

The Canadian Jewish News

THE SAUCY SOPRANO Melina Schein's wild ride from opera to kreplach

/ page 6



CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

HALIFAX	8:07
MONTREAL	7:49
OTTAWA	7:58
TORONTO	8:08
WINNIPEG	8:37
EDMONTON	8:55
CALGARY	8:48
VANCOUVER	8:19

Toronto police's 2021 hate crimes data	page 2
Montreal man pays back a D-Day debt	page 3
Thoughts on raising a multilingual child	page 5
A personal film about abuses at Huronia	page 7

**WELCOME TO THE 18TH EDITION
OF OUR PRINTABLE WEEKLY DIGEST.**

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK: INFO@THECJN.CA

Toronto police report the most targeted group for hate crimes in 2021 were Jews

/ Alex Rose

Jews were the demographic most targeted by hate crimes in Toronto last year, according to the annual hate crime statistical report presented at a Toronto Police Services (TPS) board meeting on May 2.

Of the 257 hate crimes that were reported in Toronto in 2021, 56 targeted the Jewish community, followed by 47 targeting the Black community and 41 targeting the East and Southeast Asian community. The 257 hate crimes represent a 22 percent increase from the 210 reported in 2020.

The majority of the reported hate crimes that targeted Jews—36 of 56—were classified as mischief under \$5,000. According to the report, vandalism and graffiti were the two most common types of this crime, and they were most often reported at schools of all types, on public transit, and in apartment buildings.

The second most common hate crime against Jews was assault, with seven reported cases.

The onset of COVID seems to have led to a rise of violent hate crimes against East and Southeast Asian people, as over 20 cases of assault were reported against them in 2021.

Black people were targeted with 19 cases of mischief under \$5,000 and 11 cases of assault.

Muslims were the only other ethnic or religious community with reported hate crimes in the double-digits at 14, with five assaults.

“Year over year we are seeing an increase in hate motivated crimes in Toronto and we have taken steps to increase the capacity of our dedicated Hate Crime Unit and expand our community outreach efforts to address community concerns directly. Hate crimes victimize not only the person, but also the communities they identify with and the negative effects can be long-lasting,” Chief of Police James Ramer said in a statement from TPS.

“We know hate crimes often go unreported and we are committed to working alongside our community partners to break down barriers and develop relationships so that more people will feel comfortable coming forward to report these crimes.”

To help combat hate crimes and increase investigative capacity, the 2022 budget includes a redeployment of resources towards the hate crimes unit. The redeployment will create two additional positions dedicated to hate crime education, prevention, and investigations.

The statement also said that the Hate Crimes Unit is in regular collaboration with a number of TPS community engagement services, including the newly formed Jewish Community Consultative Committee.

During the May 2 meeting, which took place virtually, Mike Teper of the Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation gave a

deputation after the presentation on the 2021 hate crime statistics. Teper commended the TPS for working with all the levels of government and other police forces to fight hate crimes.

Teper also raised a concern that antisemitic hate crimes are classified as religious as opposed to ethnic or nationalistic, which does not reflect the nature of the hate crimes targeted against Jews. For that reason, he urged the TPS to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

Later on in the meeting, Ramer addressed Teper’s concern. “Regardless of whether the offending behavior is motivated by animus towards religion, ethnicity or race, if the behaviour fits within the definition of hate crime under the Criminal Code and the Crown consents, we will lay that charge,” Ramer said. “So quite often you’ll see that there are other non-hate-crime provisions in the code that we will utilize when the specific hate crime charges cannot.”

Aside from raising the concern about categorization, Teper also commented about the types of hate crimes directed at Jews.

“Though the majority of these hate crimes consist of mischief to property under \$5,000, little comfort can be taken from the statistic. As the detective pointed out earlier in this presentation, antisemitic vandalism is not a joke, it’s not a prank, it’s not trivial, and it’s not victimless. It is, more than anything else, a crime of intimidation,” he said. “Every act of antisemitic vandalism, in that sense, is an act of violence and a threat to public safety.” ■

Al-Quds Day Rally in Toronto less vitriolic than in past years—but still not ‘benign’, Jewish groups say

/ Alex Rose

This year’s Al-Quds Day rally in Toronto, held on April 30 outside the city’s University Avenue courthouse, was not as hateful or antisemitic as many concerned organizations and advocates feared it would be, based on past iterations of the event.

The day before the event, Toronto police chief James Ramer held a press conference to address the large number of protests that were planned for the weekend in the city, and specifically mentioned the upcoming Al-Quds Day rally. Ramer said the police would be taking extra steps to monitor the event and ensure it remained peaceful and lawful, and would arrest anyone who crossed the line into criminality.

Al-Quds Day, held on the last Friday of Ramadan, was first started in 1979 by Iran as a way to promote the Palestinian cause and oppose Zionism and Israel. In the past, the Toronto rallies have had antisemitic rhetoric and images, and occasionally led to clashes between attendees at the rally and counter-protesters.

After the event, Constable Laura Brabant, Media Relations Officer for the Toronto Police Service (TPS), confirmed over email that no arrests were made and no cautions were issued at the rally for any criminal offences, including hate crimes. She said it was a lawful protest, and that the group was cooperative and peaceful.

According to a press release from B'nai Brith Canada published on May 2, participants in the rally shouted slogans such as "Long live the Intifada!" and "We heed your call, oh Nasrallah!" referring to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Noah Shack, vice-president of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), credited Ramer's message with proactively helping to keep the peace by setting the expectations for the protest's participants. Shack said that although antisemitism and falsehoods about Israel were still present, there was nothing approaching the vitriol and level of hate promotion that had been seen in the past, such as dehumanizing language and calls for violence against Zionists and Jews.

CIJA is still reviewing videos and images from the event to see if they can unearth any criminal activity. One thing Shack did notice is that it seemed like members or organizers of the rally were making more of an effort to control its tone. For example, in reviewing the footage from the rally, Shack said CIJA had not yet identified any Hezbollah flags, which had been flown liberally in past rallies. All that being said, Shack still wants to focus on why the rally is occurring in the first place.

"I'm glad that it wasn't as bad as it's been in years past, but that doesn't take away from just how bad it actually still was. I think that there's still a lot that's concerning about this protest and demonstration. I'm glad that it didn't include the kind of vitriolic calls for violence that we've seen in the past, or the dehumanization at levels that we've seen in the past," he said. "But by no means was this a benign rally, and its very purpose is a call for the destruction of Israel. That's something that obviously concerns our community, and is deeply problematic. The more you demonize an entire society, you dehumanize its population, and if you dehumanize the population, it makes violence against it okay."

In their press release, B'nai Brith Canada called on the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to examine the charitable status of mosques that helped facilitate the rally by busing participants to the rally location. Of the five mosques that were used as pick-up locations, four operate as registered charities, and B'nai Brith has complained about three of them in the past, the press release said.

"The ongoing impunity for religious charities that breach the conditions of their charitable status is unacceptable and against public policy," Michael Mostyn, CEO of B'nai Brith Canada said in the press release. "Canadian taxpayers must not be forced to subsidize the promotion of hatred against Jews or Israelis and glorifying acts of terrorism, via our charities system." ■

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

**FOR MORE STORIES GO TO
WWW.THECJN.CA**

How this Montreal businessman just repaid a 78-year old debt to France, where his father was rescued from the Nazis on D-Day 1944

/ Ellin Bessner

It was an overcast day in early April when Montreal businessman Harvey Engelberg found himself in the middle of a muddy farmer's field in northern France, reciting the Jewish memorial prayer for the dead.

Engelberg was repaying a 78-year old debt on behalf of his late father. Cobby Engelberg had served as an RCAF radio operator during the Second World War, and had nearly died in a crash into the same field on D-Day in 1944.

Harvey has been searching for years to find the location where the French people had saved his badly-wounded father. He had nearly given up.

"A month ago, I got a letter from France from a Madame Ferey, and in her letter, she says 'I own a farm in Bassenville,' and then my head just exploded," said Engelberg, referring to the name of the town. "I wrote back saying, 'Yes!', and she said, 'Well, we found bits of the plane crash on our property. Would you like them?'"

Engelberg bought a ticket to France and arrived at the Ferey cattle farm on April 3, where three generations of the couple's family were waiting to meet their Canadian visitor.

With a French television news crew along to document the emotional meeting, Engelberg sat down at the kitchen table of Therese Ferey and her husband Ghyslain. Forty-two pieces of the downed Dakota airplane were spread onto the tablecloth.

The Fereys had discovered the pieces over the years and kept them, just in case.

"We are happy, and I am happy that our children and grandchildren hear this story," Therese Ferey told France 3. "We'll be gone someday, and we are some of the last witnesses of the war between 1939 and 1945."

Operation "Tonga" with the RCAF and RAF

The Fereys did not own this brick farmhouse or the fields at the time of Engelberg's father's accident. They bought it 45 years ago. The original rescuers were the Duhamels.

It was the Duhamels who heard the doomed Dakota droning overhead after midnight on June 6, 1944.

The plane was part of Operation Tonga, dropping Canadian, American and British paratroopers behind German lines near the beaches of Normandy, before the main invasion force was due to land at dawn. The commandos were to capture and destroy key bridges and roads, to prevent counterattacks.

The four crewmen aboard Cobby Engelberg's Dakota KG 356,

from the RAF's #233 Squadron, left their base at Blakehill Farms for the secret mission. They were carrying equipment, plus 22-heavily armed British paratroopers. Their assigned drop zone was the farthest inland. The plane was soon hit by German flak and caught fire. The paratroopers were able to bail out, as did the navigator and the second pilot.

But Engelberg, the wireless radio operator, was injured and couldn't jump out. So the pilot, Harvey Edgar Jones, from Niagara Falls, Ontario, chose to stay at the controls to keep the plane level and try to land.

Instead, he crashed. Jones was thrown from the cockpit and died.

Engelberg survived but was unconscious, lying under one of the wings. Local villagers rescued the Jewish Montrealer from the site, while the Dakota's cargo of ammunition was still exploding. The Duhamel family hid him in their farm at Bassenville, until a passing Allied patrol eventually picked him up.

Engelberg only woke up ten days later, in a hospital in England, with no memory of the past two weeks.

After the war, Cobby and Mrs. Duhamel exchanged letters, and he learned that the farmers had been subsequently arrested by the Gestapo and interrogated. In retaliation for helping the wounded airman, and several others, the Duhamels' 16-year-old son was executed.

Harvey Engelberg has not been able to trace the Duhamels.

The farm's current owner Ghyslain Ferey found pieces of the plane, and more debris was discovered by their 90-year old next door neighbour, who clearly remembered the plane crash. So when small, weathered pieces of bent aluminium turned up during ploughing, they knew it had to come from that tragic night.

According to Canadian military historian Alex Fitzgerald-Black, who is executive director of the Juno Beach Centre Association in Canada, the Engelberg crew faced an enormous challenge on the night their plane was hit.

Fitzgerald-Black was visiting the Juno Beach Centre museum at nearby Courseulles-sur-Mer at the time of Harvey's trip, and helped to arrange his itinerary to the Bassenville site.

"The Squadron, when they were being briefed on it in the days before D-Day, they felt it was a big honour to be given the furthest inland drop zone, because that presumably would put them at the greatest amount of risk, both crossing the coast and the flak that they would experience doing that, but also getting inland and then having to turn around and go back and they would have the longest distance to travel," the historian explained.

The downed pilot, Harvey Jones, was quickly buried by the locals, and after the war, was re-interred at the main Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Ranville, about 12 kilometres to the west of the crash site. For his part, Cobby Engelberg spent about six months in hospital and then undergoing treatment and rehabilitation for a further year back in Canada. His head wounds kept him out of action for the remainder of the war.

Harvey said before his father enlisted, Cobby had been a Golden Gloves boxing champion in Montreal and was in top shape. But surviving not one, but two serious injuries during the war—including an earlier plane crash in Iceland they used to refer to as a "crackup"—changed Cobby permanently.

"To have gone through two crashes, two hours in the water there, a brain fracture, a concussion, amnesia: I would guess that the man that went into the war, came out of the war, I'd say, about seventy five per cent," Harvey said, adding that his father died at the age of 58. "I'll be honest. I'm sure all that stuff is related to whatever happened."

When Cobby returned from the war, he swore he would pay tribute to the pilot who died – Harvey Jones. After Cobby married, he had two daughters and then a son. Harvey Engelberg, now 69, has long been aware of the story and the heavy debt his name carries.

"That's why I'm here. It's pure luck, I guess. He landed in a field close to a farm of people who wanted to save him. And then it is pure luck that he was evacuated the day before the Nazis came," Harvey said.

The 42 pieces of the aircraft, and Engelberg's father's flight diary, and other wartime documents and his medals, have now been donated to the Juno Beach Centre, in France, where they will be put on display. The Montrealer decided to keep only his late father's "dog-tags", or ID tags.

He hopes the museum showing the pieces of the Dakota will prompt other local French families to come forward with any wartime souvenirs or remnants which they have been saving.

"I think it's too important to be selfish about and keep," Harvey said.

Deserved the Victoria Cross: historians

For historians like Alex Fitzgerald-Black, the pilot's heroic sacrifice by choosing to stay at the controls of his burning plane, needs to be resurrected from obscurity and properly recognized by the Canadian military. He hopes news coverage of Harvey Engelberg's French trip could spread awareness of the Jones story, and prompt the record to be changed.

Jones' Squadron Leader had recommended him for the rare, prestigious Victoria Cross, which can be awarded posthumously. The paperwork went up to the British Air Ministry in London, but, according to Fitzgerald-Black, they decided that they could not endorse the award. The explanation? So many pilots sacrificed themselves that way in Bomber Command, it became considered not out of the ordinary.

In the end, Jones was given a "Mention in dispatches", which came with a citation from the King, and a pin shaped like an oak leaf.

"I understand the decision making at the time. I do. But at the same time, it's a real shame," said Fitzgerald-Black. "We don't remember the story of Harvey Edgar Jones, unfortunately. And that's something, hopefully with this donation and this story, the Museum will work on correcting."

Back at the Fereys' farm, Harvey Engelberg and the French couple walked to the spot about a kilometre away from the farmhouse where his father's plane went down. Prayers were said. Engelberg recited the memorial prayer for his father, and for others who had died in the area on D-Day. That included some of his father's Jewish friends from Montreal who had served in the same Squadron, on the same mission.

Nathan Berger, 20, was also a wireless radio operator on a Dakota, taking paratroopers to their drop zone. All but one of the RCAF crew and the commandos on board his plane, died. Berger is buried at Ranville, too.

So is Alex Flexer, a paratrooper. He was in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion.

"I tried to say the Kaddish as best as I could because I was pretty sentimental and emotional," Harvey told The CJN.

Therese Ferey also said a prayer for her family over the site, in French.

The reunion brought a form of closure to both families, who bonded over a wartime gesture of kindness and bravery from strangers to a young Jewish airman who nearly died trying to liberate France. ■

Befriending Language: Rachel Seelig's thoughts on raising a multilingual child

Without much forethought, I found myself raising a multilingual family. My partner, who hails from a tiny Bavarian town, speaks German with our two children, while I speak Hebrew. Since we live in Toronto, English is a given. Our fantasy of trilingual children hasn't quite unfolded as imagined, however.

The toddler grunts while pursing his chubby fingers to sign for more food. The older one is more verbal, but he speaks a peculiar pidgin that invites very few interlocutors. Here's an example. At preschool drop-off one morning my son was eager to tell his teacher about making egg salad with my father. "How do you say Saba in English?" he asked me under his breath. "Grandpa," I whispered, as he turned to his teacher and proudly announced, "My grandpa is *kaufen viele beysim* to make *Eier-salat!*" The teacher gave him a smile and nod before throwing me a pleading glance.

My child's unique speech pattern is very sweet and funny, often perplexing, and occasionally concerning. "Will his new

teacher understand him?" I lay awake wondering the night before his first day of kindergarten. "Will he have trouble making friends?" And then, "Have we made a terrible mistake?"

Fortunately, a universal appreciation for Spider-Man's web-slinging moves put my son at ease among his peers, and his new teacher didn't bat an eye when he informed her that his "pancake falled on the *Boden*" earlier that morning. Suddenly I began to notice all the other languages being spoken at drop-off: French, Spanish, Urdu, Mandarin. Evidently, my multilingual child was in good company.

As I watched him line up with his schoolmates one September morning all clad in orange, I had goosebumps thinking of the countless Indigenous children who were forced to repress their language while confined far from their homes in our country's residential schools. How fortunate we are to accompany our children to school every morning and pick them up every afternoon, speaking any language we choose.

So what had I been so worried about? I now realize that I had been trying to impart to my child a broad multilingual worldview while judging him based on narrow monolingual expectations. Of course, these expectations aren't easily shed; they are central to our modern concept of identity. The idea of a powerful connection to a single language emerged in the 18th century alongside a more emotional understanding of the bond between mother and child. New notions of linguistic and familial fidelity contributed in turn to the growing devotion to a single nation – the marriage of fatherland and mother tongue.

As a scholar of modern Jewish literature, I look at languages through a particular lens. The writers I study came of age in *fin de siècle* Europe, as declining multiethnic empires were replaced by monolingual nation-states. These writers felt at home in multiple languages. Leah Goldberg, for instance, was raised in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) with German, Russian, and Yiddish, but began writing in Hebrew at a young age. Her Hebrew poems and children's books are still read in Israeli homes and schools today. But Goldberg never turned her back on the other languages of her youth. She was prolific not only as a writer but also as a translator who introduced Hebrew readers to the works of Tolstoy, Chekhov, Rilke, and others.

Among Goldberg's dearest friends was the poet Tuvia Ruebner, a native of Slovakia who at age 17 arrived an orphaned refugee

Join The CJN Circle

- ✓ Quarterly magazine
- ✓ Weekly printable editions
- ✓ Live event invitations

thecjn.ca/circle

on a kibbutz in northern Israel. Ruebner not only wrote in both German and Hebrew but also translated between them, in both directions: S.Y. Agnon from Hebrew into German, Goethe and Schiller from German into Hebrew. He also translated his own poetry from Hebrew into German, an act of self-translation that doubled as a kind of homecoming. After all, German was the language he spoke with his family, all of whom perished in the Holocaust, whereas Hebrew, his adopted language, remained “a foreign tongue flailing about.”

Both Goldberg and Ruebner understood intuitively that all communication is an act of translation, a “carrying over” (*übertragen*, as the Germans call it) from one place, culture, or person to another. Their work reveals the role of translation as dialogue and the beauty of imperfect expression, which seeks not to seduce nor subjugate but to inspire patience and attentiveness. As Ruebner once remarked: “Why must one master language? Why can’t one simply befriend language?”

My son has internalized the value of translation to such an extent that he often repeats to one parent whatever he has just told the other, even when we are all seated together at the dinner table. He seems to believe my partner and I were unable to communicate with each other before he came along. It’s exhausting, especially since his muddled expression is usually as incomprehensible the second time as it was the first. But perhaps I need to be more patient. My son’s inclination to mediate (even between his own parents!) is something to embrace.

Developmental psychologists typically highlight the cognitive benefits of acquiring a second language in childhood. This is hardly surprising, considering our culture’s obsession with milestones, scores, and benchmarks. Yet a recent study from the University of Chicago focused instead on the social benefits by showing the unique ability of multilingual children to take on another person’s perspective. In other words, multilingualism breeds empathy. Indeed, languages are not simply tools to increase one’s power in a world that fetishizes achievement; they are repositories of thought and feeling that reveal the vast spectrum of human experience.

I have no idea how or when my son’s trilingual pidgin will sort itself. To be honest, it doesn’t really matter. I see signs that English is becoming dominant, but I’m confident that German and Hebrew will remain in his ear. More importantly, I believe he will be a living link between two languages that history has violently separated. Will he master these languages? Perhaps. He has already befriended them. ■

Rachel Seelig, PhD is a scholar of modern Jewish literature who has held fellowships and teaching appointments at University of Toronto, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, University of Michigan, Columbia and Harvard. She lives in Toronto with her partner and two young children.

Please contact The CJN
for advertising opportunities
info@thecjn.ca

How the Saucy Soprano went from being a singer stranded in lockdown to cashing in with her Jewish cooking skills

/ Ellin Bessner

“Melina, working on a rose water and cardamom whipped cream...,” announces Noah Cappe, doing the play-by-play for *Wall of Bakers*.

The host of the Food Network Canada show was watching Melina Schein of Vernon, B.C., compete as one of the four contestants in the inaugural episode.

While this amateur baker was whisking the soft ingredients together in the studio kitchen, she’s telling the audience what it’s been like to bring her culinary talents in front of 12 Canadian celebrity chefs, who included Christine Cushing, Lynn Crawford and Patrice Demers.

“I realize I’m baking for this wall of magnificence!” Schein says, punctuating her answer with a theatrical swoosh of her arms in the air and a throaty cackle. “So exciting, I love the drama!”

The 46-year-old is an Argentina-born, “geographically misplaced” New Yorker, who makes her home in the Okanagan area of British Columbia.

And she sings operatically for a living.

But when the COVID-19 lockdown put a halt to her performing career, Schein decided to stave off boredom and unemployment by reconnecting with her love of Jewish food. (She also watched a lot of the Food Network.)

“I spent about three weeks on the couch in the fetal position wondering who I was and what I was going to do,” Schein told The CJN. “When life stops making sense. I feed people: just like my mother. Just like my bubbe.”

So, she started cooking her way through the 400 recipes in Leah Koenig’s *The Jewish Cookbook*. And over the course of 16 months, Schein documented her progress as the Saucy Soprano.

Some of the photos are very saucy, indeed. She’s posed in the altogether, holding up two pieces of strategically placed matzah, or tastefully hidden behind stacks of New York-style bagels.

Schein also launched a line of spices, including Middle Eastern Za’atar, Persian Advieh and Ethiopian Berbere.

A friend sent her a casting call note for a new reality baking show modelled on the successful *Wall of Chefs* concept. She flew to Toronto last summer for the taping of *Wall of Bakers*.

“It was one day, but it felt like it was the longest day of my life. That’s the only way to describe it.”

Aside from dealing with the jet lag, she had to get up at 4 a.m. to get to the studio by 5 a.m. After three baking challenges, the final interview was wrapped at midnight.

“When I made it to the final round, I remember just having this thought of ‘I don’t have anything left to give’ and then somehow you find something else. You pull it out of who knows where?”

Schein's culinary heritage has many origins: she is a descendent of Holocaust survivors on both sides. Her mother was born in a Displaced Person's camp in Germany, before moving to America. Her father's journey was via Buenos Aires. Her parents actually met in New York City's Greenwich Village, where Schein's mother was a busking singer in Washington Square.

As a result, lots of languages were used in her home: Spanish, Yiddish, Russian and Polish.

"The language changed depending on how much or how little my parents or grandparents wanted me to understand."

Schein was raised in New York and trained at The Juilliard School in voice and piano, also at Columbia University, then a year in Argentina. She's performed on and off-Broadway, and has sung diverse roles in both opera and musical theatre, ranging from *Così fan tutte* to *Guys and Dolls* and *Fiddler on the Roof*.

While at Juilliard, Schein met a Canadian opera student who became her first husband. The couple came to live in his small B.C. community over 20 years ago. She discovered the beauty of the scenery—and the dearth of Jewish culture and flavours.

"It gets a little bit lonely sometimes. And I yearn for my people. I yearn for a good bagel. I have to make my own."

During the pandemic, Schein went to great lengths (and also expense) to find the kosher ingredients required for all those recipes. Amazon had some of what she needed, but she had to make a Herculean effort to get things which many central Canadian Jews take for granted, like matzah.

She ordered it from a specialty store in Victoria, for about \$40 a box. Needless to say, she tried to use it sparingly.

Longing for community made her feel instantly at home in the Toronto studio of Wall of Bakers, when she was bantering with the Jewish host, Noah Cappe, and with two of the celebrity chefs on her episode: Amy Rosen and Jo Notkin.

She recalls how both Rosen and Notkin said something in Hebrew when Schein was discussing the origins of one of her dishes. Cappe even sang a little bit of his bar mitzvah portion—but that scene didn't make the final edit, even though she started singing along.

In recent years, Schein had been a busy performer, touring around Western Canada and North America singing Andrew Lloyd Weber numbers, such as from *Phantom of the Opera*.

One of those shows led to an offer of a recurring gig as the cantorial soloist at the Okanagan Jewish Community Centre's High Holiday services, in Kelowna. (That one ended several years before the pandemic.)

"Kol Nidre was probably my favourite piece to sing, ever," she said. "It's just absolutely stunning and exquisite."

Spoiler alert: When the episode aired at the end of March, viewers saw the four bakers go through three rounds of timed chal-

lenges: the crowd-pleaser that family and friends at home love to eat, plus a concoction made with mystery ingredients dreamed up by the judges. The final challenge is a signature dessert worthy of a pastry shop's display.

For her finale, Schein whipped up some personal nostalgia: a black-and-white cookie and egg cream drink inspired by the Lower East Side delis she visited with her bubbe and zayde.

As the winner of her episode, Schein pockets \$10,000. Hers was a one-off appearance, unlike cooking competitions with a full-season arc, such as *The Great Canadian Baking Show*.

Back at home in Vernon, she didn't throw a big watch party when her episode aired in March, due partly to the pandemic, but also because she was worried how she would come across in the final edit. But all over town, folks were watching in pubs and in restaurants and sending her messages of support.

Now she hopes the triumph will lead to new career opportunities, including a cooking show of her own. She's confident people will like her unusual combination of brash sauciness, soaring operatic voice, and a newly honed cooking talent. A robust social media following doesn't hurt, either.

But for now, Schein's put her Saucy Soprano alter ego on the back-burner. Since the social gathering restrictions have been lifted in her home province of B.C., her career as a vocalist has just resumed, performing in the Andrew Lloyd Weber tribute *Music of the Night*.

When she gets back to the kitchen, she'll try to remember advice she received from the expert bakers judging her stuff: lighten up on bold flavours, and tone down the spices and seasonings.

"And I remember one of the chefs said, 'You know, too much rose water and it's going to taste like your grandmother's bathroom.' I keep that in mind, too." ■

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

Filmmaker tells a deeply personal tale about the suffering of children at Huronia Regional Centre

/ Lila Sarick

Barri Cohen first learned of the existence of her half-brother on the day he died.

She was 12 when she heard about Alfie, a son from her father's first marriage, who had severe developmental delays and died just before his 24th birthday. There was also a younger brother, Louis, who she was told was also disabled and had died at home as a toddler.

The siblings were never spoken about again.

It would be decades before Cohen would learn that both Alfred and Louis had lived and died at Huronia Regional Centre, an institution in southern Ontario for children with develop-

Do Jewish comedians have anything new to say? Listen now: thecjn.ca/giggles



mental disabilities.

In 2013, a lawsuit launched by those who had survived the neglect and abuse at Huronia was settled. Premier Kathleen Wynne issued an official apology. And that's when Barri Cohen began to dive deep into the legal documents produced for the lawsuit.

What the filmmaker learned shocked her to her core.

"I was floored when I read them, I was absolutely floored. The level of detail of neglect, of harm, the number of incident reports, the number of institutional inspection reports that were ignored decade after decade after decade," Cohen said in an interview with The CJN.

"I couldn't believe that nobody knew about this and if they knew about it, they didn't care."

Unloved: Huronia's Forgotten Children, which premieres May 3 at Toronto's Hot Docs festival, is Cohen's response to the silence that surrounded the institution.

The documentary film unravels the secrets surrounding Alfred's and Louis' short lives as well as the conditions that allowed institutions like Huronia to exist for over 100 years.

Cohen also interviews survivors of the school, who describe the toll of living at Huronia. Some of the children sent to Huronia were not in fact disabled at all, but were placed there by children's aid societies who could not find foster homes, or by parents unable to cope. They tell harrowing stories of neglect, abuse and abandonment.

Shortly after the lawsuit was settled, the province allowed survivors and their families to visit the centre. Cohen bought a camera and with her half-sister, Adele, walked through Huronia, both of them seeing it for the first time.

Although the centre had been closed for several years by then, the cage-like cribs remained. Survivors pointed out rooms where they were routinely locked up and the scratches on the door left by desperate children.

"Adele was really motivated to go on those tours and to see and talk to people and to understand," Cohen recalled. "It was hard for her to watch the film, it made her very sad."

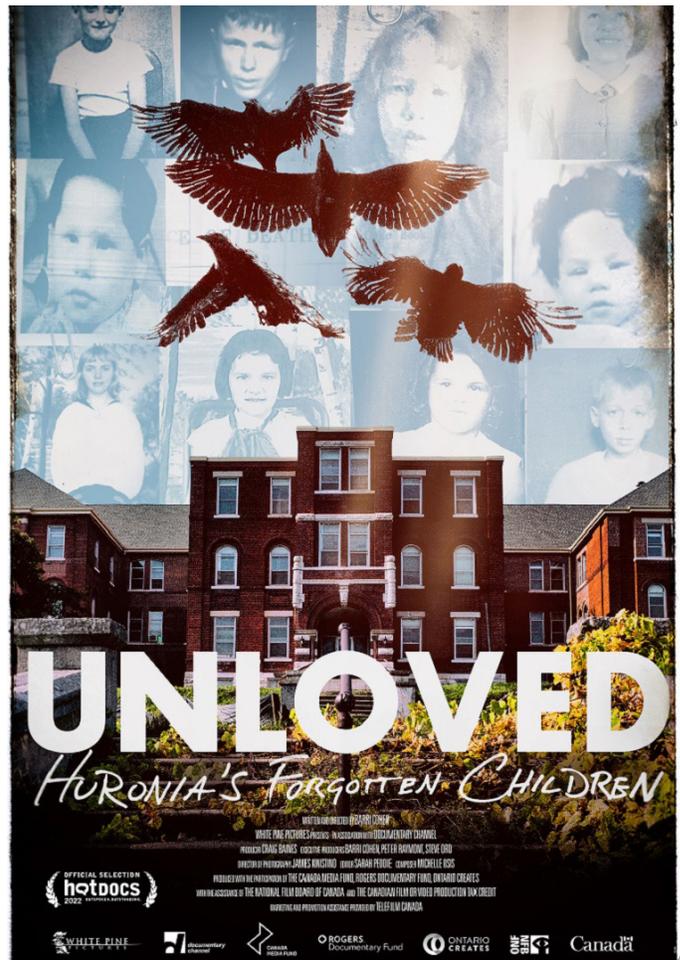
Unloved also follows Cohen's attempts to learn more about her two brothers. Although she was told Louis had died at home, she discovers that he was four years old when he died at Huronia. The documents that she uncovers show that both brothers suffered from numerous health problems and infections while at Huronia. Ultimately, the paper trail peters out and it appears a death certificate was never filed for little Louis.

Eventually, with the help of a dedicated researcher at the Ontario Jewish Archives, Cohen learned that the child was buried in the same Jewish cemetery as his older brother Alfred. A Jewish welfare agency paid the bill for the burial, but no grave marker for the little boy has been found.

"That became one of the driving mysteries of the film and emblematic of how people are dehumanized or shunned, even in death," she said.

Making the film affected all of Cohen's siblings, who had to reshuffle what they thought they knew about their earliest years and their family. It also raised deeper philosophical questions for Cohen.

"It made me question what is it about us as humans that consistently dehumanizes people who are different from us?" she asks. "When you think the other person is less human, you can do anything, you tell yourself."



"To separate small children from their families is to implicitly believe the kids don't have feelings like you and me... The trauma of separation as we know is enormous. It lasts a lifetime. For our brothers we'll never know what that was like, but we hear from survivors what that was like."

Although Huronia has been closed since 2009, the lessons of the film are still relevant, Cohen says. "Look at long-term care, look at what happened under COVID and it didn't happen under COVID, it just got revealed by COVID: the dehumanization, the segregation, the separation, the neglect, the abuse," she said. "The casual failure to do oversight over these institutions, that's an Ontario problem that goes back generations."

Meanwhile, survivors of Huronia and other similar centres around the province exist on meager payments of about \$1,100 a month. Families continue to struggle to find resources to keep their disabled children at home while waiting lists for services grow, she said.

"Once you segregate people away, it gets much harder to get accountability, never mind love and care. That's why I think it's an urgent film now."

Unloved will appear on CBC's Documentary Channel in the fall, and then move to CBC's streaming platform, Gem.

Cohen says she also plans to take the film to Ottawa and wants to arrange screenings for lawyers, medical professionals and disability activists. ■

Lila Sarick is news editor of The CJN.