOT YIZKOR SERVICE**

Special Guest Speaker:

**MP Melissa Lantsman**, Deputy Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, Member of Parliament for Thornhill and Habonim Member

**Topic: Combating Antisemitism in Canada**

Tuesday, June 13th, 7:30 pm

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Friday, June 23rd, 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

**KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE**

## ANNUAL DUES

Annual Dues - 2023 Annual fees are now due. All membership dues must be paid by July 31 to ensure tickets for the High Holidays. Please advise the office if you are not planning to renew.

## HABONIM HOSTS PASSOVER ART EXHIBITION

Habonim member Dr. Esther Gelcer created a series of Passover themed art that featured in the Canadian Jewish News and also in a two week exhibit at Habonim around the time of Passover.

As quoted in the Canadian Jewish News, Gelcer believes the struggle from slavery to freedom represents the process of psychotherapy and personal transformation. "We are all slaves under the yoke of life's problems but once we free ourselves from these, we become masters of our world. The process, like 40 years in the desert, is long and arduous. But once you go through the "parting of the sea" you are the point of no return; you are committed.

The artistic interpretations inspired by Gelcer's work as a clinical psychologist were published in a Haggadah created by Habonim members Brenda and Paul Hoffert and included the full series of 19 illustrations in their Haggadah.

Below are pictures from the Habonim exhibit launch as well as links to the paintings. Paintings may be purchased by contacting Congregation Habonim - all proceeds go to the synagogue.

[Click here](#) for hi-resolution versions of all of Esther Gelcer's paintings.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

### Habonim Annual Meeting of Members

*Tuesday, June 13th at 7:30pm*

**The Congregation's Annual Meeting of Members will be held on Tuesday June 13th, 2023 at 7:30pm. Members are invited to attend the Meeting in person at Habonim.**

A Notice of Meeting will be sent to Members in advance of the Meeting, in accordance with our by-laws, outlining the agenda for the Meeting and other details.

# ANNUAL MEETING



# THE JEWISH HERITAGE SCHOOL UPDATE

Shalom Habonim,

Over the past few months the students of the Habonim Jewish Heritage School were involved in many educational activities, we learned the Alef Beth through a variety of techniques and games. We celebrated a Tu bishvat seder and planted seeds with the JNF, enjoyed a Purim Carnival and prepared Passover plates and Afikomen covers. We also reviewed the story of Noah and his ark and learned about different cities in Israel. We chose new electives that included Israeli songs, comics and Jewish Superheroes. Shortly before Passover, school families volunteered to pack Passover boxes for people in need in the GTA. We just celebrated Israel's Yom Haatzmaut and learned about Shavuot.

We are happy to announce that registration for the 2023-2024 school year is now open. Please sign up [HERE](https://www.congregationhabonim.org/form/school-registration-2023/2024.html). <https://www.congregationhabonim.org/form/school-registration-2023/2024.html> There is a \$50 Early Bird discount if you register before May 31st. Next year's school day will be extended from 9:30 am - 12pm.

The B'nai Mitzvah students were engaged in some of the School's activities, and have also learned about the different layers and faces of Jerusalem, migration of Jews in Europe throughout the centuries, the establishment of Zionism and events that led to it, the Holocaust, and the different streams and customs in Judaism.

We encourage all families who are planning a celebration to take advantage of the B'nai Mitzvah program, which is a significant part of building a Jewish Identity among the young adults to be. Some activities next year will include Jewish baking class, a visit to the Holocaust Museum, dealing with modern Antisemitism, introduction to Jewish Toronto, meeting with the clergy and more.

If your child is celebrating a B'nei Mitzvah next year please watch your email for more information in August.

Wishing you a joyful summer,  
*Guy Mannheim,*  
*Director of Education*



Purim Carnival



# Mazel Tov!

Jody and Jason Kimelman on Samson's Bar Mitzvah

Margot and Graig Perlmutter on Molly's Bat Mitzvah

Katherine Yaphe and Howard Grosfield on Alice's Bat Mitzvah

Ali Yaphe & Matthew Kosoy on Charlie's Bar Mitzvah

Marni Shulman-Tucker and James Tucker on Michael's Bar Mitzvah

Rebecca and Michael Soberman on Joshua's Bar Mitzvah

Jessica Lax & Jeremy Bell on Oliver's Bar Mitzvah

Harris Krofchick & Michelle Tobin on Sydney's Bat Mitzvah

Danny & Jordana Joseph on Asher's Bar Mitzvah

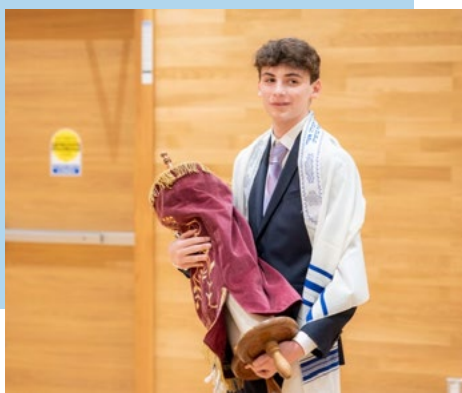
Ryan Kroft and Adam Zeller on the birth of their son Miles Abel

and proud grandparents Sharon and Fred Kroft

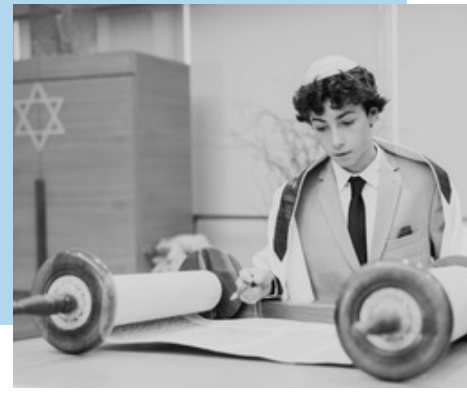
Betsy and Daniel Sauder on the birth of their granddaughter Charlotte



Alice Grosfield, Charlie Kosoy & Molly Perlmutter



Michael Tucker



Samson Kimelman

**BOOK NOW**

**BAR/BAT  
MITZVAH  
BOOKINGS**

We are now booking into 2026 for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.

Please contact the office to secure your preferred date.



## WHERE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WILD FLOWERS GROW

One of our active members, Dr. Esther Gelcer, who recently staged a Passover themed art exhibition at Habonim, is also an avid hiker, especially in her native Israel, where she spends her winters.

Below are some of the images and personal reflections of her hiking experiences she shared with me. (Eli Rubenstein)

### Where the Most Beautiful Wild Flowers Grow

I'm sending you some photographs from my last hiking trip in the Eilat mountains. We hiked for three days, so it was difficult for me to choose but I wanted you to get an idea of what spectacular beauty surrounded us. I am often amazed at how varied the geography of this country is. All you have to do is turn the corner and a different world unravels in front of you. The Galilee is absolutely spectacular with its lush green high mountains. But if you ask me, personally, I prefer the desert. It's where I find myself. I can definitely understand why the prophets escaped to the

desert. It's a place to be to become inspired. In Israel, they call it the land of Bereshit. And I certainly agree.

In Israel I'm known as The Canadian, although I'm 7 generations Israeli born in Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee. I've lived in Canada for over 55 years and indeed enjoy breathing and living here, but my heart still beats differently whenever the airplane lands on Ben Gurion airport.

In the last ten years, since I moved to spend my winters in my homeland, I've walked the country up and down and sideways. Together with my hiking group we've walked all of the Israel Trail- from Dan to Eilat, the Golan trail, the Judean Desert, the Sinai desert, around Eilat and more... but every time I touch the earth on the trail, I'm conscious of breathing through my feet. The umbilical cord that connects me, deep down to the earth that my ancestors walked on, the earth that is soaked with blood, the earth where the most beautiful wild flowers grow.





## LILY BROWN - GEMS OF MEMORY

Habonim is blessed with a membership possessed by extraordinary initiative and creativity. Many of you are no doubt familiar with Habonim member Pearl Richman, and the beautiful Haggadah Collective she created, which weaves tradition with modern Jewish values. Pearl also wrote the Hug-It-Out Haggadah a wonderful vibrantly illustrated Haggadah utilizing a child-centred approach to this ancient text.

Now 94 year old Lily Brown, Pearl's mother, has had the honour of having three short stories published in Niv Magazine, an online magazine, focusing on Jewish culture and creative work. These extraordinarily touching stories, set in pre-WWII Downtown Toronto, are poignant and lovingly polished gems of memory certain to stir your heart and touch your soul.

Please see this link:

<https://nivmag.com/brown-memoirs-1930s-toronto/>.

If you'd like to receive Lily Brown's memoirs, please email: [pearl@thehaggadahcollective.com](mailto:pearl@thehaggadahcollective.com) and she will include you on the list.





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# IN MEMORIAM

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Mourning those who passed away in the past year

Mildred Dolman  
Greta Liebel  
Shirley Granovsky  
Bob Berman  
Ian Mark Abramowitz  
Irving Abella  
Max Eisen  
Rose Roberts

Arthur Linder  
Dr. Martin Blackstein  
Renee Kaiman  
Howard Levy  
Sidney Finkelstein  
Muriel Steinberg  
Collette Landau  
Dr. Norman Bogo

Helen Karney  
Sandra Silver  
Sam Stein  
Bala Jaison-Rosen  
Arturo Mundigo  
Aaron Bregman  
Ellen Joan Bregman

*May their families be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.*

## Yahrzeits

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To receive your reminder please update your family Yahrzeits by contacting the office.

**Honour the memory of your loved one.**

**Memorial Plaque \$360**

**Oval Shaped Eitz Chaim Tree leaf \$180**

Please contact the office for more information or to send tribute and condolence cards.



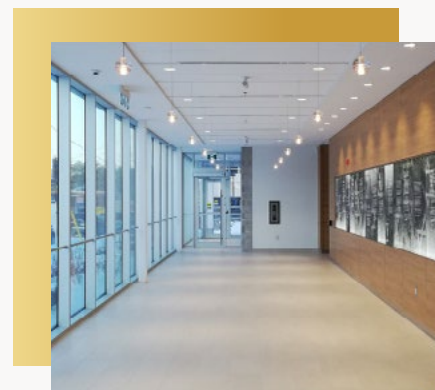


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The main sanctuary offers 4,000 sq ft of open space with a partition that can divide the room in half. There is a large second space in the lower level, which is also available for your private use. Our state -of-the-art kitchen mirrors a restaurant inspired setting, and we offer a variety of sizes of round tables, tableware for 250 guests, as well as 2 acrylic white and chrome bars and 4 matching high top cruisers. We have a capacity of 250 guests seated, up to 400 for a reception, and an industry leading sound system. Our building is fully accessible, and street parking is available.



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