

The Canadian Jewish News

SHARON HAMPSON from Sharon, Lois & Bram to a new family band

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The House, which offered programming for Toronto's young Jewish adults, closes after 18 years

/ Alex Rose

Eighteen years ago, Rabbi Rafi Lipner founded an organization called The House for young Jewish adults in Toronto.

But on April 13, just before the start of Passover, he sent out an email announcing The House would be closing its doors.

Rabbi Lipner launched the effort in September 2004, providing a space for Jews of all denominations between the ages of 22 and 35 to celebrate their shared culture, heritage, and religion. He picked the name because he wanted to evoke the familial environment at the heart of the transmission of Jewish tradition.

"If we created a caring, home-like environment that shared with each visitor the depth and relevance of a vibrant and transcendent Judaism, free from the boundaries that divide, we could inspire a generation of emerging adults to see the beauty of our heritage and strengthen their connection to live it, to lead with it, and to embody its values," Rabbi Lipner wrote in the email announcing the closure.

The House was hit hard by the pandemic, and forced to move its programming online, like so many others. But Rabbi Lipner says it pivoted well to quarantine life and that the organization was not a casualty of COVID.

Instead, he decided the time arrived to end the project after a conversation with a mentor.

"I think there is a limit to the platform of what The House was capable of doing," he said. "If I'm going to look back 20 years from now and say, 'Wow, (did I make) a massive difference, using whatever God-given talents I have?' So this rabbi, my mentor... he said, 'whatever you've done today, I'm sure it's important... but you always have to view life as, what does it position you to do next?'"

Over its nearly two-decade run, The House engaged thousands of young Jewish people, inspired future leaders in the Jewish community and was even responsible for hundreds of marriages, according to Rabbi Lipner's email. It hosted all kinds of events, from small, intimate conversations, to its flagship event Jewish Ethics Defined, or JEDx.

At its last live incarnation in 2019, the JEDx audience of over 1,000 people saw successful Jews such as Toronto Blue Jays president and CEO Mark Shapiro and JSwipe founder David Yarus speak about what Judaism means to them.

In the 2018 annual report, the most recent year available, The House raised \$885,000. It was the first year in what it said was "an ambitious five-year growth plan." About half the revenues came from a capital campaign, while another 38 percent came from event fundraising. UJA Federation's allocation accounted for three percent of The House's annual revenue.

But by the end of The House's life, Rabbi Lipner did not feel like it was bringing the depth and profundity of Judaism that he had envisioned. It was verifiably successful at bringing young Jewish people together, and he does not take that for granted.

Lives were changed for the better because of The House's programming, and many people enjoyed attending and meeting new people at its events until the day it closed.

However, at the end, Rabbi Lipner does not believe it was reflecting the best of his own talents or goals.

"I think there's been an evolution and exchange of The House subtly over time based on the factors of reality, of who's around and what culture is like and what interests are and attention spans stuff and things like that. And I think about the things where I felt the impact was very profound, I think that that's changed a little bit," he said. "I think the depth of conversation (was missing), the beauty of saying, 'let's explore.' Let's explore the depth of Jewish thought, let's look internally towards who we are."

Although the closure leaves a void in Toronto's Jewish community, Rabbi Lipner says there are many people who can do comparable work—and probably even better than him.

"It's been great, but if you ask the question, if I would start exactly what The House was today, who I am, in this environment, in the way that it was? Well, of course not," he said. "I think that, like anything, something has to break down before something better can build up." ■

Home-based shuls in Côte St. Luc are getting an ultimatum: Register as legal, or start worshipping elsewhere soon

/ Janice Arnold

The city of Côte St. Luc, which has a majority Jewish population, is preparing what amounts to an ultimatum to places of worship that illegally operate out of residential properties: either regularize your status or find a new location.

The proliferation of "non-conforming" home-based shuls has gone on for too long, said Mayor Mitchell Brownstein, and is no longer acceptable to residents at large.

At its May 9 meeting, the council unanimously gave final approval to a bylaw that expands the alternative locations available to these shuls—it is not known precisely how many there are—should they have to move out of their present site.

Bylaw 2217 allows places of worship to operate in four buildings, mostly strip malls, previously zoned exclusively for commercial use. The owners, of course, have to be willing to rent or offer space to them.

There were no requests from residents to open a register prior

to this rezoning, as provincial law stipulates, Brownstein said.

With this “first step” bylaw now in effect, the controversial phase of the city’s objective goes forward. Brownstein and councillor Mike Cohen said they have already received numerous letters from residents concerned about what happens next.

On first reading at last month’s council meeting, the second step, Bylaw 2596, was adopted by a 5-2 vote. It outlines the way each existing place of worship in dwellings in residential-only zones can become legal, provided their neighbours ultimately agree to it.

Brownstein characterized the intent as adding to, rather than taking away from, the rights of these Jewish congregations, as the proposed bylaw will offer them the chance to stay where they are, while it “ensures that Côte St. Luc continues to be a place where religious prayer is welcome...in the proper zones.”

Councillor Lior Azerad, who voted against the bylaw along with Sidney Benizri, however, criticized it as “targeting the Orthodox community” and argued that “religious institutions are the backbone of Côte St. Luc” and increase the value of surrounding residential properties. One councillor was absent for the vote.

Many residents have objected to these home-based synagogues, citing traffic and noise, as well as the fact they are not paying taxes.

Previous administrations have for decades tolerated these shuls, said Brownstein, but with their numbers growing in recent years, many residents do not. He said it’s possible those that have been there 20 or 30 years and are “well integrated” in the community would be accepted by the neighbours.

“We are trying to address the situation in the nicest, kindest way,” said Brownstein. “We are offering an olive branch which we expect the religious institutions to take advantage of.”

Briefly, Bylaw 2596 would allow for a spot rezoning of a specific property in a residential area, a temporary status that would be revoked if the place of worship left the property.

In the case of shuls that do not apply for legalization or do not get the necessary support from nearby residents, Brownstein said the council “will be forced to act.”

“They will not be shut down the next day,” he said, but they will have to relocate to a permitted zone, either institutional, perhaps merging with a conforming synagogue, or commercial.

Deputy mayor Dida Berku noted that five years ago she and Brownstein met with rabbis of these congregations to try to find an “amicable” solution. Not only was that unsuccessful, she said, but since then more houses and duplexes have been converted into places of worship.

Berku said there is also a safety consideration. These dwellings were not designed to accommodate 50 or 100 people on a regular basis nor are they necessarily meeting other security standards.

With the adoption of Bylaw 2217, one of those shuls, a Hasidic Belz congregation, has automatically become legal. It is located in one of the four named commercial properties, the Adar building on Westminster Avenue.

A second reading of Bylaw 2596 is expected at next month’s council meeting with a public consultation slated for June 20. A register is not required to be opened for this type of rezoning, Berku said.

Cohen said residents need the facts because “a lot of broken telephone” is spreading “doomsday scenarios.”

“The last thing we need is to divide our community,” he said. ■

Doorstep Postings: Patrick Brown’s meandering pandering about Israel

/ Josh Lieblein

In an interview with *Sada al-Mashrek*, a Montreal-based Arabic-language publication, Conservative Party of Canada leadership hopeful Patrick Brown wondered aloud about why Canada was so slow to help Palestinian refugees and so quick to help those from Ukraine.

He also pushed back against the idea of moving Canada’s embassy to Jerusalem, complained about Canada replicating Donald Trump’s position on the Middle East, and talked about having a more balanced foreign policy.

You know, the usual.

Now, despite what you may think of these comments, I’m here to tell you that Patrick Brown isn’t an antisemite. Patrick Brown doesn’t hate Israel.

I know this because to be an antisemite or to hate Israel, you must have a genuine belief that Jews and/or Israel are bad. And because Patrick Brown hasn’t a single genuine belief of any description to his name—after serving as a Member of Parliament, the ultimately overthrown leader of the Ontario PCs, and the current mayor of Brampton—he therefore cannot hate Israel or be an antisemite.

So, why is Patrick Brown this way? Because our political system is this way. You get ahead not by having inconvenient principles or beliefs. You get ahead by anticipating the things people want to hear, and saying them in an extremely preprogrammed manner. You gain their loyalty this way, and set up “relationships” where everything centres around you and the other person telling each other things you both want to hear.

For example, I once stood not 10 feet from Patrick Brown and heard him speak to an audience of Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee donors at a fundraiser. He spoke for perhaps five minutes, said the pro-Israel things he knew everyone wanted to hear, and then fell silent. He couldn’t benefit any more from speaking any more, so there was no reason to speak. Making human contact wasn’t on the agenda.

Another time, while going through ministerial correspondence, I encountered a letter from Brown—on official parliamentary letterhead—professing solidarity and offering his outrage on that mister’s behalf after *Toronto Star* editorial cartoonist Patrick Corrigan had depicted said minister in his usual unkind-to-anyone-who-isn’t-a-Liberal fashion.

Nobody asked for this letter, and it served no purpose other than to provide a record of how Patrick Brown had made a gesture of support, which necessitated a gesture of thanks from the minister—which Brown could later use for some yet-to-be-determined favour.

Then there was the time I was charged by a rival Progressive Conservative leadership campaign to figure out how Brown was

flying around Ontario, to locations so remote that they could only be accessed by air. After a bit of digging and creating accounts here and there, I was able to connect Brown's plane to a certain Barrie-based billionaire with a significant interest in the local Ontario Hockey League team. A worthwhile investment, to have such a close relationship to someone who was expected to be the next premier!

These are just the examples I've witnessed of how Brown treats people as a means to an end—and how others treat him in a similar fashion. There are countless other such relationships, and this is how we know groups like Independent Jewish Voices and individuals like labour leader Sid Ryan are praising him not because they care about any of the enormous red flags hanging about, or because they are in any way conservative, but because having a person with name recognition that appears to pander to them validates their existence in a way that nothing else could.

And now, they will offer themselves up to him, body and soul.

You may well argue that Patrick Brown displayed poor judgment by pandering to folks who do come by their Israel-hatred honestly. I would add that the poor judgment is mutual, and that the anti-Israel folks who imagine that Patrick Brown will hesitate to throw them under the bus the minute they present an obstacle to him getting what they want need only ask the Ontario PC MPPs he alienated, or the women he offended, or the social conservatives that he brushed aside, or the Bramptonians who are less than thrilled with his tenure as mayor.

And, true to form when pressed, Brown was careful to reassure everyone that his comments were misconstrued by the article. It was, of course, what he knew we'd want to hear. ■

Josh Lieblein is a political campaigner turned pundit and pharmacist who lives in Kitchener, Ont.

Toronto musician Lorie Wolf and her search for justice after sexual assault: 'The feelings of isolation, loneliness and betrayal are deep'

When I was 17 years old and in my final year of high school, I was lured into the office of a doctor, who was a friend of my parents—a self-proclaimed (as I found out later) dermatologist specializing in acne care. When I arrived, he sat me down, showered me with compliments, and poured an unknown substance into my coffee. In a hazy state of inebriation and detached disbelief, he led me into his examination room, made me take off my shirt, bra and skirt, laid me down, and proceeded to molest me. I'll spare you the details, as this story isn't

about him, anyway.

It's about the stigma and shame that keeps people like him safe. It's about a community that can't acknowledge its part in all this. It's about you.

When I got home the night of the assault, I somehow had the presence of mind to write everything down in my journal. It took 15, single-spaced pages for me to complete my outpouring of anger, betrayal and disbelief. I told a few people right away, including some close friends who advised me that there was really nothing I could do about it. My best friend at the time told her mom, who did nothing.

I couldn't tell my parents. They put this man on a pedestal; "Call him 'Rebbe' when you see him!" they would exclaim. They found out eventually when my mom stumbled upon my hidden diary five years after the incident. She read it and then passed it to my dad. They immediately cut ties with the doctor and his family. However, instead of going to the police, they filed a complaint about the doctor with the Toronto *beit din* (rabbinic court).

Like in many other tight-knit religious and secular communities, many people are reluctant to register their complaint with the secular system because they feel bound to maintain the reputation of the *frum* community in the eyes of both Jews and non-Jews. Also, my parents were born in the late 1940s in post-Holocaust Europe. Jews certainly didn't trust the secular authorities, and vice-versa. But I digress. The doctor admitted everything he did to me before the rabbinical tribunal. The rabbi gave him a fine. Then, they let him go home. The end.

Fast forward to 2017. The #MeToo movement was in full swing. I had never forgotten the fear and trauma of being molested, the humiliation of the *beit din* hearing, the subsequent payout, the horrible guilt that this pervert was still out there, and the deep, unshakable knowledge that justice has not been served. I had been in therapy and was on anti-anxiety medication since the age of 19, diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Empowered by the stories emerging in the media, I finally worked up the courage to pursue charges. I reported the incident to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO), and then Toronto police. I felt that the case was in the bag. After all, I had a diary with detailed information from my 17-year-old self, and a roomful of rabbis who witnessed his confession. The papers they gave me after the confession were in my possession—documents from the *beit din* saying I was to be paid a certain amount for "damages" (it did not specify the nature of those damages).

I had a friend whose mom worked in the office of the *beit din* at the time, and she smugly told me on many occasions that she knew all about the incident, as the relevant paperwork had passed over her desk. My friend said she would support me by attending my court dates with me. I felt strongly that my friend's mother would come to my aid and testify on my behalf. However, when push came to shove and I approached my friend's mother to ask her to come forward with testimony, she declined to give a police statement. My friend decided she couldn't help me anymore because she knew the doctor's family and "felt sorry for his kids." I ended my friendship with her because I felt hurt and betrayed. It was among many disappointing encounters I had with people in the *frum* community.

When they were visited by the Toronto police detective, the rabbis of the *beit din* claimed they couldn't remember what those damages were all about, and said that they kept no paperwork from so far back. Despite this, after a two-year wait, the police decided that I had a strong enough case to have the doctor arrested on two counts of sexual assault and two counts of sexual exploitation of a young person. It would be another year before I had my day in court, which almost didn't happen because the prosecutor had trouble convincing people to submit their testimony. It was then I painfully found out my own parents were reluctant to sign. The trial went on.

The CPSO also agreed to investigate and eventually flagged the doctor's page on the college's website for all to see. In an attempt to have other potential victims come forward, I sent the CPSO link to the doctor's page, which stated the allegations, to friends I had grown up with in the community and who would have known my abuser and asked them for their help by posting the link to the page on their social media. Not one person posted it and most of them never even wrote back. I confronted a couple of them who I thought were my close friends. One said that it wasn't his "place" to post these things (whatever that means) and the other admitted she was too frightened. Neither lives in Toronto, or did at the time.

The feelings of isolation, loneliness and betrayal are deep. Time after time, I see cases of people in the community who choose to turn a blind eye rather than confront someone whose behaviour harms the most vulnerable, or else convince the victim, family and community to keep it hush. This gives the perpetrator opportunities to lure in new victims and leaves a wake of broken people in his/her wake. (Yes, women can be abusers too.) This has to stop.

The Crown finally decided there was enough evidence to proceed to trial. I took the stand and faced my abuser for the first time in 23 years. As I write this, I'm coming down from the shell shock of a humiliating cross-examination. The trial was to continue in May 2020.

Update: June 2021

While waiting for what I hoped would be the final day in court in May 2020, the pandemic took over and all court cases were postponed. In an effort to do something about the growing backlog of postponed criminal cases, the Crown decided to withdraw my case.

Maddeningly, Leon Herman, the doctor at the centre of this case, had seen his opportunity to flee and ran to northern Israel, where he claimed that he had little access to stable internet and was in general not tech-savvy enough to operate Zoom-type platforms. Bringing him back to stand trial was impossible. How he was able to get on a plane to Israel while facing criminal charges for sexual assault, I'll never know. Since the Crown had little chance of successfully prosecuting him, it withdrew the charges.

Thankfully, the CPSO saw it differently. In October 2020, a college tribunal revoked Herman's medical licence, found that he engaged in "disgraceful, dishonourable or unprofessional" conduct by sexually abusing a patient (me), and ordered him to repay \$22,000 in costs to the college.

It was a cathartic moment to finally have someone other than

my therapist acknowledge that the man who had hurt me deeply would no longer be able to practice medicine in Ontario. It came a little too late to make any difference in his career: Herman saw the writing on the wall and retired as soon as he was charged with sex crimes. He didn't attend the hearing at the CPSO, but sent two lawyers who sat impassively the whole time.

I went public and posted the results of the CPSO hearing to Facebook. All that information had already been posted anyway on the CPSO website, so I no longer feared being sued for libel or being caught with tiny variations in stories on social media. Public disclosures like this have been exploited by defence lawyers in the past.

On Facebook, I publicly invited all those who feared confronting their attackers or felt confounded by a looming, confusing legal procedure to contact me for comfort and advice. Many, many people wrote in about how they felt sorry for me for having lived through such a nightmare. I responded with, "don't feel bad for me. I won. I confronted my past. I challenged the system. I instigated change."

There will always be horrible people who want to take advantage of innocence and trust. But perhaps they will read my story and think twice about being abusive over fears of being prosecuted. Perhaps someone who is suffering silently will hear my story and know that there is a way out, and even if the results aren't ideal, as in my case, they will find comfort and closure by taking action.

Perhaps the *beit din* will advise parents who approach them for arbitration to contact the police instead of taking pains to conceal pedophiles. Maybe, just maybe, parents will teach their children to trust themselves, and that any unwanted touch is bad touch, and that no one—no rabbi, no relative, no doctor, no teacher—is allowed to make them feel unsafe. In 2022, I had the publication ban lifted from both the CPSO and Ontario courts so I could share my story and hope that some good comes of it. ■

Lorie Wolf is a musician, composer and educator living in Toronto.

Deep ties between China and the Jews are on display at a Toronto art exhibition called Tribute to Friendship

/ Alex Rose

An art exhibit that honours the long and rich—but not well-known—history between China and the Jews opens May 25 in Toronto.

Ian Leventhal, a Toronto artist who helped organize the exhi-

bition *Tribute to Friendship*, said it marks the millennium anniversary of Jewish life in China. One thousand years ago, a Jewish community was founded in the Silk Road city of Kaifeng, during the Sun Dynasty. There are still ancestors of those original Jewish settlers in Kaifeng, and since that time, other Jewish communities in China have risen and fallen away including in Tianjin and Harbin and most notably in Shanghai, where around 20,000 Jews fled to escape the Holocaust.

Leventhal first learned the extent of Jewish history in China when he visited the country over 20 years ago. In Shanghai, he saw the old Jewish district, including a ghetto and synagogue. There, he met Wang La Fiang, resident historian of the museum, who shared stories of his Jewish friends who had lived in the neighbourhood before the community dissolved under Mao Zedong's rule.

"I was completely fascinated by it. And I looked around, and they had a tiny museum there, it was very meagre, and I thought 'I would love to be able to help tell this story,' the story about the compassion shown by the Chinese during the 1930s and '40s to the Jewish people fleeing Nazi Europe," Leventhal said.

"When I came home, I rallied a group of people... to do an art collection... a gift of friendship as a thank you to the Chinese people for this humanitarian rescue during the Shoah period."

Thirty-three artists donated their work for the exhibition, which was first shown in Toronto's Chinese Cultural Centre in 2002, before being shipped as a gift to Shanghai. After the exhibition opened in Shanghai, the local district of the Chinese government reached out to Leventhal and other contributors to ask for their continued help in promoting this aspect of Chinese Jewish culture.

Over several years and 18 visits to Shanghai, Leventhal helped turn the city's old Jewish district into a historical preservation zone, protecting it from demolition and setting it up for future restoration projects. For example, it served as a catalyst for the later restoration of the old synagogue, Leventhal said.

For the 20-year anniversary of that first exhibition, Leventhal and the team wanted to once again do something to bring the communities together and contribute to mutual friendship. Additionally, the exhibition is opening during May, which is recognized as both Asian and Jewish Heritage Month.

"We wanted to examine all aspects of our common history. And one of the lenses that we felt was important this time is, in the present-day climate that our two communities are living in, even locally, is one of heightened racism," Leventhal said.

"So, a lot of what we're trying to do is showcase harmony and understanding between what seems like very different, diverse communities, to sort of mitigate some of these tensions that are prevalent today."

The opening night of the exhibition will include a klezmer fusion concert by Beyond the Pale, a Chinese dance performance by MyMulan Culture, a lightshow with Jewish and Asian themes by Gina Godfrey that will be accompanied by Cantor David Rosen's Temple Singers from Holy Blossom Temple, and a music video called *Chai Shanghai* by Len Rosen.

***Tribute to Friendship* is at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto, 5183 Sheppard Ave. E., from May 26- June 8. The exhibit is open from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. ■**

Alex Rose is a Toronto-based reporter for The C.J.N.

Sharon, Lois and Bram's legacy lives on—with a family act for a new generation of elephant-counting fans

/ Ellin Bessner

Like so many other Canadian kids, Ethan Ullmann and his younger brother Elijah grew up singing the words to songs such as "Skinnamarink" and "One Elephant, Deux Elephants" by Sharon, Lois and Bram.

But the Toronto university students never imagined performing those 1980s and '90s children's music hits for modern-day audiences.

Of course, the fact that the brothers are also Hampson's grandsons had a lot to do with it.

The current incarnation of the legendary group is composed of three generations, under the billing of Sharon, Randi and Friends. (Randi Hampson is their mom.)

The act is hoping to see young fans show up—with their parents and maybe even grandparents in tow—to wiggle and clap and dance at their first in person concert since the pandemic started, at the 1,100 seat-Regent Theatre in Oshawa on Sunday, May 15.

And for Sharon, it's been a long wait to get back to the stage this way.

"You can imagine for a grandmother to do it, for a bubbe, to be doing it with her daughter and her grandsons is, only, like, the best thing!"

Ethan, who turns 21 on Sunday, plays bass and flute, while Elijah, 18, is a vocalist alongside his mother and grandmother. Randi's partner James Meschino plays guitar, and Ethan's roommate Zachary Dawood is their percussionist.

But how Sharon got here is a whole story in itself.

Sharon Hampson, Lois Lilienthal (who died in 2015) and Bram Morrison emerged from Ontario's folk music scene with a debut album in 1978. The trio of Jewish singers recorded 21 best-selling albums, performed at the White House, the United Nations and Carnegie Hall, and were North American television fixtures for over 20 years: first with *The Elephant Show* and later on *Skinnamarink TV*.

Hampson's daughter joined the entourage as manager when Sharon and Bram did a farewell cross-Canada tour in 2019—after which Morrison, now 81, retired from touring. But when the pandemic hit, Randi, a Toronto lawyer, started mounting virtual shows with family and friends.

They even re-recorded the song "Talk About Peace," which was originally written by Hampson's late husband Joe, after the Vietnam War. He became a member of the legendary Canadian group The Travellers, who composed the home-grown version of "This Land is Your Land".

Randi thought the song's message was just as relevant today

So they invited Bram, plus Blue Rodeo's Jim Cuddy, actor Colin Mochrie and two dozen other entertainers to add their tracks to the 2020 music video.

A new album followed with material recorded at live performances from back in the day. Next came a kids' book called *Skinnamarink*, featuring new lyrics penned by Randi. A documentary is next, along with two more books. (The next one, due in August 2022, is called *Sharon Lois & Bram's One Elephant Went Out to Play*.)

With her Gen Z grandchildren as part of the musical team now, Sharon is finding new ways to reach her old fans, plus connect with new ones. The Sharon, Lois and Bram account on TikTok boasts 122,000 followers so far and 1.3 million likes.

The grandsons think it's "surreal" to hear things like "Hey, I saw your grandmother on my feed!"

Connections like these lead to quickly learning when actor Kate Hudson filmed her daughter singing "Skinnamarink" while holding two microphones. And singer Josh Groban posted a throwback photo of himself listening to the original act's second album, *Smorgasbord*. (Drake, a Toronto rapper with a toddler of his own, may not be too far behind.)

Ethan and Elijah insist they felt no pressure to join the "firm," as the British Royal Family is often called. They have their own eclectic musical tastes, too: Elijah is a Beatlemania who sings the Paul McCartney song "I Will" at some of the family's virtual concerts. Ethan is more into Diana Ross and Kool and the Gang.

Still, being raised in a musical home and ingesting the music of their famous grandparents made it easier for the two University of Toronto students to come on board.

Ethan: "Basically my mother and my grandmother came up to me and said, 'Hey, we're doing some of these little virtual concerts. Do you want to accompany us?' And I said, 'You know, Sure.' And then this sort of started expanding over time, gradually."

It took Elijah, who is in his first year studying political science and history, a little longer to agree to participate in the family lockdown jams.

"I would be playing a game with somebody online, and... then I would realize that I was subconsciously singing it when they were practicing downstairs. And then eventually it was a natural progression that I would just end up helping them with their

music."

That's an experience which Randi Hampson knows well. She began singing with the original trio at age 3—first watching backstage, and then helping with vocal arrangements. But she never imagined performing with three generations at once.

Randi's younger brother, Geoff Hampson, has his own career as a professional bridge player, and is not involved with the family performances. His mother blames an inferior Toronto high school music program for discouraging him.

But the grandsons found their footing onstage. Sharon is particularly impressed by Ethan's flute skills, and Elijah's ability to pitch a little lower to match Bram's rich baritone—which is on display when they harmonize on "She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain."

So, how does the Hampson clan think they can reach new fans today? Randi thinks there are enough parents who want to expose their kids to quality, no matter how many will settle for "Baby Shark."

Sharon explains that the original philosophy of the trio included an explicit goal not to teach anything. Instead, the songs would do that organically, when the young listeners interact and sing along. The magic of the music was in making audiences feel safe.

Onstage, the boys don't emphasize that Hampson is their real-life grandmother. Instead, they tease her about her timing.

Despite celebrating her 79th birthday in March, Hampson remains diligent about attending her regular exercise sessions. But with age, she's slightly modified her act. For example, she no longer dashes across the stage.

Still, the family marvels at her pep, and how she still can get an audience up on their feet and dancing.

Even so, in getting back on the road, she's anxious about how her own vocals will hold up.

"Everything is in a lower key. I worry about my voice, but it's been okay. My family keeps telling me it's okay."

And, if it isn't, she hopes the rest of the group will be honest with her. But she hopes Sharon, Randi and Friends can draw crowds for a while.

"I don't feel like stopping yet." ■

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

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The Montreal woman who returned to a land her family fled 30 years ago—to help the Ukrainian refugees of today

/ Janice Arnold

Back in 1992, she was a child fleeing Transnistria with her family from a military conflict to Ukraine.

Thirty years later, Irina Polak Veronneau was back in the land of her birth, this time helping Ukrainians seeking refuge in Moldova from war.

Social worker and art therapist Veronneau, a school counselor for Agence Ometz, volunteered with IsraAID, Israel's leading non-governmental humanitarian aid organization, in Moldova from April 9-30. She worked with children and their mothers in refugee centres in the capital of Chisinau, formerly known as Kishinev, a city steeped in Jewish history, much of it violent.

Veronneau is no stranger to disaster zones. She first worked with IsraAID in 2006 in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake, and in Sierra Leone during the ebola outbreak six years ago.

But returning to Moldova was personally emotional with its echoes of her own experience as a 13-year-old. "As soon as the plane touched down, I had tears in my eyes," she said.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the eastern Transnistria region unilaterally broke away from Moldova and in 1992 the dispute with Russia escalated into armed struggle.

"We left Transnistria in a hurry, me, my parents and older sister, and got on the bus for Odessa. We left behind almost everything, bringing mostly family photos and books," she said.

The family stayed in Ukraine only a few months before making aliyah to Israel.

Veronneau, who has lived in Montreal for four years, was in Israel in March visiting relatives when IsraAID reached out to see if she would take on one more assignment.

"My only hesitation was whether I could take the time from work; I was very moved Ometz (a Federation CJA agency) and École Maimonide were so supportive," she said. "They saw it as *tikkun olam*."

Of course, she also had the blessing of her Quebec-born husband who stayed at home with their two children aged 8 and 6. They met in Haiti, where both were working on humanitarian projects – he with the United Nations and she with IsraAID again. "It was supposed to have been two months, but turned into two years," she said.

IsraAID was one of the first foreign teams on the ground in Mol-

dova, arriving the day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, serving those in need without distinction to their origin. Since then Moldova, a small country of just 2.6 million people, one of the poorest in Europe, has received over 400,000 Ukrainian refugees. According to the United Nations, that means Moldova has welcomed the highest proportion of refugees per capita of any country.

So the needs were great when Veronneau arrived. She assisted in several reception centres set up by the government, drawing on her art therapy skills to ease the refugees' trauma. Most came from the Kyiv area, but some had fled the devastated city of Mariupol.

They came in buses, or on foot. Veronneau was struck by one elderly woman who had walked kilometers to cross the border.

She also trained local aid workers who have carried on since she left. Russian, a language in which Veronneau remains fluent, was the lingua franca.

Veronneau, who earned her MSW at Hebrew University, went back to school after she settled in Montreal for a certificate in art therapy at Concordia University, something she had long wanted to do.

She realized from her earliest humanitarian missions how powerful art, not only visual but the full range from music to drama to movement, can be for people enduring trauma.

The Ukrainian children, who had experienced shelling and devastation, were often able to express their feelings more easily while engaged in an art project, she said, an approach more gentle than face-to-face dialogue.

The mothers also were able to talk more openly when they had something to occupy their hands with. "We would put some clay on the table. No one was told they had to do anything with it, it just happened naturally: they would reach for it and slowly start speaking about what they were feeling," said Veronneau who also works in a women's shelter in Montreal.

The strongest emotion was uncertainty, she found, about the homes and loved ones they left, the impact on their kids, and what would happen next.

Veronneau had a little time to get reacquainted with Moldova, once known as Bessarabia, and its history. By the 1890s, Jews represented almost half the population of Kishinev, which was the scene of two terrible pogroms in the early 20th century and whose Jewish community was decimated in the Holocaust.

She was amazed by the beauty of the city today and felt at home. She visited her grandparents' former house about two hours outside Chisinau. Her mother came in from Israel for a few days.

At Passover Veronneau picked up matzah at the Chabad centre that reaches out to the small Jewish population in the city today.

"I feel gratitude toward IsraAID for this opportunity," she said. "It is a great feeling to have had the privilege to do something to help people on their very difficult journey. And I learned a lot."

Since coming back to Montreal, Veronneau has kept in touch with some of the refugees, sending short videos through WhatsApp to encourage them to carry on. ■

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

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