

# The Canadian Jewish News



**DIANNE  
SAXE**  
wants to turn  
Ontario's  
political scene  
more Green

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### CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

ST. JOHN'S	7:52
SAINT JOHN	8:10
MONTREAL	7:41
OTTAWA	7:49
TORONTO	8:00
ST. CATHARINES	7:58
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# Yom ha-Shoah ceremonies returned in-person across Canada after two years in virtual mode

/ Alex Rose

**F**or the first time since 2019, Jews across Canada were able to observe Yom ha-Shoah in person, and unseasonably cold late-April weather wasn't going to stop them.

UJA Toronto's Holocaust Education Centre held a Yom ha-Shoah remembrance ceremony on the evening of April 27 in front of the Holocaust Memorial at Earl Bales Park. The seats were full with people grateful to be sharing these moments together again.

Naomi Parness attends the event every year. She is the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, both of whom are still alive but were not able to attend the in-person ceremony. However, she did bring her son, who is having his bar mitzvah later this year, to the event for the first time. They watched the virtual livestreams together the prior two years, and Parness felt fortunate to be able to bring him to the real thing.

"It's extremely meaningful to have my son here. I've done a lot of work in my life so far to try and carry on my grandparents' legacy. But I know that it's going to be up to the next generation, and that's my kids," Parness said. "My grandparents call their family their riches. They lost so much family, so the family they have now are their riches. And they are so proud that they have four generations now that will carry on their legacy."

Parness was also proud of how many people showed up to the commemoration even despite the cold weather, calling it "a testament to the community."

Dara Solomon, executive director of the Holocaust Education Centre, said the community was the reason they decided to hold the ceremony in person this year. Planning another virtual event didn't feel right, because so many people seemed ready to open up their lives again after two years shuttered away.

Perhaps more importantly, though, was how important in-person events would mean to Holocaust survivors, many of whom found the repeated lockdowns and quarantines especially tough.

"I think isolation was really hard when we were in those serious lockdowns. I think for many of them, they felt very alone. It was very triggering for some of them, bringing back memories of being in hiding and other memories," Solomon said. "And to be away from family during Pesach, during the High Holidays, was incredibly difficult for them. I think they know these are their twilight years and they want to be with people. They want to continue teaching."

Solomon said she always looks forward to the candle-lighting service, when the survivors come together and speak about the family members they lost to the Holocaust, before lighting

candles in their memories while surrounded by multiple generations of their families. It's a moment that would be moving no matter the context, but certainly more powerful when the survivors can gather in-person and an audience can view it live.

Hedy Bohm, one of the survivors who participated in the candle-lighting ceremony, had mixed emotions about this year's Yom ha-Shoah ceremony.

"It is a wonderful sign of our togetherness, our memories, our will to remember, not to forget," Bohm said. "But also, it's sad because, while we remember the terrible times, they're happening all over again. So, it's difficult not to be negative, to keep your positive attitude and hopes, which I have. And I try to tell the young people that I speak to, to believe in themselves, and to go and do and to be brave, never to stand by, and then maybe we will have a better world for them and their children."

In Vancouver, the Holocaust Education Centre also held an event on the evening of April 27—although this one was indoors. The commemoration also included a candle-lighting ceremony, as well as speeches from survivor Amalia Boe-Fishman, who spoke about her experiences during the Holocaust, and author Marsha Lederman, a child of survivors, who spoke about her parents' experiences.

In Ottawa, a Yom ha-Shoah commemoration was held in the morning of April 28, in front of the National Holocaust Monument, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was in attendance and gave remarks.

In Edmonton, a commemoration was held at noon on the same day, at the Holocaust Memorial on the grounds of the Alberta Legislature. ■

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## City of Montreal gives \$1.5M to new Holocaust museum; recognizes May as Jewish Heritage Month

/ Janice Arnold

**T**he City of Montreal will contribute \$1.5 million toward the new Montreal Holocaust Museum (MHM), Mayor Valérie Plante announced during a visit to the existing museum on the eve of Yom ha-Shoah.

The city follows the Quebec and federal governments which have each pledged \$20 million toward the \$90-million project. The MHM, located since its founding in 1979 in the Federation CJA building in the Côte des Neiges district, is to relocate into much larger facilities downtown in 2025.

In February, the MHM officially announced plans to build a new museum at 3535 St. Laurent Blvd., near the Quartier des Spectacles, an entertainment and cultural hub.

The Azrieli Foundation is the lead donor at \$15 million among

the private contributors to the project. The MHM says it has \$10 million left to raise in its Give Voice campaign, which includes a \$15 million endowment fund.

Plante attended a private Yom ha-Shoah commemoration at the MHM on the morning of April 27 with community leaders, Holocaust survivors and other key figures associated with the project.

“Each year, alongside its partners, the City of Montreal commemorates Yom ha-Shoah,” she stated. “We remember all those who lost their lives and all those who put their lives at risk to save others. For over 40 years, the MHM has worked to educate and raise awareness about the genocide of millions of Jews.”

Plante was accompanied by Outremont borough councillor Mindy Pollak, a member of the Hasidic community whose grandparents were Holocaust survivors.

For the third year, the mayor did not host a Yom ha-Shoah commemoration at city hall due to the pandemic, but the council did pass a motion recognizing the day of remembrance.

Plante also underlined the council’s unanimous decision the day before to recognize May as Jewish Heritage Month. The motion was presented by opposition councillor Sonny Moroz, the sole Jewish councillor on the 64-seat body.

With that gesture, Plante said, the city “reiterates its commitment to celebrate the Jewish community’s contributions to the development of Montreal and to fight antisemitism in the city on a daily basis.”

MHM president Richard Schnurbach, the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor, welcomed the city’s support, saying it “confirms the ongoing commitment of the City of Montreal to fight antisemitism, racism and other forms of discrimination, notably through education. In a context marked by the rise of discrimination against minorities, Holocaust education remains essential for building vigilant and tolerant citizens.”

Director Daniel Amar applauded Plante’s personal commitment. “As Mayor Plante has repeatedly reminded us, the City of Montreal has zero tolerance for racism and antisemitism. By supporting the new Museum project, the city is asserting its leadership in the promotion of human rights and the fight against all forms of discrimination.”

Relations between the Jewish community leadership and Plante have been strained in the past over her Projet Montréal administration’s reluctance to support the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. Twice during her first mandate, opposition attempts to have the definition considered were shelved. Plante was re-elected last November.

The city executive committee member responsible for culture and heritage, Ericka Alneus, noted that the new MHM will stand on St. Laurent, a historic thoroughfare emblematic of the city’s cultural diversity.

The Jewish Heritage Month motion emphasizes the community’s deep roots in the city, noting that the first Jewish congregation in Canada, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, was established in Montreal in 1768, as well as its contributions to Montreal’s economic, cultural and institutional development.

In presenting the motion to council, Moroz, the Ensemble Montréal representative for Snowdon, said he hopes the her-

itage month will be an opportunity for Montrealers to learn that the Jewish community is not monolithic.

The differences within the community are not only cultural, but also political, Moroz indicated. He compared his grandfather, Boris Moroz, now 101, and the late Dr. Henry Morgentaler. Both were from Lodz, Poland, were close in age, and immigrated to Montreal.

Moroz became a builder and community leader; Morgentaler an abortion rights activist who was jailed. Despite their similar early backgrounds, the younger Moroz said, Morgentaler “did not believe in the State of Israel, my grandfather does... That’s the contradiction you can find in the Jewish community.”

The winning design for the new MHM, to be selected through an international competition, will be revealed in July. The first stage of the competition has concluded, and the jury announced the four finalists among 32 projects submitted anonymously from nine countries: Atelier TAG et L’OEUF architectes en consortium, Saucier+Perrotte Architectes, KPMB Architects + Daoust Lestage Lizotte Stecker, and Pelletier de Fontenay + NEUF architect(e)s.

The new museum will be constructed on a now vacant 20,000-square-foot lot. ■

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## Malcolm Lester (1938-2022): Canada’s dedicated Jewish book publisher’s legacy remembered

/ Alex Rose

**O**n Tuesday nights at Terrace Gardens Retirement Residence in Toronto, the residents play *Jeopardy*. For the last 14 months of his life, renowned publisher Malcolm Lester was a regular participant in those games.

He was so dominant, his younger brother Brian Lester said, that the other residents wanted to ban him from playing.

“Although Parkinson’s was consuming him, his mind remained sharp as a tack. And for that I’m thankful. I don’t know how I would have coped, let alone Malcolm,” said Brian. “Up until the last few days, his mind was brilliant.”

Brian would continue to test his older brother’s wits until the end, and remained amazed at how quickly the latter’s mind worked. The last question Brian remembers asking Lester was to name the four Alfred Hitchcock movies that starred Jimmy Stewart, and Lester was able to answer in under 10 seconds.

Lester passed away on April 1 at age 83. He was best-known for establishing Canadian publishing as a player in the industry, both at home and abroad, and for promoting Canadian Jewish literature, such as the 1982 book *None is Too Many* about the re-

relationship between Canada and European Jews before, during, and after the Second World War.

Lester grew up in Toronto and at one point was studying to be a rabbi in Cincinnati. When he fell sick with mononucleosis, Brian drove through a snowstorm to pick him up and bring him home. During his convalescence, he realized his true love was publishing, so he decided to quit rabbinical school to pursue his passion.

In January of 2021 friends and family raised enough money to put him up in Terrace Gardens for what would be his final year while he was undergoing long-term care for his Parkinson's disease.

"The only complaint he had over the 14 months was that the roast potatoes were better than the mashed potatoes," Brian said, a quip that was characteristic of Lester's sense of humour.

But beyond his brilliant mind, people admired Lester most of all for his kindness.

"He was my brother for 79 years of my life. We never had a bad word. He was just a treat to be around," Brian said.

Lousie Dennys was Lester's business partner at Lester & Orpen Dennys, a Canadian publishing house. She later became one of his best friends, and was a core member of Malcolm's Gang. She remembers Lester the same way as Brian.

"Loyalty and kindness and trust were part of his makeup... My first impression from the start is that he was gentle, he was mild in his demeanour... courteous," Dennys said.

"But there's no question, at the same time, that he was passionate about what he was doing. And it was that combination that really attracted me, that he was completely dedicated and committed to books, and to this work, and to Canadian writers."

Dennys said that both she and Lester made an effort to publish books that would move Canada forward, have a real impact on society, and better promote Canadian literature both within the country and to the rest of the world. Lester made it his life's work to champion Canadian writers and Canadian writing—especially Canadian Jewish writing—and that passion propelled him to change the world of Canadian publishing.

"He had a vision for what he wanted Canadian readers to hear and understand. And he found the books and the writers," Dennys said. "And then to work with them, to draw them out in terms of their ideas and their own commitment as writers to reflect those ideas and that vision of what was achievable here in Canada, why we needed to understand. He had a strong social conscience, and it was reflected in the hard work he put into finding, in particular, his Canadian Jewish books."

Among those Canadian Jewish books was *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948*, published in 1982 by historians Irving Abella and Harold Troper. Abella and Troper believed they had an important book on their hands, but they could not find a publisher for it. When they finally tried Lester, he leapt at the chance to publish their book.

"He saw the potential, and really saw the value to Canadians of having that story told," Abella said. "Malcolm above all else was Jewish. And he felt passionate about the story, and felt that Canadians ought to know what their history was towards Jews. So it was something that he was going to publish automatically... it was about Canada and about Jews, and his interests in publishing were about Canada and about Jews."

When *None is Too Many* was eventually published, a Toronto launch was held at Edwards Books on Queen Street West. The event was mobbed, and the copies sold out. Even though nu-

merous publishers had rejected the book, its success proved that Lester "knew exactly what the reading public wanted," Abella said.

On top of Lester's other talents, including promotion, publishing, and marketing, Abella said Lester was also a "superb" editor. Abella said Lester was a thoughtful, patient, and close reader for his authors, who knew exactly what they were trying to say and could say it even better.

If there had been no Malcolm Lester, Abella believes the entire industry would have looked very different.

"Malcolm was the only one in the industry who was pushing for Jewish books. He was the only one who was publicizing them. He was the only one who was looking for authors about Jewish topics. He was the only one who was looking for Jewish readership. It was important for him," Abella said.

Lester & Orpen Dennys closed down in 1991, but Lester stayed in publishing. Towards the end of his career, Lester opened up New Jewish Press, which focuses on Jewish non-fiction. Natalie Fingerhut, its current editor, says the imprint aims to publish books "grounded in empathy and inclusion but also willing to tackle pressing issues facing the Jewish community," such as intermarriage and how the Israel/Palestine conflict plays out on university campuses.

"Malcolm believed in the power of words to both educate and inspire and I hope to continue to inject that kind of energy into our books," wrote Fingerhut in an email. "I often heard Malcolm Lester referred to as a *mensch*: a man of honour. It is indeed a privilege to have the opportunity to continue his work at New Jewish Press. We will endeavor to publish books that honour his legacy."

One of Lester's final projects was the publishing of *Siddur Pirchei Kodesh*, which he collaborated on with Rabbi Yael Splansky of Holy Blossom Temple—which he rejoined as a member in the last years of his life.

In her eulogy for Lester, Rabbi Splansky spoke about how he was the "Godfather" who guided the project from start to finish with a masterful and respectful touch, and, in a way, reconnected with his much younger self who at one point was studying to become a rabbi.

"When Malcolm took on this siddur project he came full circle back to Jewish theology, Hebrew poetry, rabbinic commentary," Splansky said. "It was a kind of homecoming for him. A capstone to his life as a Jew, who filled his eyes with words and his mind with the worlds they created."

"And now a very different kind of book, a sacred book, proudly sits on the shelf of the many, many books Malcolm brought into being." ■

**Alex Rose is a Toronto-based news reporter for The CJN.**



# Four Winnipeg siblings who survived the Holocaust together in a slave labour camp in Siberia are recording their stories for the future

/ John Longhurst

**T**hey may well be the oldest living Holocaust survivor siblings—and they live in Canada.

The four Fink siblings—Sally Singer, 100, Anne Novak, 99, Sol Fink, 97 and Ruth Zimmer, 95—live in Winnipeg, where they are in the process of having their stories added to the Last Chance Testimony Collection, part of the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive.

The race-against-time initiative was launched in 2019 to preserve the memories of the last remaining survivors of the Holocaust.

Sally's story was already in the Foundation's archive, from a 1988 interview for Winnipeg's Freeman Family Foundation Holocaust Education Centre of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada.

In December, last year, Sol and Ruth recorded their stories. Anne recorded hers in March.

The four grew up in Poland, near the Carpathian Mountains, with their younger brother, Eli, and their parents Shaindel and Zecharia Fink.

When the Nazis invaded on Sept. 1, 1939, the family fled to their grandparents' home, 21 kilometers away.

By the end of September, that town was under Russian control and, in 1940, they were arrested by the Russians, along with other Polish Jews, and sent to Siberia by train in cattle cars — all except for Eli, who managed to escape back to his grandparent's house.

At stations along the way, they were given water and small amounts of soup or bread. Passengers relieved themselves through a hole in the carriage floor.

After a month of traveling, the family arrived in Novosibirsk in southwestern Siberia. They were given a tiny room in a barracks and forced to work in a nearby forest chopping trees.

Anne remembers the cold from that time.

"We worked very hard in the forest," she said, recalling one minus-30-degree day when her legs began to freeze.

"We were told if we leave work, we will be arrested and put in jail for a year. But I asked myself: 'Should I die here or go to jail?' I decided to leave and walk home."

When she got to their flimsy shelter, her legs were swollen. "But nobody caught me," she said.

A woman brought her a cup of fresh milk while she lay on her straw mattress. "It was the best cup of milk I had in my life," she said.

Ruth remembers the hunger.

"I would sometimes cry all night from the hunger pains," she said. "Our family of six would share two pieces of bread. That's the way it was."

She also remembers people dying, like a man walking between the barracks who just fell down and died on the spot. "He dropped dead from hunger," she said.

When the Nazis invaded the former Soviet Union in June 1941, Russia freed the Finks and the other Jewish prisoners. The family moved to a nearby village, where they lived in a cramped cottage with a small garden and were forced to work on a communal farm every summer.

With little in the way of warm clothing, they still suffered from the cold. That included having only one pair of boots between them; whoever was going outside got to wear them.

And there was always a shortage of food; seeds from some kindly Russian neighbours enabled them to plant a garden each year for something extra to eat.

When the war ended in 1945, the Finks returned to Poland to discover their brother Eli was murdered in a death camp along with their grandparents. In all, about 80 members of their extended family were killed during the Holocaust.

From Poland they went to Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany before coming to Canada. Ruth remembers her father dropping to his knees and kissing the ground when they got off at the train station in Winnipeg. "Thank God we are finally here," she remembers him saying.

In Winnipeg, the siblings found work and raised families. Their parents died in 1959 and 1960.

Today the three sisters—all widows—remain close, living in the same assisted living residence in Winnipeg. They meet regularly with their brother Sol and his wife, who live nearby.

They are glad to have their stories in the Shoah Foundation archive. "We want people to know what happened," said Ruth, adding she is particularly interested in making sure young people know about the Holocaust.

"They can't believe what happened or even understand it," she said. "But they need to know."

She also wants to make sure their story is there to counter those who deny the Holocaust. "It happened," she said matter-of-factly. "We know the truth."

Anne feels the same way. "I want people to know about it," she said. "It was a very hard time."

Anne's daughter, Carol Sevitt, who lives in Toronto, believes their closeness today is due to their experiences during the war.

"They spent the war years enduring bitter hardships in Russia, facing hunger and deprivation, but being together somehow made it bearable," she said, adding the loss of their brother and other relatives made them "hang onto each other even more."

Growing up, she didn't hear much about their Holocaust experience until one day, at age 16, she found her mother crying during a phone call and asked why.

That's when she learned about the death of her uncle Eli. "It was the first I ever heard of it," she said.

Carol attributes their reluctance to talk about the Holocaust to a desire to "protect us from those painful experiences."

Plus, she added, since the siblings hadn't been in a concentration camp, they didn't feel like "real" Holocaust survivors.

"I told them, 'You lost your homes, you were packed into a cat-

the car, you were in a slave labour camp, you lost your brother—of course you are Holocaust survivors,” Carol said.

For Marilyn Sinclair, who is leading the Shoah Foundation’s Last Chance Canada effort, “having four siblings talk about their experience gives us an incredible chance to hear a story from different perspectives... We feel like we have found a treasure, that they are still sharp and eager to share their stories.”

Looking back, Ruth said those years were hard. “But we survived. And we aren’t finished with life yet.” ■

**John Longhurst is the religion reporter for the *Winnipeg Free Press*.**

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## Montreal’s Segal Centre promises a steamy illicit love affair tale in a new musical called ‘April Fools’

/ Janice Arnold

**W**hen a theatre advises audiences that they will need a cold shower after seeing a new play, it’s sure to spark interest. When that theatre is the Segal Centre for Performing Arts, they may wonder if it’s a belated *April Fools’* joke.

Not exactly, but *April Fools* is the title of the Segal’s next offering: a “steamy adult rock cabaret” restricted to those over age 18. The show is the translated and adapted iteration of a smash Israeli musical that premiered in 2018 at the Habima, the country’s national theatre, and performed hundreds of times around the country before the pandemic.

Created by and starring Keren Peles, a pop icon and songwriter, *April Fools* had Israelis atwitter over how much was autobiographical in this story about a married woman who risks a ‘perfect’ life—family, nice home, career—for an affair with a soon-to-be married man, a reserve army officer with his own demons.

Peles is not in the Segal production, which runs May 1-22, but is working closely on this English-language premiere with its director Moshe Kepten, Habima’s artistic director, who helped bring to stage the Hebrew original.

The Segal’s content advisory warns audiences the play deals frankly with marital infidelity and sexuality, including simulated orgasm. There is “strong language” and talk about drug use and mental health.

This version does not take place in Israel or refer to it. The story has been relocated to Los Angeles and the female lead’s illicit lover is a firefighter, set to Peles’s original songs with dance numbers and dazzling video effects.

The audience is not a passive observer. This is probably the first time that theatre patrons will be asked to turn on their cell phones, said Kepten.

In what proved to be a hit with tech-loving Israelis, an app is downloaded before the performance that allows the audience to view the heated texts between the two lovers. Besides adding a voyeuristic thrill, at a certain point, audience members may intervene and influence the plot.

The Segal’s hyping of the naughtiness is a bit misleading, according to Kepten, who says don’t expect the tawdry; this is a serious, artistic work.

“There is no nudity or anything explicit, nothing is gratuitous,” he said. “It is a universal situation that everyone can see themselves in. A woman breaks from societal expectations, has conflicted emotions and faces the consequences.”

Kepten hopes *April Fools* will eventually tour elsewhere in Canada or the United States.

He has been conscious of the need for cultural, as well as linguistic, translation. Perhaps Israelis are a little more shock-proof than people here. “This is a different culture, and I’m wondering how Montrealers will react.”

Executive and artistic director Lisa Rubin believes mature audiences want theatre that addresses real-life issues, but knows it is not for everyone.

*April Fools’* Canadian cast is headlined by Eva Foote and Daniel Murphy, joined by ensemble characters with names like Libido and Morality and Confidence and Doubt. Twenty-four performances are scheduled in the main 300-seat theatre.

When the Segal gambled on a 2021-2022 subscription season after the previous season had to be scratched due to the pandemic, Rubin said it was taking some artistic risks as well to entice people back to live theatre.

She admits it’s not easy. “We have lost a ton of people. We don’t expect to bounce back immediately.”

A sixth COVID wave was officially declared in Quebec on March 30 and case numbers have only worsened since then. The province still plans to lift masking for indoor public spaces, the last remaining restriction, on April 30.

The Segal will nevertheless continue to require masks at all times, including when seated, said Rubin. Another measure was mandating triple vaccination for all cast and crew members.

Though unlikely, if there is another forced closure of performance venues, Rubin said the Segal will not move *April Fools* online. Digital theatre, in its experience, does not work, she said.

The Segal managed to present in-person, with limited capacity, the season’s first two plays: the one-man *Every Brilliant Thing* and *Superdogs: The Musical* before Omicron and yet another shutdown was imposed in late December.

The January show, *Pandemish*, featuring the comic duo YidLife Crisis, was switched to online only and February’s *Black and Blue Matters* was cancelled even though theatres could reopen at full capacity. Rubin explained that public health protocols made it too difficult to do justice to the development of this new musical about racism and police brutality, produced by the Black Theatre Workshop.

*Black and Blue Matters* will be mounted next season, which is to be unveiled in late May.

The final show this season, the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre’s *The Sages of Chelm*, is still on for June.

The *April Fools* team worked via videoconferencing for months before Kepten, Peles and some Israeli musicians came to Montreal for rehearsals, often at odd hours due to the time difference.

For Kepten, this was a small sacrifice after a devastating two years for the performing arts. “I will do anything it takes to keep theatre alive, and we all have to keep living now,” he said. ■

**Janice Arnold has been reporting for The CJN from Montreal since 1976.**

## **Environmental lawyer Dianne Saxe credits Jewish values and concern for the planet for her role in Ontario’s Green Party**

/ Jeremy Appel

**D**ianne Saxe, one of the Ontario Green Party’s two deputy leaders, says it was her Jewish values that helped made her a committed environmentalist.

“This is what my father taught me from the very beginning: *tikun olam*. We may not be able to do the whole job, but we’re not free to stand aside,” Saxe told The CJN. “We must stand up. Those who can, must. And particularly people of my generation.

“Most of the real damage to the climate, to the environment, has occurred during my working lifetime. When we break something, we’re supposed to fix it.”

Saxe’s father, Morton Shulman, was also involved in Ontario provincial politics, having served as a New Democrat MPP from 1967 to 1975.

An environmental lawyer by trade, who was the province’s non-partisan environmental commissioner from 2015-19, Saxe decided to run for office when her position was eliminated by Premier Doug Ford. Her experience parallels her father’s, who ran for office after he was removed as the province’s chief coroner.

After her position was eliminated, she continued as a volunteer “people’s commissioner,” travelling around the province to discuss the urgency of climate action. This led her to the Greens, which she calls the “only party serious about a livable future.”

She is running in the University-Rosedale riding in the June provincial election, which is represented federally by Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland and provincially by New Democrat MPP Jessica Bell.

“Politics is a very tough place for anybody,” Saxe said. “It’s particularly tough for women. It’s particularly tough for Jews. It’s particularly tough for Jewish women who are speaking up for climate action and who are methodically all around the world subjected to vitriolic attacks and denigration.”

As a member of the provincial party, she said she’s detached from developments with the federal Greens, which has been marred by allegations of antisemitism stemming from internal

disagreements over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The discord culminated in the resignation of Annamie Paul, the party’s first Jewish and Black leader. Saxe characterized Paul’s treatment as “terrible” and “heartbreaking.”

But Saxe claims these issues simply don’t exist in the provincial party. “I have not experienced the slightest trace of antisemitism. I have not seen any trace of racism,” she said.

“What I’ve seen is people bending over backwards, twisting themselves into knots to be respectful and inclusive and to understand the different kinds of pain that different communities have and to search and work for a better future as we move forward.”

“Passionate disagreements” about contentious issues aren’t unique to the Greens, she added, pointing to the dissension in the federal Conservative party that led to the ouster of former leader Erin O’Toole.

Saxe said she is a staunch supporter of Israel. And while she’s critical of some of its policies, and supports groups like the New Israel Fund that are dedicated to enhancing Jewish-Arab cooperation, she believes Israel’s harshest critics fail to appreciate that “Israel lives in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the world.”

“That’s relevant to the choices that they make,” she said. “I don’t live in that neighborhood. I don’t get to tell them what to do.”

But at the end of the day, she said her primary motivation is the climate crisis, which is multifaceted in its impact.

Rather than use the ongoing crisis in eastern Europe as a pretext for expanding fossil fuel production, as Alberta Premier Jason Kenney has suggested, Saxe said it ought to be a wake-up call to wean society off fossil fuels.

“We could see this moment as the pivot point to rapidly accelerate our conversion to renewable energy,” she said.

One solution is to curb urban sprawl, which Saxe calls a key plank in the Greens’ platform.

“Sprawl is our biggest problem. Sprawl is Ontario’s oilsands,” said Saxe, whose final report as environmental commissioner detailed the environmentally destructive impact of cities stretching out beyond their means.

“We need to provide places to live where people have what they need near them, that they don’t have to drive to,” Saxe said. “That will make communities much more vibrant and more fun places to live, with more local shops and more local opportunities to work... And that allows us to then protect our woodlands, wetlands and forests, which we are going to desperately need, as the hammer blows of climate continue.”

Saxe criticized Ford’s move to spend \$1.1 billion a year on waiving licence plate renewal fees. She said this will only strengthen Ontarians’ dependency on their personal vehicles at a time when we need to be shifting toward public transit.

The Greens are calling for those funds to go to funding a \$6.6-billion mental health strategy over four years, which Saxe tied directly to the impacts of the pandemic and the climate crisis.

“Young people have depression and despair and rage and fear, all of them totally justified because people on the planet are getting clobbered,” she said. “And the leadership we’re getting from most of the political class, certainly including our Ontario premier, is criminal because we are pushing past our opportunity for a livable planet. We’re throwing it away. We’re stealing it from the young people.” ■

**Jeremy Appel is a Calgary-based freelance journalist.**

# Guy Lafleur with a siddur: How a surreal 1981 hockey star photo was snapped by a student in Montreal

/ Ellin Bessner

**T**he news of Guy Lafleur's death on April 22 led 61-year-old Montreal postal worker Robert Foxman to reflect on how the Canadiens hockey legend played a role in a crazy Jewish moment that hardly anyone else knew about.

But he had the photographic evidence to prove it actually happened over 40 years ago, with the accompanying negatives stashed inside a grocery bag at home.

Lafleur is pictured in his overcoat along with a kippah and a tallit, while holding a Hebrew prayer book, as if he was praying.

The image was snapped in February 1981, near a restaurant across the street from the old Montreal Forum, where the Habs played.

Foxman, who was 20 at the time, was a student at McGill University, taking a photography course. He needed a good subject for an assignment.

And somehow, it led him to the idea of getting the right winger to respectfully dress up as a reverent Jew.

"I don't know if it's because in some ways, Guy Lafleur can look Jewish in certain pictures because... he had a little bit of a bigger nose," Foxman said.

But he didn't necessarily think the five-time Stanley Cup champion would go along with this act of "capital-C chutzpah."

Lafleur died of cancer at the age of 70. His death has prompted a national outpouring of tributes and personal stories of how nice "The Flower" was to his fans—and to the wider community.

Foxman packed his personal bar-mitzvah tallit and the other Jewish religious items into a bag, and took the bus down to the Forum, on a day he knew the Montreal Canadiens would be practicing.

In those days, he recalls, fans could wait outside the team entrance to ask for autographs.

He recalls the pitch being as simple as this: "Mr. Lafleur, I'm taking a photography course and I have an idea for an interesting photo. I'd like to dress you up as a Jewish person."

Lafleur invited the teenager to accompany him and his business manager to his car parked at the Alexis Nihon Plaza, a shopping centre with a large underground parking area. And it was there that the athlete dressed up "davening" outside of a Polynesian Tiki bar known as the Bali-Hi—which had bamboo poles as decor.

"I was nervous. And he was in a rush."

The whole encounter lasted for about 10 minutes, as Foxman used his older sister Terri's Olympus camera to snap one single photo.



He didn't even ask for an autograph.

"I didn't want to push things—because I was already pushing things big time."

The picture became part of family lore, but it was never published anywhere. Instead, a copy was laminated for Foxman's late father Jules, a salesman, who proudly showed it off to all his customers.

"My father was always going around telling everyone, 'The whole world is Jewish!'"

As recently as 2017, Lafleur and some representatives of the Habs and the Ottawa Senators attended a Jewish community event at the Library and Archives Canada building. It was timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the first NHL game between the Habs and the Sens.

"He's known as a mensch on and off the ice," Robert Foxman said. "I think this story illustrates that. The fact that he was able to embrace this crazy idea from this stranger and not really be concerned."

While he regrets that he did not ever share his effort with the team, let alone with its subject, Robert asked Terri to finally publish it on Facebook because he's not on social media himself.

And of all the national tributes paid to "Le Démon Blond," this one had to be the most surprising of all. But maybe it's not so odd to those who couldn't keep their eyes off Guy Lafleur in his 1970s prime—when many a Passover seder in Montreal was distracted by what was happening in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

"Hockey in Quebec is like a religion," Terri said. "And Robert found a way to express it." ■

**Ellin Bessner is chief correspondent of *The CJA Daily*.**