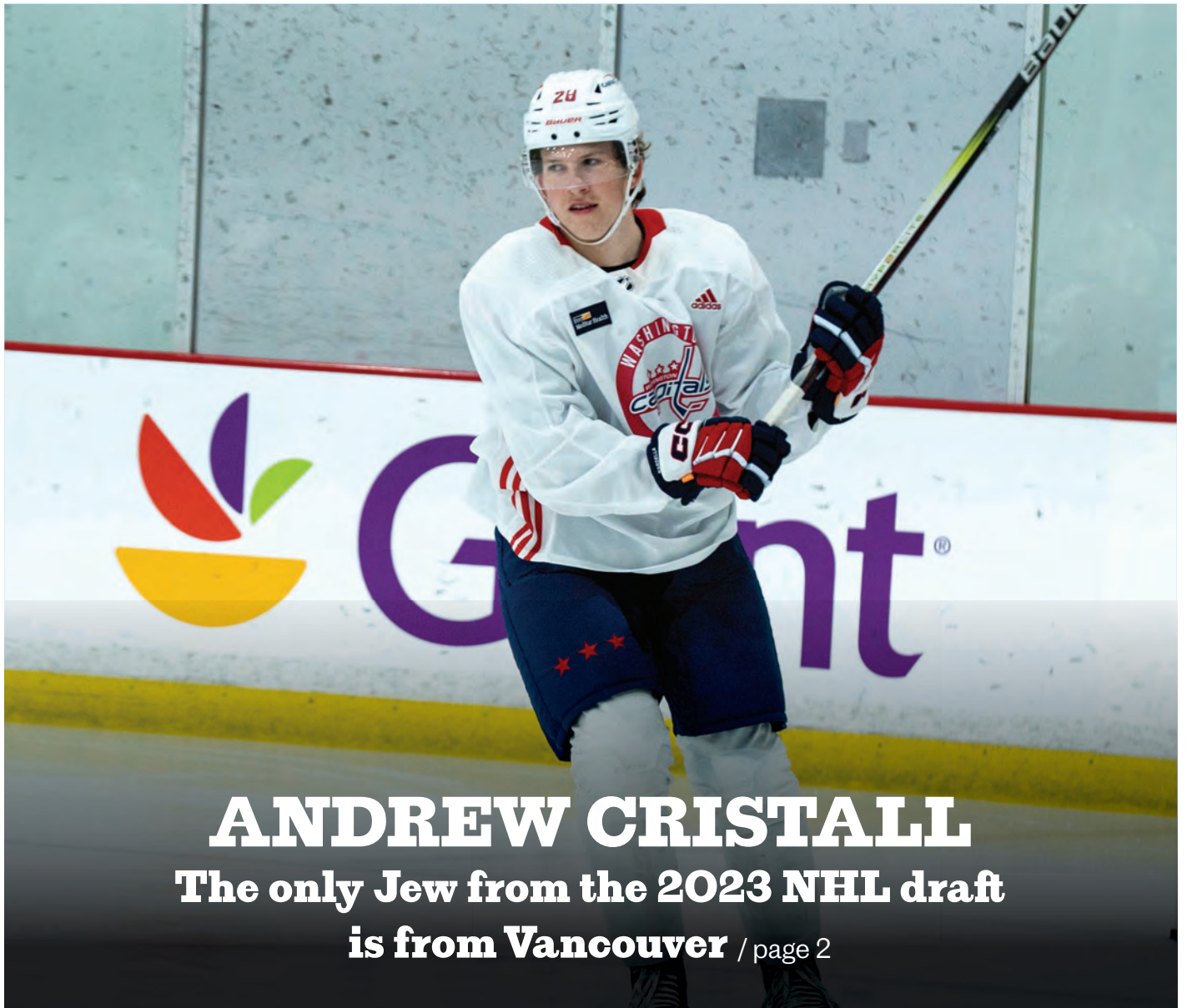


# The Canadian Jewish News



## ANDREW CRISTALL

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W W W . T H E C J N . C A

# Andrew Cristall wants to ‘represent’ his Jewish identity in the NHL as he signs with the Washington Capitals

/ Ellin Bessner

**A**ndrew Cristall always makes sure he dons his hockey equipment from right to left.

Like many athletes, the forward from Vancouver follows his own personal superstitious routine religiously each time he opens his hockey bag in the dressing room.

“Right sock, left sock, right knee pad, left knee pad and then right skate, left skate.”

But he doesn’t know why he practises this ritual habit.

As the only Jewish player out of 224 prospects chosen in last month’s NHL 2023 Draft, doing things from right to left certainly might send a deeply symbolic message to his Jewish fans—especially after The Canadian Jewish News reminded him in our interview that Jews read the Torah from right to left.

“Yeah, I didn’t realize that,” Cristall said, with a laugh, from his home in Vancouver on July 9. “But yeah, maybe I’ll say that now!”

Cristall, 18, is the son of a prominent Vancouver Jewish family: his father Alex is a real estate developer who leads the fundraising for the current \$450 million revitalization of the city’s Jewish community campus on Oak Street. Andrew’s mother Jodi works at King David High School.

Although Andrew chose to attend a private prep school with a strong hockey program— St. George’s— he previously attended Vancouver’s Talmud Torah elementary school (after winning a Mensch of the Month award in 2014). He also had a bar mitzvah.

The Washington Capitals selected Cristall as their 40th overall pick in the annual NHL draft on June 29 in Nashville, Tenn. The teenager’s whole family was there, nervously waiting to see whether any team would think enough of his hockey abilities.

He was the leading scorer this past season on his junior club, the Kelowna Rockets, with 95 points—despite missing nearly two months due to an undisclosed lower body injury. He was ranked in the top 15 prospects in North America.

Still, his name wasn’t called on the first day, when to no one’s surprise, Connor Bedard—a summer roller-hockey teammate of Cristall’s back home in B.C.—was the draft’s first pick, selected by the Chicago Blackhawks.

Then, mid-morning on the draft’s second day, the Washington Capitals announced their selection of Cristall, who bounded down the stairs of the Nashville arena to don the team’s jersey and shake hands with the general manager and senior front office staff.

“I think it’s definitely like a roller-coaster of emotions,” he recalled. “You’re going up and down a lot and, you know, it all happens so fast, in the blink of an eye.”

The rest of the day was a flurry of photoshoots with Cristall posing wearing his new Washington Capitals hockey sweater, emblazoned

with his number 28. He also held his first press conference as a prospect. The team whisked him onto a flight to a private development camp in Arlington, Virginia, where he and the other young players were put through their paces on the ice.

Cristall then set out to show he has what they are looking for. After a mandatory hockey tournament, which his team won, they sent a film crew to capture him performing some of his best stickhandling and goal scoring trick shots with the puck.

Then it was back home to Vancouver where, on July 7, he sat at his parents’ dining room table and signed his \$2.85 million (USD) three-year, entry level contract with his new club.

While his fans and family have high hopes that the draftee will earn a berth on the roster when the season opens in October, Cristall is already prepared for the likelihood he will spend 2023-2024 playing for his current team in Kelowna. He knows he needs to grow physically—he’s five-foot-10 and 175 pounds – and he has to work on his skating, or, as he once quipped, “get his man legs.”

But he’s optimistic that it won’t take too many years of seasoning before he gets a shot at his own locker in the Capital One Arena in Washington, D.C.

Gabe Pulver, co-host of The CJN’s *Menschwarmers* podcast, believes Cristall has a shot at seeing action sooner rather than later—which he told him directly.

“You’re a high pick, you’re a second-round pick. Ultimately, I’m sure you know this, you’re going to get a chance to make the team.”

Joining the Capitals has been “a dream come true” for the young left-winger. Not only did the team win a Stanley Cup five years ago, but their captain is none other than Alexander Ovechkin, arguably the best left-winger in the history of the National Hockey League.

With 1,485 points in his storied career so far, Ovechkin is also on track to tie Wayne Gretzky’s record for the most goals scored by a player.

To his disappointment, Cristall didn’t meet the Russian superstar while being evaluated at the team’s development camp. In fact, none of the regular players were around at all, just the staff. But when he does eventually meet “Ovie,” Cristall is sure it is going to be “pretty surreal.”

“Yeah, I probably won’t say too many words. I’ll probably just, like, hopefully shake his hand or, look at him and probably be smiling a lot.”

Cristall hopes to watch No. 8 at work on the ice, and learn from him to help his own goal-scoring techniques. Interestingly, he doesn’t use the same style of hockey stick as Ovechkin, which has a big hook. Cristall’s preferred shape is the same one used by Auston Matthews of the Toronto Maple Leafs, known as a P92.

“That’s just kind of what worked for me,” Cristall said.

Cristall doesn’t know what style of stick forward Zach Hyman uses when he streaks up the ice for the Edmonton Oilers. But it isn’t just Hyman’s hockey talent that has made the Toronto-born star sit atop the list of his own favourite Jewish athletes.

Hyman has been very public about his background. He’s involved in fundraising for Jewish charities. He lit the giant Hanukkah menorah outside the Alberta legislature in 2021, and has spoken out about antisemitism in sports. He even now wears the number 18, which is the Jewish symbol for life.

Cristall hasn’t been told what number he might be assigned with Washington, but he would like to emulate how Hyman navigates being Jewish with a pro-hockey career, as part of a small but growing group of fewer than two dozen currently in the NHL system, or feeder leagues.

“Definitely, yeah, I like to represent, I think,” he said. “I grew up with it and my family is Jewish and we take a lot of pride in it. So it’s definitely not something that I’m gonna be shy of, but also I hopefully follow in Zach’s footsteps a little bit.”

There have been only three Jewish players in the history of the Washington Capitals franchise: the list includes retired goalie Bernie Wolfe, and former captain Jeff Halpern, a centre who is now an assistant coach with Tampa Bay; and André Burakovsky, now with Seattle, who has Jewish roots on his father’s side.

While he was in touch with the local Jewish community while playing for Kelowna, the team schedule usually meant Cristall was playing on Friday nights. Invitations to Shabbat dinners had to be turned down.

And while his favourite Jewish food is challah (with matzah ball soup a close second), it was a fast day that caused Cristall to decide how he was going to reconcile his faith with his obligations on the ice.

Yom Kippur began on the evening of Oct. 4, and with it, came a lengthy fast period for all Jewish adults. Kelowna had a game scheduled for 7 p.m. against Victoria the following night.

“I didn’t sit the game out, but I fasted as long as I could, and ate my pregame meal right before the game.”

Cristall is well aware of the legendary American pitcher Sandy Koufax, who famously didn’t play during the World Series—and asked to switch his place the L.A. Dodgers’ pitching rotation to observe Jewish holidays.

The budding hockey star could face a similar issue in September when the Washington Capitals open their training camps. Rookie camp is scheduled to start on Sept. 16, on the first day of Rosh Hashanah.

And while he isn’t worried right now about a timing conflict, Cristall has already found a community of sorts inside the organization.

“I got to Washington and a couple of the training staff were also Jewish and they kind of mentioned to me that they were and ‘You know, we stick together a little bit.’”

Cristall’s bedroom at his family’s Vancouver-area home is decorated with a poster of his personal favourite NHL team, the Vancouver Canucks. The walls are covered with framed action shots of him playing for his previous teams growing up. To date, his career has been all with British Columbia clubs.

This season, though, he played in two international tournaments wearing a Team Canada jersey. He won gold in the U18 Hlinka Gretzky Cup, and a bronze medal in the IIHF U18 World Championships.

In his day, Andrew’s father also competed for Canada on the world stage. Alex Cristall was part of Canada’s men’s rugby squad in 1993 at the 14th Maccabiah Games in Israel. Dad also started out playing hockey, in goal—but, according to Andrew, his father abandoned the rink for the rugby pitch.

Andrew discovered his own passion was for hockey at a young age, following in his older brother’s footsteps.

Tyler Cristall, now 21, also played junior hockey in Kelowna before choosing to remain an amateur (for now) and take the NCAA route. Tyler is studying business while playing hockey on the Division I team at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y. (And he wears the number 18.)

Their sister Sydney Cristall also is involved with pro hockey, but not on the ice. She didn’t actually like to play hockey. Instead, the family joke is that she reached the NHL before her brothers did when she landed a marketing job with the Vancouver Canucks organization.

Andrew Cristall’s career move has caught the attention of well-wishers across North America: Karl Alzner, a former Wash-

ington player, reached out to congratulate him, as did Anthony Housefather, the Liberal MP for Mount Royal. The Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee sent a “huge mazel tov” on Twitter, as did Ezra Shanken, the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver.

Cristall plans to spend the summer hitting the gym, plus playing inline hockey with his friends. Then comes the Caps training camp in Washington, where he hopes to prove himself.

“There’s going to be a ton of NHL players, and Ovechkin, and all these great players like [Niklas] Backstrom and [John] Carlson,” he said. “The thing that I want to do most is just kind of be a sponge and learn, you know?” ■

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## Honey and Barry Sherman’s son is building a hockey arena to celebrate their legacy

/ Ellin Bessner

**J**onathon Sherman, the only son of the slain Canadian billionaire philanthropists Honey and Barry Sherman, is joining their legacy of community building in a very big way.

In making the announcement June 29, Sherman explained why he’s donating \$52 million to the Toronto Jewish community so it can build the Honey and Barry Memorial Arena on the grounds of an existing Jewish community campus in Vaughan, Ont.

“The arena announcement, of course, brings heavy emotions,” Sherman told The CJN in a written statement. “At the same time, this week is really about celebrating my parents’ legacy of community leadership, rather than the tragedy and the unresolved case.”

Construction of the arena began in early June on the community’s northern Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Campus at 9600 Bathurst Street.

The architectural plans call for two NHL-sized rinks, dressing rooms, stands for fans, a heated area for parents to view the action and a concession stand. The arena will be attached to the existing Jewish campus, which already houses the Schwartz/Reisman JCC, Jewish schools, synagogues, a banquet hall, medical offices, community agencies and a home for special needs adults.

It will also be the first and only hockey arena in North America owned by a Jewish community, specifically the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto.

Like the Hollywood film *Field of Dreams*, officials believe opening a state-of-the-art hockey arena will serve as the gateway to encourage more young Jews in York Region to affiliate with the community.

“It’s a huge fit for us because [of] the ability to be able to attract all these families to the campus, whether for hockey or any other ice sports,” said Adam Minsky, the CEO of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. “And what we see is when people come for one thing, they end up being involved in much more.”

Barry Sherman, 75, was the founder of Apotex, a generic drug

manufacturer, while his wife, Honey, 70, was the child of Holocaust survivors. The couple donated millions to Jewish communal causes and to the wider community. They were found strangled to death, in bizarre poses, on the deck of the indoor swimming pool in their Toronto home in late December, 2017.

Toronto police at first called it a murder-suicide, but subsequent examinations by their four children's own team of experts would later force the police to change their view.

The Shermans' estate is estimated to be worth \$10 billion, plus more from the recent sale of the Apotex empire in April of this year. The money was divided equally among the couple's four children.

There is a \$35-million reward still out from the family for any tips leading to solving the case, including \$25 million added by Jonathon in December 2022, on the fifth anniversary of the killings.

Media reports in *The Toronto Star* have previously revealed how the Shermans' son, Jonathon, a businessman, had long wanted to open a "premium" arena somewhere in the city, but his sister, Alexandra Krawczyk, had turned down his request for funding from the family's charitable foundation.

The CJN reached out to Krawczyk and her other sisters Lauren and Kaelen for comments about the new arena project but did not receive a reply.

"From the very beginning of this initiative, my focus has been on ensuring the arena serves as a lasting tribute to my parents' memory. This is why it is being named the Honey and Barry Memorial Arena, as a testament to the role they played as pillars of the Jewish community," Sherman said.

While the Sherman name already graces a southern Jewish campus in the Toronto suburb of North York, the geography of that location posed too many problems to locate the new arena there. For one thing, according to Federation's Adam Minsky, that Sherman campus sits on a floodplain. It also doesn't have enough space for the hundreds of additional parking spots that are needed to accommodate a busy hockey and figure skating arena.

The \$185-million Lebovic campus in Vaughan opened in 2012. It has served as a hub for at least three Jewish day schools, the Schwartz/Reisman Jewish Community Centre, Beit Rayim synagogue, a banquet hall, medical offices, Jewish community agencies, and the Reena Residence for adults with disabilities. The original plan was to build out the site eastward to include a community theatre, but that did not happen.

Indeed, the site has not been without its problems. Two of the private Jewish schools—Leo Baeck and the TanenbaumCHAT high school—have since closed their northern branches, due to insufficient enrolment. That left the landlord scrambling for tenants. Then the pandemic lockdown forced the snack bar to shutter: there is a small kiosk open now, operated by Eisenbergs, the same caterers who have the food concession at the midtown Sherman campus.

Jonathan Sherman said that it was only after his parents' murders in 2017 that he approached the Toronto Jewish community with the idea for the arena. His charitable donation will cover the full cost of the project, plus pay for scholarships to help underprivileged youth participate in sports.

"By prioritizing affordability as a core objective, the arena will enable more community members and families to build strong connections with each other and share their love of sports through engagement with the community as a whole," Sherman said, adding that he had already been funding similar scholarships before the arena project came to be.

Because of the financial windfall, Jewish officials point out that there will be no other sources of community funding needed for the arena project. And the way the gift is being structured, Sherman wants them to use any profits from rentals and plough it back into other important community priorities.

Federation officials acknowledged they decided they would not use the land to build affordable housing instead. (Vancouver's Jewish community is doing a housing component for seniors and renters as part of the ongoing \$450 million JWest campus redevelopment project.)

"So we actually have looked at the issue of housing," Minsky said, "and we weren't able to find something that would be of equal benefit to what we were able to do with the arena."

Although officials expect that any food services in the arena will be kosher, it remains to be worked out whether the facility will operate on Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Community hockey leagues and figure skating schools schedule games, classes and tournaments on the weekend, and so keeping the arena closed on Friday nights and Saturdays would pose a challenge, not to mention be a financial hit to the bottom line.

"We have not gotten to the stage where those decisions are finalized," Minsky said.

However, he suggested there will very likely be mezuzahs on doors throughout the arena, as is the case in the adjacent Jewish buildings.

While the Toronto Jewish community becomes the first federation on the continent to own an indoor ice arena, details of who will manage and operate the facility have not been announced. Minsky said they will most likely hire an outside expert to manage the new arena.

As for end users, priority will be given to Jewish sports teams such as JCC Chai Sports and Maccabi Canada, and to Jewish school varsity teams. But non-Jewish groups are also going to have access, including hockey programs in the surrounding community of Vaughan and beyond.

The City of Vaughan approved the arena project last year. Officials are keen to add the two rinks to the city's parks and recreation department programs, because of the heavy demand but short supply of ice time.

"We're like most Canadians, we all like to play hockey and there's just not enough indoor or outdoor arenas, so it's a very welcomed arena that we've got being built," said Chris Ainsworth, the city councillor for Ward 4 in Vaughan where the new arena will be located. "It will be widely used, I'm sure, for community events, for rep hockey, it's going to be [for] private [and] free skating, the list goes on."

Because the arena is going up on land that presently houses a shared soccer field and city playground, the site plan calls for these to be moved elsewhere to create more parking spots. There will also be a specially-spot built to melt the excess ice which the Zamboni disposes of, so as not to take up room in the new parking lot or leave an unsightly pile of snow.

The main entrance to the hockey arena will be built on the south side of the arena, and accessed from the west side of Bathurst Street. The existing outdoor pool will remain where it is.

The arena is set to be open in 2025.

Architecture49, the main architects, have plenty of experience in designing community arenas, not to mention major projects such as the renovations to the West Block on Parliament Hill, and Winnipeg's True North Square.

The company also has in their portfolio the Meridian Centre in St. Catharines, Ont. where the Niagara Ice Dogs of the Ontario Hockey

League play, as well as the RBC Centre in Dartmouth, N.S., and the former Yardmen (now CAA) Centre in Belleville, Ont. where the Ottawa Senators' farm team, the Belleville Senators, skate.

As for whether the Sherman arena could eventually attract high-level teams, such as perhaps seeing the Toronto Maple Leafs practise there, or having Toronto-born Jewish NHL star Zach Hyman open a hockey academy, officials say it's too soon in the process to discuss.

"While it's still early days and we have nothing to share in this regard, we certainly see this as an opportunity to work with Jewish community role models in the world of professional sports," Jonathan Sherman said.

However, Adam Minsky of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto believes these would certainly be huge enticements to attract more young Jewish players to come to the new campus.

"Our first priority is making sure that this is going to be of benefit to the community, and the vision of bringing as many community members to be engaged in Jewish sports," Minsky said. "The issue of whether they're going to be professional sports teams or athletes, that's a secondary issue and that's part of the planning that has to go on. Now, I would love to see whatever happens." ■

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## Toronto Holocaust Museum has opened in a time of rising intolerance—with an emphasis on preserving the stories of survivors

/ Lila Sarick

**T**he Toronto Holocaust Museum, which officially opened June 9, tells the story of the genocide and the rebuilding of shattered lives with an emphasis on survivors' testimonies.

But it also has very few of the graphic, horrifying photos and films that were once the norm in Holocaust education.

"That is a real conscious decision. Best practices in Holocaust education today have determined that by being sad and horrified that learning actually shuts down," said museum executive director Dara Solomon.

"We know that students learn when they're able to ask questions in different ways and hear different kinds of answers. But when you're just sitting in front of this horrible difficult content and then not given the opportunity to reflect, to talk—you're sad, but you're not necessarily learning and thinking critically. What we want is for students to walk out of here with curiosity about this period and wanting to learn more."

Education is key to the new museum's mission. Between 65,000 and 80,000 people are expected to visit annually, about 75 percent of them as school groups. The new museum replaces an older Holo-

caust centre, which saw, at most about 12,000 to 15,000 visits a year.

Starting this fall, Holocaust education will be part of the Grade 6 curriculum in Ontario. Solomon expects that in addition to the usual high school groups, younger students will come as well.

The museum opens at a time when intolerance is rising. Police and advocacy groups report annually that Jews continue to be the most targeted group in racist incidents. Meanwhile, the generation of survivors, whose first-hand testimonies were the core of Holocaust education, are passing away. The new museum was designed with both concerns in mind.

Learning about the Holocaust and the aftermath is part of the answer to combat antisemitism, although not the sole solution, explains Solomon.

"For young people to be introduced to who Jews are, who they were before the war, what happened to them during the Holocaust, why the Nazis targeted them and then this narrative of they are immigrants just like so much of our population, who came to Canada after surviving tremendous hardship—those are lessons that the students can really relate to and start to see the humanity in the narrative."

Central to the museum are 11 life-size video monitors where visitors can hear more than 70 survivors speaking about their life before the war as well as their experiences in hiding, in ghettos and in concentration camps. More than 200 minutes of testimony have been curated in short clips lasting a minute or two, geared to audiences' increasingly short attention spans.

The CJN visited the museum a few days before its official opening, while workers were still tinkering with displays and ensuring that all the video monitors were working.

Solomon has been showing the museum to select guests before the official ribbon-cutting. She becomes emotional as she recalls the reactions of survivors, who were instrumental in building the original museum.

"We were founded by Holocaust survivors in the 1980s during a time of Holocaust denial and rising antisemitism and they found their voices to speak out against this," she said.

"Then they realized the importance of their narratives and the importance to start sharing their stories and they did that in the 1980s and it wasn't easy and they worked for decades to share their stories with students and the public across the GTA, and them knowing that we're going to continue this work after they're gone is really important to them. Seeing them see it and come to life, has been really incredible."

Survivors' experiences are central to the museum. In the entrance hall, large banners hang from the ceiling with photos depicting everyday life in pre-war Europe. The first of the video monitors that visitors encounter is filled with survivors recounting their childhood memories of life before the war.

The message throughout the museum is clear: the Jews of Europe were ordinary people living their lives, when they were targeted for destruction.

"Not just learning about us as victims of the Shoah, but learning this full story is really important," said Solomon. "If we just focus on people wanting to kill us, I don't think that's right message to counter antisemitism."

Museum design firm Reich + Petch had visited the original Holocaust centre, which had survivor testimony at the heart of school visits and wondered how to replicate that experience.

"The goals were to make the stories come alive in the same way

as they do when a face-to-face person is presenting. We realized this is going to require the most up-to-date and effective media we can possibly provide in the centre,” senior architect Tony Reich said in a presentation about the new museum.

The 10,000-square-foot museum, located on the Sherman Campus, which also houses a community centre, theatre, day-care and other communal buildings, doubles the space of the old Holocaust centre which was on the same site. It had a budget of \$30 million, which includes a \$15 million endowment. The Azrieli Foundation contributed \$12 million, and the federal government provided another \$3 million.

The museum is divided into four distinct halls: Persecution; Atrocity and Devastation; Liberation and Aftermath; and Life in Canada. The artifacts, many of which were donated by Toronto’s survivors, were carefully chosen to illustrate the narrative of the videos.

Among the most poignant of the objects are three tiny hearts crafted from bread. They were sent by George Brady’s mother, who was in a concentration camp, to her two children and a niece, who had not been captured at the time. George survived the war and eventually moved to Toronto but his younger sister died in Auschwitz (as did his parents). Her story was told in the award-winning children’s book *Hana’s Suitcase*.

Solomon says one of the most moving items for her are the yellow stars, which mothers would have had to cut out and sew onto their children’s clothing, marking them for persecution.

The collection includes letters sent to relatives to Canada, pleading for help to escape Europe; a *Schutzpass*, a protective visa issued by Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, and a concentration camp uniform.

The most graphic pictures and detailed maps of ghettos and mass shooting sites are kept in drawers and hanging files, available for visitors to view, but often not visibly displayed.

In the last of the four galleries, dedicated to the lives survivors built after the war, often in the very neighbourhood where the museum is located, there are pictures of grandchildren, university diplomas and a massive cash register from a store. The pull-out drawers contain more difficult materials about the physical and emotional health problems survivors suffered. Another wall has documents about the postwar trials of Nazis in Germany where Canadian survivors testified.

Throughout the museum are displays that explain what was happening in Canada at the time. Residential schools, Canada’s enthusiastic participation in the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the Christie Pits Riot are mentioned in the first hall, dedicated to the persecution of Jews before the outbreak of war.

The decision was made to tell a Jewish story of genocide, but to put it in a context that may be more familiar to students, says Solomon.

“The Jewish tragedy is the main tragedy that’s told here. We talk about the Holocaust as the genocide of six million Jews, but throughout the museum there are different areas where we explore what happened to the Roma and the Sinti... to the homosexuals that were targeted.”

“If you look around, this is a primarily a museum dedicated to the narratives of what happened to the Jews during this time. If you think about the students coming today, largely not Jewish, it’s important for them to see the whole history and to be able to relate it to as well by learning about these other victim groups.”

The museum took a few other departures from older Holocaust centres. In one corner are images and the testimony of the perpetrators of genocide. While many museums are loathe to give them the space, Solomon said it was important to highlight the very mundane lives of the murderers, who sometimes left killing fields and concentration camps to eat dinner with their own families.

Enclosed in the midst of the four galleries is a room with floor-to-ceiling images of a forest. The forest represents both the woods where survivors hid during the war as well as the sites where massacres occurred. In a museum filled with interactive videos and prompts, the room is deliberately free of technology. As visitors approach the walls, the panels darken and the names of those who died in the Holocaust appear.

The room is meant to be a contemplative space in the middle of what can be an overwhelming experience. Solomon said the inspiration for the forest room came from designers who were working during the early days of COVID lockdowns when people were finding solace by spending time in nature.

About 1,200 names, which had been part of the old centre, are on the walls, Solomon said.

“And that’s another learning moment. These names are just a tiny, tiny fraction of the loss. ■

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## How a German high school helped Toronto Holocaust survivor Gershon Willinger learn precious new details about his family

/ Alex Rose

**A** Holocaust survivor from Toronto who was separated from his parents as an infant recently learned new information about his family—from students in a history club at a German high school.

Gershon Willinger was born in Amsterdam in 1942 to German Jewish parents who had fled their home country. A few months later, Willinger’s parents gave him to a family in the Dutch resistance for safety. In February 1943, authorities discovered that Willinger was Jewish, and from there he was sent to a series of concentration camps.

Willinger ended up surviving the Holocaust, but of course he had no memory of how he had managed to live—let alone his life before the camps. Everything he knows about his early years, his family, and their life prior to the war is the result of a lifetime of painstaking research.

The knowledge that Willinger has accumulated can never replace the full picture that was erased, but he doesn’t take it for

granted there was at least enough documentation to piece together some facts about his family. At 81, he was content with how much he had managed to uncover.

And then came a message from Germany.

A history club at Comenius Gymnasium, a high school in Dusseldorf, Germany, was working on a project to research the 41 Jewish students who had attended the school between 1900 and 1945. Seven of those students had perished in the Holocaust—including Willinger's father Guido and his two uncles Kurt and Izmar.

The history club's research eventually turned up Willinger's name, along with his affiliation with Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC). So the school reached out to FSWC to say they had discovered more information about Willinger's family and wished to share it with him.

In March, Daniella Lurion, part of the education team at FSWC, traveled to Dusseldorf to facilitate a Zoom meeting between Willinger and Comenius Gymnasium's history club. Students took turns presenting to Willinger what they had learned about his family members.

"This was an icing on the cake for me, what happened in Germany. I never expected it. This was absolutely unbelievable. It was just a moment in the life of my family, a normal happening, such as a high school, such as a report card," Willinger said. "But that again, to me, is a very big present that I received at this age, at 81 years old."

The school found student cards and report cards of the three boys in the cellar of the old building, which had been bombed during the Second World War. Willinger learned that his father was the youngest of the three brothers, which he didn't know before. He also found out that his father and two uncles all received top marks for behaviour, and that, while his father was not overly gifted in academics, he seemed to have a penchant for athletics and singing.

"It was absolutely amazing. I said that I thank them very much because it is very eerie and strange to suddenly be intimately involved with their intellectual prowess in school, whether they had good grades or bad grades. To see their names, as well, on each report card was in itself already unbelievable. So for me, it was very, very special to be able to see that, because again, as a part of a whole, it's another little part of a puzzle that was clarified for me," Willinger said.

"I put a lot of store in history and in documentation... so for me, it was really a validation for, 'Hey, these people were my family,' and it validates your existence as a human being."

Perhaps the most exciting discovery was about Willinger's grandmother Rosa. The students had been surprised to discover that Willinger's grandmother Rosa had owned her own ladies-swear shop, which was highly unusual for a woman in early 1900s Germany. The original building still stands, and they showed photos of it to Willinger.

Another important fact that their research turned up was the ultimate fate of Willinger's uncle Izmar. Willinger knew where most of his family members had been killed, but not Izmar. Willinger knew that Izmar had had a disability of some sort, but that was it.

It turned out that Izmar had been in a psychiatric hospital when the war started, and was forcibly "euthanized," as the Nazis called it, in May 1941, because of his disability.

The school even promised to lay down a stolperstein, or stumbling stone, with the names of Willinger's family, and invited him

to come join for the installation.

Willinger also shared his story with the German students, including pictures from various stages of his life—and even some of his parents before he had been born. While addressing them after, he spoke to the importance of keeping alive the memory of families like his, implored them to keep up their good work, and finally thanked them for the precious knowledge they had gifted him.

"I hope that your students, who are so many generations later, they have an obligation, but don't feel guilty. They should never feel guilty about anything because, as I always tell students, it's your duty to change things, to inform people, and if there is Holocaust denial, to set the record straight," Willinger said to the history club's teacher on the Zoom call.

"I'm absolutely thrilled. I keep my emotions to myself because otherwise I start crying, but I'm absolutely thrilled that I have the opportunity because this is not just, 'oh, this is history about your parents.'

"These were people who never committed crimes, these were good people, these were real Germans, these were people who happened to be Jews in Germany who wanted to live a life like everybody else. So what you've done for me here, what your students have done, is absolutely unbelievable to me, and it means an awful lot to me." ■

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## **A few Jews from the LGBTQ community shared their fears with Israel's representatives in Toronto prior to the Pride parade**

/ Lila Sarick

Several members of Toronto's Jewish LGBTQ community expressed their worry and deep anguish about the direction Israel's government in a meeting held June 20, to coincide with Pride Month.

The meeting was organized by Gal Hana, the Israeli consulate's director of tourism, and Yaron Deckel, the Jewish Agency's regional director. "The government has the potential of destroying 25 years of hasbara. What the prime minister is doing will have a major impact," said Noah Zatzman, a political strategist who served as senior adviser for former Green Party Leader Annamie Paul.

The select group of six influential men included lawyers, political strategists and real estate brokers—all with deep ties to Israel. Their concern is with the judicial reforms proposed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition. Also participating in the discussion were two shinshinim, Israeli teenagers on a gap year working in the community. (Deckel said a number of women were

invited to the meeting, but they did not attend.)

The recent visit by Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli—organized by the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus and included a speech at a Canadian evangelical Christian college—was part of the conversation, along with a wish for stronger condemnation from Canadian Jewish organizations.

Cumulatively, the developments make it harder for them to be optimistic that Israel will continue as a progressive, democratic state, some of the participants said.

Historically, the Israeli courts have protected and advanced the rights of minorities, said Darren Sukonick, a lawyer and former partner at Torys LLP, who is now a principal at Matthew Sapera Fine Homes. He has served on the board of UJA of Greater Toronto. Court decisions have been solidified by the Knesset, which translated them into legislation.

With the proposed judicial changes, which diminish the court's power, those advances are in danger of being erased, he said

"LGBTQ couples don't have the same protection," Sukonick said. "What do the judicial reforms mean for other rights that might be pared back?"

Same-sex marriages, as well as civil marriages, are not recognized in Israel. The government has registered same-sex marriages performed abroad since 2006. In March 2023, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Interior Ministry is obligated to register married couples, including same sex couples, who wed in online civil ceremonies performed in Utah.

In February 2023, the Knesset opposed a bill that would allow singles and same-sex couples to adopt.

The participants also expressed concern over recent visit by Amichai Chikli who was in Canada in early June on a trip punctuated by two large Christian events: one on Parliament Hill where he met with the Israel Allies Caucus, led by Conservative MP Leslyn Lewis, and a gala at Canada Christian College. He also met with Jewish MPs and communal organizations and schools.

The visit was "a slap in the face," said Evan Pilz, a fundraiser for several political campaigns, including Toronto mayoral candidate Ana Bailão.

Pilz questioned the minister's motives, and his decision to stand on stage with evangelical leaders "who say I'm going to hell."

"I'm not sure the psychological damage is easy to repair, it adds to the sense of instability," he added.

The consulate was not involved in the minister's trip, Hana said.

However, the Diaspora Affairs Minister did meet with consul staff while he was in Toronto, and they accompanied him to meetings with Jewish leaders. (He also met with the Ambassador in Ottawa, and staff accompanied him to visits with Jewish MPs.)

As ardent Zionists, the participants said they have routinely and reflexively supported Israel when it was under physical attack, demonized or unfairly singled out by international organizations such as the United Nations. But the situation has changed and they are finding it harder to support the Jewish state.

"It isn't just isolated to our community, a lot of people are questioning whether they can even walk in the UJA Walk with Israel," said Sukonick.

"Our community institutions, such as UJA and CIJA (Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs) are not vocal enough in pushing back and expressing the community's concerns," said Pilz.

"We were always proud of our institutions, that stood in lockstep with Israel. Now we need people saying 'This is a bridge too far'.

"When you see in the news, there's another attack, normally we stand shoulder-to-shoulder (with Israel) when civilians are being murdered. It's harder to muster that reflex."

Despite the current situation, though, Pilz said, "I haven't changed as a Jew or as a Zionist.

"What's happening there hasn't severed my emotional or spiritual or religious or familial connection to the State of Israel, to the land of Israel, to the people, my fellow Jews who live there."

Not everyone present felt the situation was as dire as it had been portrayed. Interior designer and television personality Shai DeLuca pointed to the weekly, mass protests in Israel and the fact that although Netanyahu has the votes in the Knesset to pass the judicial reform legislation, the reforms seem to have stalled.

"To see a country come out every week for 29 weeks and to say 'Not on our watch,' we've never seen that before. That's giving me hope and my belief that this is a glitch in our history," he said.

Not just Israel, but other nations, including the United States and the U.K. have moved farther right politically, he pointed out.

"My plan is to go back home. My concern is what am I going to go back to? But I'm still equal in my country and my marriage is still equal in my country."

Israel and specifically the consulate need to take influential members of the LGBTQ community, not necessarily Jews, to Israel to explain the complexities of the situation. The consulate also needs to bring Israelis to Canada to speak with the LGBTQ community here, participants said.

Deckel, who represents the Jewish Agency, pointed out that acceptance and equal rights for the LGBTQ community have advanced in Israel over the last 25 years, under right, centre and left-wing governments.

But even Labor and left-leaning governments have not recognized same-sex marriage, or civil marriages, which continue to be controlled solely by religious authorities, he said.

After the meeting, Deckel and Hana painted an optimistic picture, despite the current instability in Israel and the deep concerns expressed.

"I would be more worried if we saw indifference," Hana said. "We will come out from this situation much stronger than before, because we are dealing with our core values for the first time in a long time."

Israel has encountered crises before, from threats to its very existence in the 1960s to the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, Deckel said.

"There is a controversy. Israel is polarized no doubt, there is a situation which is not easy, but I do hope the State of Israel and the society will be able to overcome." ■

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# IPF Atid is a new Canadian group aiming to give young Jews a place to discuss the complexities of Israel

/ Alex Rose

**A**n organization that fosters community for young Jewish people who want to engage more deeply with Israel has recently opened its first Canadian chapter in Toronto. IPF Atid, which is the youth wing of Israel Policy Forum, was founded to address the need for spaces that could accommodate nuanced conversations about Israel—especially regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel Policy Forum, IPF Atid's parent organization, provides educational resources to Jewish leaders and American policymakers to help them better understand the situation in Israel, and also to help them communicate that knowledge to others. According to its website, IPF is guided by a vision of a Jewish, democratic, secure Israel, and officially supports the two-state solution as a means to that end.

As the youth wing of IPF, Atid subscribes to the same guiding principles. However, instead of directly focusing on how to bring about its vision in Israel, it aims to connect people in the United States—and now Canada—who share those same goals.

Shanie Reichman, founding deputy director and current director of IPF Atid, says she created it with Adam Basciano in 2017 because it was the kind of organization they both wanted but couldn't find.

"[We] launched IPF Atid to create the space that we both needed, and so many of our peers needed, to have a very serious dialogue about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," she said. "[A dialogue] that was rooted in Zionism and love for Israel and intentional care about Israel's security, while also seriously grappling with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how we can best resolve it."

Every year, IPF Atid hosts the Charles Bronfman Conveners Summit. Over four days, young professionals are educated about the policy challenges facing Israel so they can return to their communities armed with relevant knowledge. Many of the fellows selected to attend the conference have been Canadian, including Yos Tarshish, director of Queen's Hillel, and Yoni Belete, former director of speechwriting and public relations at the Israeli Embassy in Ottawa.

Between the enthusiasm of Canadian fellows and the encouragement of Canadian philanthropist Charles Bronfman, it was only a matter of time until IPF Atid expanded to Canada, Reichman said.

"We ended up with a bunch of really, really amazing, talented, smart, Canadian Jews in this cohort," said Reichman. "We were answering a call from them. Because over the past few years, since we've had these Atidniks in our network, based in Canada... they were some of the most invested people in our entire network, so it became obvious that we had to support them also. They really wanted us to start a chapter, they wanted the space."

Yoni Belete, who was an IPF Atid convener in 2021, is optimistic about the value that the organization can provide in Toronto.

"I hope to see a more well-informed Jewish community on the issues that Israel and Israeli society are grappling with," he said. "I also hope this more well-informed community can find leadership positions throughout the Toronto Jewish community, and outside of the Jewish community as well, so that we can be more confident in how we talk about Israel and the challenges the country faces."

Although the new Toronto Atid chapter is responding to an explicit request from existing fellows, Reichman hopes the benefit to Toronto's Jewish community won't stop there. Atid hopes to be a resource for anyone who is interested in engaging with Israel in all its complexity.

"We're looking to support, in whatever way we can, the whole Jewish community. I'm hopeful that people will begin to know that if they need this sort of content and analysis, they can come to us and we're always happy to provide it beyond just the members of our chapter."

In today's political climate, many young Jewish people are finding themselves unsure of how they should relate to Israel, Atid has found. Although they may care about Israel, if it is hard to find a space where all of their feelings towards the Jewish state are acknowledged and respected, they may withdraw from it, as Reichman explains.

"We don't want American and Canadian Jews to stop talking about Israel because it's hard and messy, and because every time they try to, they get yelled at. Which is real, right? It's legitimate that they don't want to be dealing with it because it's so frustrating, but we're hoping that in giving them the space they'll keep engaging." ■

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## As a verdict is handed down in the Pittsburgh synagogue shootings, Joyce Fienberg is remembered by her brother in Toronto

/ Lila Sarick

**R**obert Libman was forced to relive the "horrible moments" of learning about his sister's murder at the Tree of Life Synagogue, when the gunman responsible was found guilty on Friday, June 16.

Joyce Fienberg, his older sister by five years, was one of 11 worshippers killed October 2018, as she attended Shabbat morning services at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue. Six others were injured in what was the deadliest attack on a Jewish community in the United States.

Robert Bowers, a 50-year-old truck driver, was found guilty on all 63 counts—including 11 charges of obstructing the free exercise of religious beliefs. The court now will hear evidence to determine whether he is eligible for the death penalty and if it should be imposed.

Fienberg, who was 75, grew up in Toronto. Her brother, who lives in Thornhill where he is a family doctor, did not attend the trial but watched a live broadcast about the jury's decision.

"It's been a very trying day, just reliving horrible moments of that time. It brings it all back in a very painful way," he said in an interview with The CJN. "Just watching it on CNN and trying to grapple with it and seeing her picture up there with the other victims, it's very difficult, terrible actually.

"This was so horrific and so tragic. It's something that's supposed to happen to other people, not to you and your family. We're just a quiet, regular family."

Victim impact statements will be heard in the next phase of the trial. Libman declined to discuss whether the gunman should face the death penalty.

"My rage and my inner anger is enormous, but I'm not going to weigh in on the pros and cons of capital punishment. It's far too complicated and I'm far too close to the situation. There has to be justice and we'll let the courts make that decision."

Joyce's murder has been devastating to the family: "It's like getting punched in the gut, a lot and often," he said.

"It's the elephant in the room, we're constantly reminded of it. It's a daily thing and missing her, she was an incredible person... It's a lot of grief."

Fienberg and her late husband Stephen, were raised in Toronto. Her confirmation class picture still hangs in Holy Blossom Temple, where she was married.

She earned a BA in social psychology at the University of Toronto and began her career working with emotionally disturbed children, and Robert followed her initially as a youth worker. "She was my role model," he recalled.

Fienberg spent 25 years as a research specialist in the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, helping teachers become more effective in the classroom.

"When I would hire a new postdoc... the minute the postdoc arrived, Joyce would say 'c'mon I'll take you to dinner,' or 'come to my house' very spontaneously and warmly," her supervisor Gaea Leinhardt said in an interview with the Pitt News. "It wasn't a requirement, but it was what she felt someone would need."

She began attending synagogue daily after her husband, professor emeritus at Carnegie Mellon University, died in 2016. She would make breakfast for everyone on Shabbat morning and Libman said when he heard the news about the shooting, he knew his sister was there.

"She was just the most wonderful human being, she was a very gracious person, she was so refined and so gentle," her brother said with a deep sigh. "She just had this loving nature about her that was very non-judgmental... It's a terrible loss."

Joyce's daughter-in-law, Marnie Fienberg, started a program called 2 for Seder that encourages families to invite non-Jews to their Passover seders, in memory of Joyce's warmth and hospitality.

Her memory is also preserved at Holy Blossom Temple, where a tree was planted, and in a memorial board at Libman's own synagogue, Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto (BAYT).

More poignantly, Libman's daughter named her youngest daughter

ter Joy, after the aunt she was very close to. "She sometimes sees my sister's picture and I say 'that's big Joy'... One day she'll learn the history of who her wonderful aunt was."

Libman says he is relieved by the verdict and that the trial did not become politicized. "The fact that they called it what it was, they didn't try to sugarcoat it.

"They said out-and-out it was antisemitic murder and slaughter and that's what it was. They didn't try to politicize or make nice about it. That's a very positive thing."

But the murders, in a largely Jewish neighbourhood of Pittsburgh which had a low-crime rate, "uncovered an underbelly of antisemitism," in America, Libman said.

"We're seeing more of it, antisemitism, in our country as well as in the United States," he said. "This exposed that in a very violent and direct way, it's scary." ■

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## Obituary: Moshe Kraus, 100, who survived in Bergen-Belsen by singing, became the first chief cantor for the IDF

/ Alex Rose

**W**hen Cantor Moshe Kraus of Ottawa died, on May 29 at the age of 100, he had been carrying a grudge for almost 80 years.

It was a grudge against himself.

Kraus, who was born in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1923, wound up in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp during the war. He survived because of his voice. Commandant Josef Kramer, who was nicknamed the Beast of Belsen, took a liking to Kraus's singing. He made the young cantor perform for him every Sunday, which ensured Kraus remained protected.

The first time Kramer brought in Kraus to sing for him, he requested a German song by the renowned Jewish tenor Joseph Schmidt, whose style Kraus imitated.

"I sang it, and unbelievable, he cried. I couldn't believe it, he can cry," Kraus recalled in an interview from 2016 with Carleton University.

It was so unbelievable to Kraus because Kramer was so exceptionally callous otherwise.

"That murderer, that nothing—I don't have the words—'murderer' is a compliment for him. For him, killing a person was like killing a fly," he said in a Yiddish-language interview with the Yiddish Book Center from 2019. "If he was going for a walk and saw a Jew, he would shoot him. He would go to see if the bullet hit right in the middle (of the forehead). And if it wasn't in the middle, he said a very nasty word."

Kraus was baffled by the incongruity of the man who used Jewish lives for sport on the one hand yet could be moved to tears by a Jewish man singing for him on the other. And he was also baffled

by his response when he learned of Kramer's death by hanging in 1945, which became the source of that grudge against himself.

"When they hanged him, I cried. He saved my life," Kraus tearfully recounts in the Carleton interview. "And I can't forgive (myself) till today why I cried."

Kraus's talent didn't just save his own life. He was granted permission to sing for prisoners at the camp, boosting their spirits. According to the description of his memoir, *The Life of Moshele Der Zinger: How Singing Saved My Life*, "many Bergen-Belsen survivors remember him as 'Moshele der Zinger' (Little Moshe, the singer), whose beautiful tenor voice and trove of Yiddish and sacred music had kept their hopes alive—and in many cases restored their faith—during the living nightmare of the Holocaust."

Before the war, Kraus was trained as a cantor. When he was as young as nine, he would travel across Eastern Europe, leading services for Shabbat in various Jewish locales. After his bar mitzvah, he became even more sought after. By his early teens, he was making lots of money for his family—parents Myer and Henya and his eight siblings. Both of Kraus's parents and five of his siblings were murdered in the Holocaust.

After the war, Kraus ended up in Bucharest, Romania, to serve as the Malbim shul's chief cantor. His next stop was in Germany, where he worked for the Joint Distribution Committee, and then to what was then Palestine, where he became the first chief cantor of the Israel Defense Forces.

"There were so many funerals and memorial services to attend. I cried for the young soldiers who died defending Israel, and at the same time I shed many tears for my own immense losses," Kraus told *Mishpacha* about his time in the IDF.

It was also in Israel where he met his wife of 72 years, Rivka. As soon as he saw her, Kraus knew that he wanted to marry her. They met at a crowded wedding with thousands of people, so big that it had to be held outside. The friends of the bride and groom brought food around to the guests. As a friend of the bride, Rivka, who was 16 at the time, was helping.

"And when I saw her—she was very beautiful. You can see her today, she looks like she's 30. She's 83," Kraus said in his Yiddish interview. "I went over. I talked with her for half an hour. And after half an hour, I said, 'Rivka, will you marry me?'"

Instead of immediately accepting his proposal, Rivka called him crazy. But he persisted. He would go to see her every day, and eventually she agreed to marry him.

After Israel, Kraus's next stop was as chief cantor in Antwerp, Belgium, and then in Johannesburg, where he came face-to-face with his past.

"When I arrived in Johannesburg and became the chief cantor... I didn't know English, so they brought a woman who speaks Yiddish that she should greet me... I go to her and thank her, I tell her how happy she made me with her speech," Kraus said in the Carleton interview. "And she says to me, 'you know, you remind me of Moshele the singer in Bergen-Belsen. I was in Bergen-Belsen, I remember a man came to sing for us, and he sang like you. Very similar.' And I said to her, 'I am Moshele the singer.' She fainted. They brought her back, she was crying, I was crying."

During this time, in 1964, Kraus was asked to travel behind the Iron Curtain for a three-month concert tour. Leonid Brezhnev, who led

the Soviet Union at the time, wanted a Jewish act to show the world he wasn't antisemitic. Aside from the danger of travelling across the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War, Kraus and Rivka were also asked to free some Jewish refuseniks. At one point, Kraus had to shake off his tail to carry out an undercover action. (*Mishpacha* magazine published a story with more details in 2017.)

The Krauses moved from Johannesburg to Mexico City, and finally settled in Ottawa, where they lived for the last 50-odd years. Kraus became a vital part of Jewish life in the city, said Heshel Teitelbaum, president of Ohev Yisroel, the shul where Kraus had been a member for the past 20 years.

Teitelbaum first met Kraus around 45 years ago, when Teitelbaum moved to the city for a teaching job at the University of Ottawa. When Teitelbaum first arrived, he knew nobody. He attended a service at Beth Shalom, where Kraus was cantor at the time.

"He immediately invited me to his home. He didn't know me, just a stranger, but it made a big impression," Teitelbaum said. "When *hazzan* Kraus did this, I said, 'wow, I feel really at home here.' So I got to know him, he invited me, and later, my wife to his home for shabbos. It made a fantastic impression."

The rest of Teitelbaum's family got to know the *hazzan* as well. Kraus once told Teitelbaum that he had only taught three people in his life, despite many requests from would-be cantors. However, Kraus decided that Teitelbaum's son had a talent, so he decided to be the young boy's teacher as well.

"When you're standing in front of a man with such presence, you kind of feel a little bit intimidated. And my eight-year-old son, he would also feel intimidated," Teitelbaum said. "Not that he was threatening him. But he would make one slight mistake, and the *hazzan* would let him know. But he stuck it out, *baruch Hashem...* my son is a rabbi in Pittsburgh right now."

"Still, you will get the impression that (Kraus) was extremely precise and wanted precision and no mistakes. And he made sure that my son would not make mistakes."

It wasn't just with his students that Kraus could be intimidating and demanding. Teitelbaum described Kraus as possessing "an apparent lack of tolerance for people who didn't do things right."

"He wanted perfection, not only from himself, but he wanted perfection from others. So sometimes, for example, I, the *gabbai* at shul, would be a little bit trembling because if I made the slightest mistake, he would let me know."

Kraus always carried himself with dignity and authority, and that contributed to his imposing presence, Teitelbaum added.

"He was a real personality. He would stand out in a crowd. First of all, he is short by stature. So you wouldn't think that he would stand out. But he had a presence, he had an attitude. He was dressed impeccably, tailored suits. He was groomed impeccably, with his twirly moustache and his beard always trim. He was dressed royally, he would walk with a demeanour like he was a prince or something, so he would stand out.

"And his facial expression would also contribute to that aura, so people would turn when he would walk down the street."

The congregation of Ohev Yisroel feels so strongly about commemorating Kraus's memory that they have begun work on a feature film about his life. Donations are being accepted to help fund the production. ■

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# Obituary: Sidney Cyngiser, 99, shared his story about the Shoah with generations of Alberta students

/ Sam Margolis

**S**idney (Sucher) Cyngiser, an indefatigable proponent of Holocaust education, who was often viewed as Calgary's Elie Wiesel, died on June 27. He was 99. Cyngiser continued to share his story of hardship and tenacity with generations of Alberta students and educators well into his 90s.

"He has inspired thousands, especially young students, advocating for basic human rights, democracy, kindness, tolerance, multiculturalism and interfaith dialogue. The magnitude of his impact can be found in the many boxes of letters in his house which were sent to him by grateful students and teachers over the years," his daughter Frances Cyngiser said.

Born in Lodz on March 15, 1924, Cyngiser's memories were those of a happy childhood spent in Radom, Poland. His idyllic youth was abruptly shattered and turned into a living nightmare, however, upon the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, and he would perform slave labour throughout much of the Second World War.

After arriving at Auschwitz, Cyngiser survived a *selektion*, the process of determining which inmates would be executed and which forced into labour, by pinching his cheeks and brushing his clothes to make himself appear as healthy as possible.

He was later moved to the Vaihingen an der Enz camp along with his father, who died there from starvation and exhaustion. He was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. Cyngiser learned after the war that his mother and three sisters were murdered at Treblinka.

Having endured beatings, malnutrition and disease, Cyngiser weighed a mere 72 pounds when liberated by French troops on April 7, 1945. He spent nearly three years convalescing, first in a hospital, where he met his wife, Bronia, and afterward in a displaced persons camp. In 1949, through the sponsorship of his father's aunt, Bella Singer, he immigrated to Canada. Bronia followed in 1951 and they were married soon after.

A proud Canadian citizen, Cyngiser found professional success in the furniture business and subsequently in real estate.

"He chose not to let his life be defined by the devastation of the Holocaust, but rather by his response to it," said his daughter Frances. "Rather than being filled with bitterness anger and resentment, he chose to give meaning to his life by filling it with love, tolerance and understanding and a fervent wish for *tikun olam*—repairing our broken world.

"In the face of Holocaust denial," she said, "he dedicated his life to bearing witness, believing that hope for the future begins with truth about the past."

His commitment to educating future generations about the Shoah, led him to become a regular presence at schools, churches, community organizations and at Calgary's Holocaust Educa-

tion Symposium each year.

Consistently described as a gentle and generous soul, Cyngiser backed numerous organizations as an avid volunteer and philanthropist. Together with Bronia, he provided financial support to both the Jewish and broader Calgary community and was an ardent champion of Israel.

In addition to a Citizenship Award at the Calgary Jewish Academy and an annual scholarship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Cyngisers endowed a Multicultural Education Scholarship at Mount Royal University's Bachelor of Education Program in recognition of student contributions to multicultural understanding.

The pair were involved with United Jewish Appeal and State of Israel Bonds, each having served as UJA division chairs and Israel Bond co-chairs. They also established a Holocaust Education Collection at Mount Royal University's library and an endowment fund for Calgary's Beth Tzedec Congregation's Jewish Film Festival.

Cyngiser's efforts were recognized on several occasions throughout his life. Among the awards and accolades he received were the Alberta Centennial Medal, the Immigrant of Distinction Lifetime Achievement Award from Immigrant Services Calgary and an honorary doctorate from University of Calgary in 2006 for his contribution to Canadian society in promoting tolerance and understanding through Holocaust education.

On obtaining his honorary doctorate, Cyngiser urged the graduating class, "Do not choose to be bystanders. Rather, count yourselves among those who make a difference. Be engaged in your community and our society. Be aware of what's happening in the world. Do not choose to remain silent or indifferent in the face of intolerance, hatred or injustice. Speak out. Take action. Not to speak out, not to act, is to be an accomplice."

In 1998, Cyngiser was among 50 Holocaust survivors across Canada to receive the Zachor Award, jointly created by the federal government and prominent Canadian Jewish organizations.

Echoing the sentiments of many in Calgary, Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapidés said, "Our community has lost a giant, a man of integrity, brilliance, kindness, and *menschlichkeit*. I had the honour and immense privilege of spending large chunks of my professional life with Sid. I watched him inspire, literally, thousands of adults and young people to respect one another's basic human rights, to cherish democracy, and to treat others with kindness, regardless of their faith, ethnic background or religion.

"When Sid would tell his Holocaust story, normally cynical 'too cool for school' high school students would line up for ages just to have the opportunity to shake his hand. And he would treat every single one like they were a treasure. He would show them pictures of his family and genuinely smile at each student. Every person who heard Sid speak was changed for the better," added Rabbi Krygier Lapidés, who currently serves as assistant rabbi at Beth Tzedec Congregation and was formerly the director of programming and Holocaust and human rights education for the Calgary Jewish Federation.

Rabbi Krygier Lapidés recalled hearing Cyngiser's story hundreds of times. "Every time it was a revelation. He touched the hearts and minds of everyone who had the privilege to hear him. They only had to listen for a few minutes to realize how blessed they were to be in the presence of this humble, sweet, great man. Sid Cyngiser dedicated his life to making the world a better place. We cannot fill his shoes but we can live by his example."

Cyngiser is survived by his wife Bronia; his children Harvey and Frances (David); grandchildren and great-grandchildren. ■