

The Canadian Jewish News



**We chill out
with the
JEWS OF
YUKON**
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Jewish summer camps are pivoting to virtual visitors day—as yet another wave of COVID hits

/ Alex Rose

As the seventh wave of COVID, this one driven by the Omicron BA.5 subvariant, rampages through Canada, Jewish summer camps across the country have had to adjust their plans. For many camps, that meant moving their visitors day to the phone or online.

Some camps, such as Camp Manitou near Parry Sound, Ont., elected to hold their visitors day in-person as usual. Others, including Camp Massad in Quebec and Camp Kadimah in Nova Scotia, decided months ago to move their visitors days online. Camp New Moon, in Ontario's Muskoka region, held off until the middle of July to make that same call.

"Many camps elected to cancel long before the summer started. They were precautionary. We wanted to continue to follow the evidence and the trends, so we kept our options open," said Jack Goodman, who is the co-owner and director of Camp New Moon as well as a member of the Ontario Camping Association's COVID Action Committee.

New Moon eventually decided to forgo an in-person visitors day not just because of fears surrounding COVID, but other diseases as well.

"As we communicated to our parents, canceling visitors day was not just about the rising concern of COVID coming into camp, it was the rising concern of so many communicable illnesses that the community is overrun with now," said Goodman.

"We'd much rather have disappointed campers; it's easy for them to get over that a lot faster than getting over an illness."

"There's been a sudden rise in hand foot, mouth disease, GI tract disturbances, all sorts of things, lot of the influenza-like diseases that everyone gets better from, but a lot of these things aren't typically seen in the summer. And last summer, we saw a huge reduction in the number of COVID cases because public health restrictions were still in place, masks were still required, and so on and so forth.

"Now we see a surge in COVID, which is completely opposite to what happened last summer."

Camp Timberlane, which is near Haliburton, Ont., decided in mid-June to let every camper call their parents instead of hosting an in-person visitors day.

"It's 1,500 people hugging and kissing and really on top of each other. It's not just with people passing by, and it's very, very close contact. So we really decided to go against it," said Brit Lowes, one of the directors.

Between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. each of the 400-odd campers was allocated 10 minutes to make a phone call to their would-be visitors. Although it was a change from the usual proceedings, most families took it in stride.

"When we told (parents) that we weren't having visitors day, there were two people who were annoyed, and the rest went 'thank God,'" Lowes said. "They were basically fine with it. A lot of people were disappointed. They want to see camp. We've had the kids in camp for two years now, (their parents) have never seen it. It's a disappointment from that point of view, but it's okay."

The uptick in COVID cases has the potential to affect more than just visitors day for camps. According to Goodman, since public health measures were relaxed across the board this year, there were no guidelines that camps had to follow at the beginning of the summer; instead, it was up to individual camps to determine the optimal way for them to strike a balance between keeping everybody healthy and providing the best summer for their campers.

However, as COVID cases have risen, public health units have reached out to camps with more information. For example, multiple units in Ontario that contain a number of recreational camps have recently provided new guidelines or re-emphasized the importance of older ones.

On July 14, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit sent out a letter to all camps in its jurisdiction advising them of new COVID guidelines, and the Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit sent a similar letter on July 20 that referenced a document of best practices from December of 2021, as well as updated new rules for camps undergoing COVID outbreaks.

Both of those units also keep track of the COVID outbreaks in their domains. So far this year, Simcoe Muskoka has recorded six camps that have had COVID outbreaks (they do not provide the names of the camps), two of which have officially been declared over. Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge has recorded four camps that have had outbreaks, three of which have officially been declared over. ■

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

Obituary: Rabbi Dow Marmur, 87, led Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple—and described himself as having lived six lives

/ Ron Csillag

Rabbi Dow Marmur, a respected scholar and activist who served for 17 years as spiritual leader of Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple, Canada's largest Reform congregation, died in Jerusalem on July 17. He was 87.

Known by congregants for a stentorian speaking style, perhaps acquired by serving pulpits in England, and for punctiliously starting programs on the precise stroke of their advertised time—to the consternation of latecomers—Rabbi Marmur was a prodigious writer, teacher and advocate who lived his Reform Jewish principles by implementing initiatives at his temple despite early resistance.

His peripatetic life took him from war-torn Poland to Siberia, Uzbekistan, back to Poland, Sweden, England, Canada, and finally, to his beloved Israel. As his daughter Elizabeth eulogized at his July 18 funeral in Har HaMenuchot, in the hills of Jerusalem, “my dad had an accent from no one place.”

She recalled an atypical father, one “with no discernible hobbies,” who didn’t barbecue or tinker in a garage. “My dad was a scholar, a mentor, a leader. My dad had presence and substance. He was as stern as he was soft. He was as demanding as he was forgiving. My dad wasn’t like other dads. (He was) a workaholic and a homebody.”

Among the six books he authored was 2004’s *Six Lives*, a memoir reviewed as “a testament to one Holocaust survivor’s indomitable spirit and deep need to serve the Jewish people.”

The work cited his belief that there are two kinds of rabbis: “dog” rabbis and “cat” rabbis. Dog rabbis thrive in a life of service, whereas cat rabbis are best suited to a life of scholarship. “And like a cat with many lives, Dow Marmur survived harsh, life-threatening circumstances during and after the Second World War.” His six lives and their significance were: Poland: Beginnings; Soviet Union: Exile; Sweden: Refuge; England: Vocation; Canada: Challenge; and Israel: Homecoming.

He was born in 1935 in the southern Polish city of Sosnowiec, nearly a quarter of whose residents were Jews. He was the only child of Max and Cecilia Marmur, both active in the leftist Po’alei Zion movement. His father worked as a factory foreman.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the clan shifted eastward to the town of Jaslo, then further east to the Lvov region in Ukraine. But in 1940, they were deported to Siberia. Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, they found refuge in Uzbekistan, where they remained until they were repatriated to Poland in 1946. As a result of the meanderings, young Dow picked up several languages.

He added Swedish to his arsenal when the family moved to Gothenburg, Sweden in 1948. There, he began studying religion at the University of Stockholm in 1956, the same year he married Fredzia Zonabend, a survivor of the Lodz ghetto.

According to Canadian Jewish historian Frank Bialystok, Rabbi Marmur felt unfulfilled at university, so he and his bride decamped for London, where he entered Leo Baeck College and studied under several luminaries in the Reform movement. He was ordained in 1962 and was already serving as spiritual leader of South-West Essex Reform Synagogue in Ilford. In 1969, he became rabbi of North-Western Reform Synagogue in Alyth Gardens.

In 1983 came a job offer he couldn’t refuse: Senior Rabbi at the storied Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, home to an outsized figure in the Reform movement, Rabbi Gunther Plaut, who had earlier become the congregation’s senior scholar.

Rabbi Marmur “was both traditionalist and pragmatist, teacher and preacher par excellence,” wrote the late Irving Abella in a brief history of Holy Blossom. “His major concern was adult

education—when teaching his congregants the value of Reform Judaism, his emphasis would be on the noun, Judaism, not the adjective, Reform.”

Under Rabbi Marmur, adult learning became a priority, Abella wrote. “Though he found his early years at the Temple ‘challenging,’ (he) was widely respected for his erudition, appreciated for his willingness to discuss personal theology, and admired for his successful efforts in making services more traditional and meaningful.”

For the Temple’s current senior rabbi, Yael Splansky, it was “thrilling” to watch Rabbi Marmur guide the congregation “to do what was right.”

In her eulogy, Rabbi Splansky, who was invited by Rabbi Marmur to be his assistant in 1998, recalled three examples. Under his leadership, Holy Blossom established Out of the Cold, a program that welcomed the homeless.

“Every Thursday evening, the hungry, the homeless, and the lonely were invited guests for a warm meal, warm hospitality, and a good night’s sleep,” Rabbi Splansky recalled. “At the beginning, some congregants raised concerns; neighbours protested. But Rabbi Marmur and his partners held fast to the mitzvah, and decades later, the Out of the Cold program is a point of pride for the Holy Blossom community.”

In a similar vein, in the 1980s and early ‘90s, when the AIDS epidemic was raging and young Jewish men were dying, “most people only spoke in whispers. But Rabbi Marmur and a mission-driven team of women at Holy Blossom got to work. They established support networks for people living and dying of AIDS and for their loved ones. They raised funds to cover medical bills and funeral costs. They created a third seder with its own haggadah. Most importantly, they turned the whispers of fear and shame into a full-throated call for dignity, humanity, and eventually, justice and pride.”

He was also involved in interfaith and intra-faith work, and offered not mixed messages but challenging ones, Rabbi Splansky explained.

For example, he called for intellectual honesty in Reform Judaism and the autonomy of the individual. At the same time, he insisted that “the needs of the community must take precedence over the needs of the individual.” He delivered this “counter-cultural” message consistently in sermons, in writings, and in one-on-one counseling.

“While the congregation was sometimes reluctant to receive this message, they accepted his stance and yes, they admired him for it. Dow often said with a smile, ‘They thought they were getting an English gentleman, but what they really got was a Polish Jew.’

“Slowly and steadily, Rabbi Marmur brought Holy Blossom Temple to its place on the traditional wing of the North American Reform movement,” Rabbi Splansky eulogized.

Rabbi Elyse Goldstein recalled that Rabbi Marmur helped guide her career, starting when she worked with him at Holy Blossom. He was the first person she consulted when she decided to start City Shul, in downtown Toronto.

“Dow Marmur was my first and most important rabbinic mentor, my unwavering champion and advocate in those difficult first years in Toronto in the 1980s when being a female rabbi here was still suspect and exotic. He shaped my entire rabbinic life, and his insistence on scholarship, excellence, and prepara-

tion was my benchmark,” she said.

Benjamin Maissner, cantor emeritus at Holy Blossom, said Rabbi Marmur helped him become a “rounded” hazzan “beyond the pulpit and the musical aspect of my skills. His stature at the pulpit next to me, his delivery of sermons and prayers, only helped me dive deeper into the depth and the inner meaning of the prayers. He helped me and the congregation to achieve higher spiritual levels in getting closer to the Almighty.”

Rabbi Marmur had some great slogans, as Cantor Maissner recalled: “We Jews laugh with one eye and cry with the other” and “There is one kind of Judaism: The right one.”

An ardent Zionist, Rabbi Marmur served as the first chair of Arzenu, the international movement of Reform Zionists; president of Arza Canada; vice-president of the Canadian Zionist Federation; and on the executive of the World Zionist Organization.

Rabbi Marmur “was a champion of progressive social causes in Canada and Israel, where he remained sympathetic to the peace movement,” noted the Reform Jewish Community of Canada in a statement.

The group noted that he founded the Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada, which seeks to build bridges between Poles and Jews.

Rabbi Marmur retired in 2000. At first, he and his wife divided their time between Canada and Israel, and later moved there permanently. In 2000, he served one year as interim executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, and wrote regular opinion columns for The CJN, the Toronto Star and other publications, and occasionally gave lectures.

Rabbi Marmur is survived by his wife Fredzia; children Viveca, Michael and Elizabeth; and grandchildren Miriam, Nadav, Gabrielle, Leone, and Ethan. ■

Ron Csillag is the reporter emeritus for The CJN.

Ruth Markel talks about her search to find meaning after the murder of her son, Dan

/ Ellin Bessner

Just days after the eighth anniversary of Dan Markel’s murder, his Toronto family is now gearing up for another emotional milestone. Friday, July 29, they’ll be watching via Zoom when the woman who was convicted of helping to arrange the murder appears in a Florida courtroom, for a sentencing hearing.

In May, a jury found Katherine Magbanua guilty of murder and conspiracy charges in the assassination of Markel. The 41-year-old Canadian law professor was found shot to death in his car

outside his Tallahassee, Fla. home on July 18, 2014. He had just come back from the gym, after dropping his two young sons off at daycare.

Two hired gunmen were convicted of carrying out the murder, which prosecutors allege was done to benefit Markel’s ex-wife, Wendi Adelson, who was in a custody battle with him over where the two boys would live: Tallahassee or Miami.

One of the killers is now serving a life sentence, while the other received seven years in prison in exchange for cooperating with the authorities and pleading guilty.

Magbanua was found guilty—after her first trial ended in a mistrial—of acting as the go-between with the ex-wife’s family: she had worked for the Adelson family’s dental practice, and briefly dated dentist Charles Adelson, Wendi Adelson’s brother.

The trio split the \$100,000 payment in a series of cheques that came from Adelson’s clinic.

In Toronto, Dan Markel’s mother Ruth Markel is preparing what she will say to the court when the judge asks the family to read out a victims’ impact statement.

“There’s fast cars, there’s all kinds of arrests. There’s anything you want to find in this story, even things like Peyton Place, who has relationships with who and so forth,” Ruth Markel told The CJN in this exclusive first Canadian interview on the anniversary of her son’s death. “But what is not in the real story at all, and all of the people who are suffering now, is what is it like to be a homicide victim? What does it feel like? What is the family going through?”

It’s not the first time the Markel family has gone public with their anguish over losing their son, and with their fight for justice. Ruth Markel, Dan’s father Phil (the couple is separated) and Dan’s sister Shelly have spent eight years travelling back and forth to Florida since the murder.

Aside from dealing with the immediate aftermath of the crime, the Markels have been closely involved in the subsequent investigation, arrests, trials, and three convictions to date.

Now they’re anticipating the next step in the legal journey: Magbanua’s sentencing.

The woman faces a life sentence for the murder, and 30 years for the other charges. The prosecutors did not ask for the death sentence in her case. She has two children together with one of the killers.

Meanwhile, the investigation has also taken a crucial turn: police arrested Charles Adelson in April of this year, and charged him with masterminding his former brother-in-law’s murder. He is also set to appear in the same Tallahassee courtroom, on July 29, as part of his pre-trial process.

Markel’s ex-wife Wendi and their mother Donna Adelson have been named as co-conspirators, although Wendi has always maintained she didn’t know anything about the plot to kill her ex-husband.

Wendi Adelson had wanted to move to Miami with the couple’s two sons, Benjamin, who turns 13 on July 29, and Lincoln, born in 2010. Her parents live there. But the judge sided with Markel and ruled the children were to remain in Tallahassee.

Two days after the murder, Wendi Adelson packed up her house and did move with her sons to Miami. She also changed the boys’ last names from Markel to Adelson.

After 2016, she cut off access for the Canadian grandparents to

see the boys.

“And that became the hardest thing for me. It was difficult to lose Dan, but here you have living children, living family members and important ones that you were cut off from, and that was exceptionally sad,” Ruth Markel said, referring to the span of six years without seeing the children.

In June, Florida governor Ron DeSantis signed a new law named for Dan Markel, which covers grandparent alienation in specific cases where one custodial parent is convicted of murdering the other. The Markels worked with lobbyists and Florida politicians and also her sons’ friends in the Florida legal community to introduce the draft bill and see it pass.

While this law doesn’t apply to them at the moment, Ruth Markel believes the law had other important benefits for her personally.

“There is hope, there is resilience. And the important part is to, at some point, define yourself again and find meaning, which is what I did through the advocacy work with the grandparent legislation,” she said.

Another important part of Markel’s journey has been the writing of her new memoir *The Unveiling*. The book is set for release on Sept. 20.

The book tells what it’s been like for her and for her family behind-the-scenes since the murder, as the pieces fell into place about who killed her son and why.

It is based on notes she kept beginning after her son was killed, including during the first three arrests and all the trials. She wrote the main draft during the pandemic, but added an update this spring after Adelson’s arrest.

The book paints a portrait of Ruth Markel’s own journey with grief, and also about dealing with the criminal aspects of the investigation, including learning unfamiliar legal jargon, and how to handle reporters. She hopes other families who find themselves in similar situations can learn from her experiences.

“There’s the beginning, the middle, and the rest of your life,” Markel said, citing a favourite quote from the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. “The book doesn’t end the grief. The book is a way of finding some meaning.”

The title of the book is symbolic to her, because it was only after arriving for the unveiling ceremony for Dan’s gravestone at Pardes Shalom cemetery in Vaughan, Ont., did she confront the reality of his untimely death.

After the murder in 2014, she felt “sad” and “in a daze,” but seeing the piece of fabric wrapped around the fresh gravestone ready for the unveiling ceremony, was shocking.

“It was at that point that it just hit me like I could have collapsed and gone underground myself, and that’s the reason why I chose the title,” she said, explaining that the finality of his death was the beginning of her grief journey.

The book takes readers through the Markels encounters with Florida police and with his ex-wife, as early as a day or two after the murder. She describes walking through Dan’s home looking for important papers, and seeing the boys’ toys, which they would never use again.

She has mostly praise for the Florida police, the prosecutors, court officials, and with Dan’s law school colleagues and his friends, who set up a Justice For Dan organization. The family also was grateful to the victims services workers who helped them understand their legal rights to participate in the court

cases and investigation.

She also received advice during the trials from Abe Anhang, the father of slain Winnipeg real estate millionaire Adam Anhang. The Jewish man was killed in Puerto Rico in 2005 at the request of his ex-beauty queen wife, after a dinner to discuss their divorce. She was later convicted, along with her sister, and an ex-boyfriend, after an international police manhunt to Israel and Italy.

Dan Markel was born in Montreal, but grew up in Toronto, and then moved away to do undergraduate work at Harvard University. After stops in England and Israel for further studies, including a law degree from Harvard in 2001, Markel moved to Washington to work as a lawyer. After meeting Wendi Adelson, the couple moved to Florida, where Markel became a professor at Florida State University’s law school in Tallahassee. They married in 2006.

The book delves into the couple’s differences over living an observant Jewish life: Markel wanted the boys to keep kosher. His mother describes how Dan was on the board of a local synagogue and also had ties to a Chabad community. Adelson and her family didn’t respect his wishes, and would often feed the kids non-kosher food.

Ruth Markel’s estrangement from her grandchildren is also covered in detail, beginning in 2016, when the three conspirators were arrested. Markel breaks down how a chance meeting with another client at a Florida hair salon—“I am a hairdresser junkie”—prompted her to set her sights on improving the rights of grandparents to visit their grandchildren in that state.

House Bill 1116, unofficially called the Dan Markel act, was formally adopted on June 22, 2022.

Markel is convinced it was the pending ratification of the bill that prompted a surprise invitation in April from her former daughter-in-law, Wendi, to attend Benjamin’s coming bar mitzvah. After six years of no contact, the Markels hoped they could at least spend a little time alone with the boys, the day before the celebration, to get to know them again.

It was arranged they should fly down in April and spend the day.

“We saw the children. They’re not children anymore, they’re big boys. And it was amazing. And that was the best experience that we could have,” Markel said.

They could not have known that at the exact same time, on April 20, Florida police were arranging to arrest the boys’ uncle, Charles Adelson. He was picked up the next morning, and charged with the murder for hire plot, with the boys’ mother Wendi and their American grandmother, Donna Adelson, named as co-conspirators.

The break in the case came after forensic experts were able to enhance a surveillance recording of Adelson having a meeting with Katherine Magbanua in a Miami restaurant in 2016, to discuss the murder.

After Adelson’s arrest, and the implication of his mother, the Markels were told not to come to Benjamin’s bar mitzvah. Ruth Markel worries about the impact of the whole bizarre case on her grandchildren, who are now adolescents.

“Do they know anything? It’s hard to tell. I don’t think they’ve been naturally given any information,” she said, when asked what the kids know about their father’s murder. “We want the children to have as much of a normal life as they can have.”

Which is why petitioning for custody of the boys is not in the cards at present.

Ruth Markel and her family observed the eighth anniversary of Dan's murder in several ways: there were services held at two Toronto synagogues, and she also intended to pay a visit his grave.

Dan Markel would have turned 50 this year, in October. In his memory, his mother launched the Dan Markel fund through Hillel Ontario to help support the fight against antisemitism on campus.

As part of the commemoration, in 2023 the family will sponsor a gathering of Jewish university students at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont. It is likely to be a Shabbaton at Queen's, where her other two (Canadian) grandchildren attend.

While American news outlets have been devoting gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Markel case, less attention has been paid to the story north of the border, Ruth Markel lamented.

She hopes the launch of her book will pique the interest in her home country, especially in Toronto, and in Montreal, where she was raised and worked for years with that city's Jewish Family Services, now part of Ometz.

Meanwhile the case will be high profile on July 29, with the two court appearances. There is also an upcoming Apple TV series in the works, based on episodes of a 2019 Wondery true-crime podcast into the case called *Over My Dead Body*. ■

How did a few Israeli Jews end up settling down as 'sourdough' in the Yukon?

/ Ellin Bessner

Amir Dembner was anxious just before the 2022 Canada Day parade in Whitehorse, for which he volunteered to carry an Israeli flag.

The resident of the Yukon territory—who was born in Israel—increasingly worried that the sight of the symbol might provoke some unwanted backlash against the small community living there.

His fears were soon put to rest.

In fact, the crowd clapped and cheered as Dembner was joined in the parade by compatriot Nicky Rosenberg, and Rick Karp, the Ottawa-born president of the Jewish Cultural Society of Yukon.

Plus, halfway through the parade, the pair heard Hebrew being spoken on the street. It turned out to be a family of surprised—but also thrilled—Israeli tourists, who had somehow found themselves stuck in Whitehorse on their way to a vacation in Alaska.

Nowadays, seeing the Israeli flag and hearing Hebrew is a lot more common than you might expect North of 60. A sizeable

number of Israeli expats are currently calling the rugged Canadian territory home.

Of the cultural society's 38 members, 10 are Israelis. And those who have survived a full year in the territory are considered a "sourdough." (Or a "machmetzet," as Dembner quips in Hebrew.)

Dembner, 48, arrived in Whitehorse in 2009 to work in a veterinary clinic. His fellow expats include a bus driver, an accountant, a computer specialist, an artist, several researchers associated with Yukon University—and Nicky Rosenberg, an electrical engineer who left Israel in 2011.

"When I came here, I discovered all the lakes and the nature, and going on a hike for one or two days and not meeting anyone, just you and the nature. Sometimes you meet a bear or a moose," Rosenberg said.

"We have a lot of wildlife here and foxes come in the winter and just stay on my porch and I go fishing and camping.

"It's amazing. But not everybody could handle that."

Rosenberg, 68, was born in Romania, but moved to Israel with his parents and grew up in Haifa. After the army, he earned his engineering degree from the Technion. But after a few years of work under his belt, the travel bug hit.

He took a nomadic tour for a year around the United States and Canada in a rented van. Then, in 2012, with only two weeks left on his tourist visa, he made it to Yukon. A job offer soon surfaced: developing electronics equipment for an oil and gas company.

Rosenberg hasn't been back to Israel since.

And although he misses the taste of his favourite Israeli bourekas—he made his own recently with a recipe found online—a community has been found through volunteering with the Jewish Cultural Society, which holds Passover seders and High Holiday BBQs.

He's also a Reiki practitioner and does odd handyman jobs for people in Whitehorse, when he isn't working on his current business venture: Rosenberg invented a safety device for pilots, which uses artificial intelligence to help them see landmarks through the clouds. (He's trying to market it to airlines.)

The whole frontier mentality resonates with Rosenberg, who often teases his friends about the weather in his adopted home north of the Arctic Circle as compared with the one he left behind.

"In Israel and here, the temperatures are the same temperatures, just with a different sign—plus-50 to minus-50."

Indeed, with frigid temperatures in the winter, and about the same population as the small city of Tiberias — 42,000—in an area 20 times bigger than Israel, there's no room for the kind of deep-rooted conflict impacting Jews and their Arab neighbours.

"If your neighbour and you had a fight and you don't agree and it's minus-40 degrees—and you need a place to warm up until somebody comes to repair your heating system and he says, 'No, we are not friends. You cannot come in,' you just freeze outside."

Whitehorse life hasn't been as Zen for Amir Dembner. His first job lasted only a year. His housing situation was perilous for a while. His second job in a tire centre lasted for a decade—but it left him with a debilitating back injury that's kept him at home for two years.

Still, he relishes life without the hot Israeli weather, even if this summer has seen the highest number of Yukon wildfires burning in the last 25 years, partly due to climate change.

Dembner also can't believe the freedom he's found in the Yukon. He enjoys debating fiercely with people about COVID, and Israel's turbulent political situation. He isn't shy about speaking his mind, with the bluntness that sabras are known for.

"I simply, like, say it, and I'm willing to have a discussion and to have an argument," Dembner said. "Argument is not like a negative thing, at least not for Israelis."

Dembner does miss his family, although he hasn't felt comfortable during the pandemic to take his regular two-month visits each spring.

As a secular Jew, he isn't bothered by the lack of kosher food in Whitehorse, or by the fact there's no synagogue.

Strangely, though, finding falafel hasn't been a problem. The Israeli expat bus driver, Gadi, also moonlights at the weekly farmers market, where he's served up the Middle East snack in previous years, along with bagels.

Kosher food can be sourced for Passover and for special occasions, with enough notice, explains Rick Karp, the longtime leader of the Jewish community in Whitehorse.

When he learned that a couple of ultra-Orthodox Israeli professors from Bar Ilan and Hebrew University were going to be arriving in Whitehorse for a two-week contract with the Yukon government, Karp phoned a local hotel for help.

"I said 'Can you get kosher? Can you do, like, salads and vegetarian things?' And they did. The managers also bought new dishes to serve them."

The recent death of community member Lillian Strauss—a former yoga teacher, musician and horsewoman—also provided a religious challenge due to not being able to locate 10 men for a recitation of a memorial Kaddish, per Orthodox tradition.

But a Chabad rabbi in Calgary advised Karp that, under these circumstances, women could count in the quorum.

Karp and his late wife Joy were Ottawa natives who moved to Whitehorse in 1986 to open the first McDonald's franchise in Northwestern Canada.

At the helm of the community since 1997, he's welcomed the Israeli newcomers to a region which has had a Jewish presence for about 125 years. When the Klondike Goldrush began in 1896, Jewish prospectors and merchants flocked to the territory to seek their fortunes.

Over a century later, in 2014, the community restored a long-neglected Jewish cemetery in Dawson City, where five of those early adventurers were laid to rest. The Beth Chaim burial ground is now a popular tourist attraction—although that city has just a handful of Jewish residents today.

With the arrival of the Israelis in recent years, Karp took on the task of revamping the Jewish community's official website to add Hebrew sections. He wants to make the information about events more accessible, and even include a mailing on the weekly Torah portion.

Israelis in Whitehorse also keep Karp apprised of what's going on in their homeland—most recently in June, when the new coalition government dissolved. (Karp figures he got that news faster than most Canadians.)

The Israelis haven't been the target of any protests or boycott,

divestment or sanction campaigns, beyond a group of 45 marchers who gathered to support Palestinian rights in May 2021.

The territorial government had a motion introduced by Currie Dixon, the leader of the provincial opposition Yukon Party, which condemned antisemitism. A second motion of his declared support for Israel during that two-week outbreak of hostilities with Hamas.

Karp can think of only one incident where his community was on the receiving end of antisemitism, dating back nearly a decade. The target was a visiting Canadian scientist who consulted at a mine for a few weeks. She became the target of loud racial insults from one of her temporary neighbours.

The local RCMP were called. The officer warned the man he'd go to jail if there was so much as another peep out of him.

Meanwhile, for Amir Dembner, it wasn't his Israeli passport that prompted his only run-in with ignorance and prejudice in Whitehorse. In fact, the perpetrator didn't even know he was Israeli—never mind that he was a Jew.

Someone in the auto body garage where he was employed at the time asked whether the microwave oven was working. Dembner remembers the sincere reply from someone else that the machine was working so well it was "a Jew incinerator"

When a colleague reminded everyone in the room that Dembner was Jewish and from Israel, he chose not to make a big deal about the incident. He believes the slur came from ignorance.

"And maybe I also made a little bit of a change because people saw and they interacted with a Jew for the first time in their life."

That's why he was pleased to serve as an ambassador of sorts when his foreman wanted to know more.

But that doesn't surprise Karp, who also sits on the local chamber of commerce. He saw 62 flags of different nations carried during the recent Canada Day parade, despite the remoteness of Whitehorse.

Karp feels the timing is right to push the city to commit to observing the territory's first-ever Jewish Heritage Month next May.

Between now and then, Nicky Rosenberg is hoping to return to Israel for the first time since he left. But this time, he and Karp will be accompanying a travelling display showcasing the Jewish history of Yukon. There's interest from the Tel Aviv-based Museum of the Jewish People (ANU).

For now, he's enjoying the short Yukon summer, which includes fishing on his new boat. He also encourages his daughter Maya's blossoming career as a visual artist and teacher. (She moved to the Yukon in 2014, in order to live nearby.)

He recently visited distant cousins in Montreal, and scoffed at their complaints about Quebec mosquitoes, compared to what he deals with in his own adopted home.

"They are flying around for five minutes until they decide to land on you and then, maybe, they will bite you. Once you get out of the car you have thousands, like Kamikaze, coming and sticking you right away!"

Amir Dembner similarly feels the pests are the worst thing about being an Israeli in the Yukon—especially when he encounters entire clouds of them around.

"Didn't the Jewish people suffer enough? Horrible!" ■

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

A journalist in Winnipeg investigates how that city's rye bread became the best in North America

/ John Longhurst

Which city in North America makes the best rye bread? The question was contemplated earlier this year at the New York-based Jewish website *Tablet*.

"Winnipeg has the best and most authentic Jewish rye bread in the world," someone on their staff said. That prompted the editor to reach out to me to ask: What makes it so special?

I'm not Jewish. But I like rye bread. I agreed to find out.

Unlike rye breads in eastern Canada and the U.S., those who know about the making of rye bread say Winnipeg-style rye bread is lighter in colour and milder in flavour than other rye breads.

It doesn't contain much, if any, rye flour. Instead, it is made from cracked rye or coarse rye meal.

It is also made differently from eastern rye bread, said Fivie Gunn, the former owner of Gunn's bakery in Winnipeg.

"It uses chopped or flaked rye, making it sort of speckled," he said, adding it is lighter and has a milder flavour, "not a sour taste like out east."

It's also made mostly with white flour and with no caraway seeds, he said, making it smoother and softer.

"It's quite tasty and unique," Gunn said.

Gunn thinks Winnipeg's rye bread originated with immigrants who came to the city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries from Ukraine.

"They brought their kind of bread with them," he said, noting that as you head further west into Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, the style of rye bread changes again. "It's heavier," he said. "Winnipeg rye bread is unique."

Ross Einfeld is part owner and production manager at Kub Bakery, another favorite for many when it comes to rye bread.

He also traces Winnipeg's unique rye bread to immigrants from Ukraine over 100 years ago.

"Our bread is based on their recipe," he said, adding that for him City, Gunn's and Kub make the best rye bread in Winnipeg because they bake it on a paddle in a hearth with steam to give a chewy coating.

"It's crusty all the way around, not like bread made in a pan," he said. "It's chewy outside and moist inside."

When it comes to personal preferences, members of the Winnipeg Jewish community have their own favourite bakeries.

Belle Jarniewski, executive director of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, prefers the version made by City Bread.

"I remember going to the old City Bread location with my mom and dad every other week to stock up. My mom would come out with a shopping bag filled with fresh rye bread and she would freeze whatever we couldn't eat right away."

Elaine Goldstine, CEO of the Winnipeg Jewish Federation, also liked rye bread from City Bakery.

"I know that rye bread at Gunn's and City bread are different," she said, indicating her preference is for City Bread rye bread.

As for the city's reputation for rye bread, "I guess it is famous like Winnipeg goldeye is famous," she added about the Manitoba fish that is well-known outside the province.

Bernie Bellam is editor of Winnipeg's *Jewish Post and News*. "To my mind City Bread is by far the best with Gunn's second," he said. "It's really a question of acquired taste, I would say."

Alan Green, former rabbi at Winnipeg's Shaarey Zedek synagogue, was more of Gunn's Bakery fan when he lived in the city. Now that he lives in Fairfield, Iowa, he has fond memories of Winnipeg's rye bread.

"I certainly understand how a good bakery—particularly a bread bakery—can make one feel at home and rooted in a city or community," he said.

Becky Kaufmann moved from Winnipeg to Toronto recently. She, too, has good memories of that city's rye bread.

For Kaufmann, the best is City Bread, followed by Gunn's; she's heard of ex-Winnepeggers ordering bread from local bakeries and having it shipped to them.

"Jews are very particular about their likes," she said, including rye bread. "We're loyal!" ■

"Now we're able to help him through his career as a choreographer, and helping to produce his works and present those works to the city of Toronto, to the community, really is full circle."

John Longhurst is the religion reporter at the *Winnipeg Free Press* and a contributor to *The CJN*.

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