

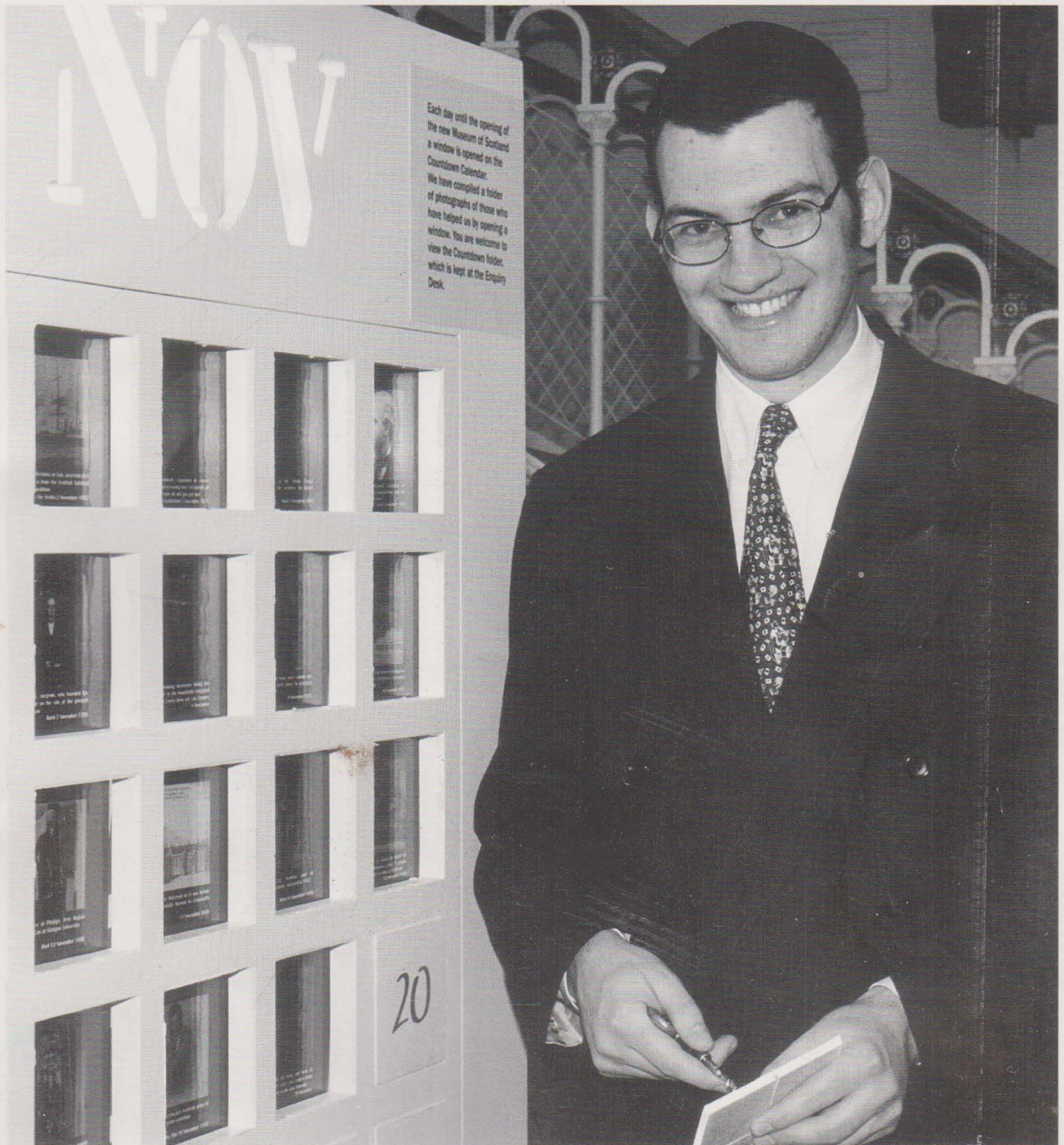
The Edinburgh Star

Journal of the Edinburgh Jewish Community

February 1999

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The Edinburgh Star

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Front Cover: Rabbi David Sedley opening one of the windows, depicting King David playing the harp, on the Countdown Calendar in the new National Museum of Scotland in Chambers Street.

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The Board would also like to thank

Mr & Mrs Harold Mendelssohn for kindly defraying the cost of sending *The Edinburgh Star* overseas.

A short visit to hospital, for a non life-threatening condition, can, as I recently found out, be a very uplifting experience. In a somewhat perverse way, I can almost say I enjoyed it. I was enormously impressed by the care and concern of the medical, nursing and ancillary staff, who, in their different ways, could not do enough to deal with my presenting problem, to reassure me and make me comfortable. I was also quite overwhelmed by the kindness and concern of my family and friends who visited me, wrote to me and expressed their concern for me in myriads of ways, and by colleagues and who were only too willing to cover for me and help me out. And, to judge from the experiences of others, for example the message from Willie and Betty Caplan and the letter from Rose Orgel in this issue of **The Edinburgh Star**, my experiences are in no way unique.

While I was in hospital, I met and spoke to so many people whom I would not normally have had the opportunity to meet – the school janitor from Duns who was waiting for a by-pass operation, the widow from Newtown St Boswells who had lost two of her 10 children in a whirlpool in the Tweed, the chef from Edinburgh who had temporarily lost his sight after a stroke and had then had several thromboses in his leg. With all of them I was able, if only temporarily, to establish a relationship based on mutual understanding and sympathy. And then, as if to remind me of my Jewish identity, there was the consultant who regaled me, and the other staff members in the investigation room, with stories about his Uncle Schmuley in St Petersburg, his Uncle Izzy in Israel and his other uncle (I didn't catch his name) in Boston, Mass.

The contrast between this co-operative way of life and the tension and turmoil of events in the outside world was very striking. Lying in bed, I read in the newspaper and listened on the radio to reports of the death of King Hussein, the Senate's acquittal of President Clinton on impeachment charges, the events surrounding the arrest of the Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Ocalan, and the controversy over genetically modified food. As usual, there were several items of Jewish interest – the visit by the judge and jury to the forest in Belarus where Anthony Sawoniuk is accused (under the 1991 War Crimes Act) of shooting at least 20 unnamed Jewish women in September 1942, the demonstration by 200,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem and the counter-demonstration by an unspecified number of secular Jews reflecting the long-running conflict which divides Israel as never before, and the controversy over allegations that actors had been paid to appear as guests on the Vanessa Feltz 'chat show'. Jews and topics of Jewish interest would appear to take up a disproportionate share of news but the contrast between the caring, harmonious and tolerant relationships among and between staff and patients in the hospital, and the sometimes bestial and frequently intolerant and dishonest relationships among and between Jews and non-Jews in the outside world. A visit to hospital can act as a salutary reminder of what life can and should be like.

In this issue of **The Edinburgh Star**, we publish the first in our new series entitled 'What does it mean to be Jewish?' It clearly means different things to different people and the diversity among the four accounts published in this issue more than lives up to our expectations. We plan to publish three or four more accounts in each of the next few issues and any reader who wishes to contribute to the series by writing briefly about what being Jewish means to them is invited to contact the Editor. We also publish another photograph in the 'Star Trek' series and, because the series seems to be so popular with our readers, will continue doing so as long as there are suitable photographs to publish. So please go through your old albums and send Ian Shein any pictures you would like us to consider.

Most of the articles in this issue are home grown and that is no bad thing. We are delighted to publish a joint profile of two very prominent and much loved members of the community, Anita and David Mendelssohn, and, equally, to publish a wonderfully evocative account by Robin Spark of life with his grandparents Bernard and Sarah Camberg and the circumstances which brought them, and him, to Edinburgh. Then there is a short trailer by the novelist and writer Dan Jacobson, based on his talk to the Literary Society, of his exquisitely written and very moving book *Heshel's Kingdom*. This book is due out in paperback this month, and is very strongly recommended, not least because he traces his roots to a part of Lithuania from which many members of the Edinburgh community can trace theirs. We are also very pleased to publish a 'letter from Israel' by a well known Edinburgh 'ex pat', Edwin Hoffenberg, which makes some very complimentary comparisons between the Jewish Community in Edinburgh when he was growing up and our community today, and some very interesting observations about changes in Israeli society over this period. I hope our readers will enjoy this issue – comments, suggestions and contributions for the next issue will all be welcome.

FREDA RIFFKIN REPORTS....

LADIES COMMUNAL HALL COMMITTEE SUPPER

9th September 1998

The speaker at this supper was Dr. Shari Cohn who spoke on the subject of 'Second Sight: Tradition and Experiences.'

Another successful evening for the Ladies Committee saw a large audience gather to hear this charming speaker. It was with great enthusiasm that we welcomed the Guests of Honour, Rabbi Shalom Shapira and his wife Rachel.

After a beautifully catered supper, Mrs Anita Mendelssohn introduced Dr. Cohn who is a Research Fellow at the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University. Dr. Cohn led us through her subject by explaining that there was a history of psychic phenomena in her own family and this had originally prompted her interest in the subject. She had made a study of 'Second Sight' in Scotland and found that this often ran in families, especially among Celtic people. The audience was spellbound and only limitations of time brought the question and answer session to a close.

Mrs. Rose Orgel moved a Vote of Thanks and presented Dr. Cohn with flowers from the Committee.

Rabbi Shapira then thanked the Committee for inviting him and Rachel and emphasised how important gatherings of this sort are. He believed that it was essential for Jewish people to meet like this in such a friendly atmosphere, in fact it was almost as important as going to *Shul*, and one should enjoy the happy communion of like-minded people. He also addressed your correspondent, telling her to be a true journalist and to make an effort to reproduce the atmosphere at such gatherings. *[I think she has done very well - Ed.]*

WIZO LUNCH

11th November 1998.

A most successful lunch was held at the home of Mrs. Sylvia Donne where 27 ladies enjoyed a delightful lunch of dainty open sandwiches, coffee and cake. A presentation was made to Mrs. Leila Goldberg on the occasion of her forthcoming marriage *[see below]*.

The sum of £160 for WIZO funds was realised.

COMMUNAL HALL QUIZ SUPPER

15th November 1998

As usual, a large number of contestants arrived on 15th November to enjoy another evening of pitting their wits against the formidable Quiz pair, Joyce and Norman Cram, ably assisted by their under-cover helper, their daughter Hilary.

As always, this contest was keenly competed for and two tables tied at the end of the evening. The following brains were at the two winning tables:

Ros and Samson Abramsky
Susie and Jonathan Adler
Lesley and John Danzig
Elaine Samuel and Stanley Raffel

Stephen Downie and Deborah Katz
Downie
Debbie Donne and Carol Stewart
Mark and Paul Gilbert
Susie and Dan Kelpie
Molly and Jonathan Seckl

The Communal Hall Committee served an appetising supper and a large sum was raised for the upkeep of the Hall.

THE LUNCHEON CLUB

26th November 1998

On Thursday 26th November 1998, the Luncheon Club had a full complement of members and cooks

at a special Lunch to honour Leila Goldberg who was leaving us to marry and live in Newcastle.

This was both a happy and a sad occasion, happy because we are all so pleased for Leila in her happiness and sad because we are losing one of our most loved members. She has given a great deal of her time and contributed a great deal of effort to the Luncheon Club over many years. The Senior Member of the Club, Sammy Latter presented Leila with a travelling case and a camera and thanked her for all the hard work she has put in for the Club. He wished her *Mazaltov* and much joy and happiness for her future.

Leila, who was accompanied by her daughter Wendy, thanked all the members for their gifts and assured them that she would be back to see them frequently.

Mr. Willie Caplan then thanked the cooks for their catering as this was one of the few occasions when they were all present at the Club

WIZO LUNCH

9th December 1998

The last WIZO Lunch of the year was held at the home of Mrs. Irene Mason, and was attended by a number of ladies. A delicious lunch was served which was much enjoyed by all present and the sum of £100 was raised for WIZO funds.

CHANUKAH DINNER ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNAL HALL

19th December 1998

The Communal Hall Chanukah Dinner, always a social event in Edinburgh, was patronised by a large number of our Community this year. As usual a mouth watering meal, catered by the Ladies Committee, was served and we then had the pleasure of a cabaret from

the talented Shirley and Peter Bennett. Their extensive repertoire, charismatic

personalities and professional skill made for a most enjoyable concert and the applause they received must have made them aware of how much the audience had appreciated their show.

All in all, a delightful evening to which many thanks to all who worked so hard to make it so.

HILLEL UPDATE



A group of students in the Sukkah

Myrna Kaplan writes: Edinburgh's Hillel House continues to go from strength to strength and, when the academic session commenced, it was full, with five students in residence. Applications are already being received for next academic year. The festival of *Sukkot* was celebrated in style at Hillel this year with the residents, and members of Edinburgh J Soc eating their meals in the new *Sukkah*. Although the weather was rather cold for the time of year, the students were able to warm themselves on hot soup made by Juliet Cohen

Once again the Hillel committee must thank Mr. John Donne for

making the purpose-built *Sukkah* for the students.

Further details and applications for Edinburgh Hillel House, please contact Myrna Kaplan (0131 339 8201) or Hilary Rifkind (0131 447 7386)

THE ANNUAL YOUTH QUIZ

A report by Carol Levstein

Fingers on the buzzers? Lets GO!

Once again our enthusiastic and fearless youth rose to the challenge of the annual Youth Quiz. Fresh from *Cheder*, our minibus drove us to the Giffnock Banqueting Suite. 16 children made the trip to represent Edinburgh in five teams, one senior (S1-3) and four junior (P4-7) teams, answering questions under the strictest of regulations and conditions in three categories: Jewish knowledge and knowledge of Israel; general knowledge; sport, music and the arts.

What wonderful ambassadors we have. Team spirit and good humour were abundant, sharing and supporting each other in their successes and concerns, to be rewarded by a triumphant outcome about which the community is absolutely delighted.

Two of our junior teams made it into the semi-finals, one being narrowly beaten by only two points, while the other team stole the show in a nail-biting final to win THE DOROTHEA STRUMP CUP. Our senior team were unfortunately beaten in the gruelling finals after having convincingly won all their previous rounds.

The winners of the Junior Quiz were: Benjamin Danzig, Richard Field, and Jonathan Fransman. Final score: 23 to 17.

Senior runners up were: David Brannan, Samuel Danzig, and Joel Raffel.

Competitors included David Abramsky, Abigail Blumsohn, Robbie Ansell Forsyth, Daniel

Gilroy, Martin Henry, Alice Kelpie, Genievieve Littauer, Joanna Seckl, and Lauren Stewart.

We may be a small community but we are certainly power packed! Thanks to all who helped on the day and to all the children, who were wonderful.

CONGRATULATIONS



Debbie Donne

The Editorial Board offers its congratulations to:

Elliott Cowan, son of Andrea and Malcolm Cowan, on his engagement to Caroline Davis of London and Zurich.

Debbie Donne (pictured above), on winning the 1998 Hamp Mamilton award, an annual prize presented by the Scottish Group of the Institute of Public Relations for the best young PR practitioner in Scotland. Debbie works as an Account Manager in the Edinburgh Office of the international PR consultancy, Shandwick.

Leila Goldberg, widow of the late Philip Goldberg, on her marriage to Dr Stephen Steel in the Edinburgh Synagogue (*see report page 5*).

Julian Goodman on receiving the Best Dressed Individual Award in the Edinburgh Hogmanay's

"Dressed to the Nine Competition". (*We very much regret that we*

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

are unable to reproduce a photograph of this embodiment of sartorial elegance for our readers – Ed.)

Charles Raab, President of the Jewish Literary Society, on his promotion to a Personal Chair in Government at Edinburgh University.

Michael Rifkind, younger son of Hilary and Arnold Rifkind, on his marriage to Sharon Janowitz in Boston, Mass. (see report opposite).

LEILA GOLDBERG'S WEDDING



Myrna Kaplan writes: The marriage of Leila Goldberg to Dr Stephen Steel took place on Sunday 6th December 1998, 6th Kislev 5759. The ceremony was conducted in the Edinburgh Synagogue by Rabbi Sedley from Edinburgh and Rabbi Black from Newcastle. Pupils from the Edinburgh Cheder attended the ceremony along with family and friends from Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Newcastle.

Leila, who is the widow of Philip Goldberg, looked beautiful in her wedding outfit. She is very well known to many people in the Edinburgh community on account of the hard work she has put in to so many communal organisations. She will be moving to Newcastle where Stephen, who is a widower with three married children and four grandchildren, is a G. P. She will be sadly missed in Edinburgh, by her four grown-up children Jonathan, Wendy, Paul and Tony, and by her extended family and friends. The Community wishes her and Stephen much health and happiness in their new life together.

RECEPTION FOR MR M. S. COWEN THE CITY CHAMBERS EDINBURGH

It was with great pride that the family and friends of Myer (better known as Mickey) Cowen, a Past President of the Community, attended a Reception in the City Chambers given by the City of Edinburgh Council on 21st October 1998 to mark his retirement after 10 years as Chairman of the Justices of the Peace in the City.

Councillor Brian Fallon, Convener of the General Purposes Sub-Committee of the City of Edinburgh Council presided and apologised for the absence of the Lord Provost. He thanked Mr. Cowen for his many years of service as a Justice of the Peace and for the efficient way he had carried out his duties, both on the Bench and as Chairman of the Justices, and outlined what his duties had been during that time. He then presented Mr. Cowen with a City Council tie and a silver quaich engraved with the arms of the City of Edinburgh.

In his reply, Mr. Cowen thanked the Councillor for his kind remarks. To his knowledge, this was the first time that such a reception had been accorded to a JP. He had been appointed in 1975 and was extremely honoured at having been chosen, although at that time he could not have envisaged what the future was to hold.

He was Edinburgh born and bred and married to an Edinburgh girl and was glad to have been able to put something back into the city which had given him so much. His appointment had given him the opportunity to make many new friends and he was most grateful for that.

He thanked the Justices and Justices Committee over which he had presided for demonstrating their confidence in him over the years. His Committee had made many recommendations to the City and to the Secretary of Commissions and most of them, for example, continuous training of JPs, had been



acted upon. He thanked the Clerks of the District Court, their team of Court Officers and their staff for all their help, and wished his successor, Councillor Walls, and his Committee well.

Finally he thanked his colleagues, friends and family who, by their presence had made the occasion an unforgettable one.

Drinks and canapés were served. This memorable function gave much pleasure to those who were privileged to be present.

Freda Rifkin

BBC RADIO SCOTLAND

"THOUGHT FOR THE DAY"

by John Cosgrove

Approx. 7.26 a.m.

Thursday 4th, 11th,
18th, 25th March 1999

A BOSTON WEDDING PARTY

Malcolm Cowan writes: The marriage took place on 8 November 1998 at Young Israel of Brookline Synagogue, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. of Michael, younger son of Arnold and Hilary Rifkind and Sharon daughter of Maxine and the late Stephen Janowitz of Cortland Manor, New York.

The wedding was preceded by a weekend of celebration, which commenced on the Friday, when, after the synagogue service, Arnold and Hilary hosted a traditional Friday night meal for family and friends. Michael's *aufruf* was held on the *Shabbat* and the Edinburgh influence was seen to great effect when the *Shacharit* Service was *davened* by David Mason and *Maftir* and *Musaf* were *davened* by Michael. After the traditional *Kiddush*, the Rifkinds hosted lunch and in the evening entertained the guests at a kosher Chinese restaurant.

Prior to the actual ceremony, amid scenes of great joy and excitement, two traditional rituals, seldom if ever seen in Edinburgh



were performed. The first was the *Chatan's Tisch* where Michael gave a *Dvar Torah* and publicly affirmed his willingness to accept the obligations of marriage. The *Ketubah* was then signed by the witnesses after which Michael was danced to meet his bride. The second was the ritual of the *Beddeken* in which Michael publicly ensured that Sharon was his intended bride, and then lowered the veil over her face. After the veiling and blessings from the Rabbi, Sharon's mother and Michael's parents, Michael was danced out of the room and the guests were invited to enter the

Main Sanctuary.

Around the *Chuppah* were the two witnesses, David Mason and Abe Eisenstat and four *Chuppah* 'holders': friends, Valerie Feldman and Melissa Braverman, the Best Man David Kaplan, and the Matron of Honour Amy Katz. Rabbi Sendor of Boston, assisted by Rabbi Gerwitz of Brookline, conducted the wedding ceremony.

The whole weekend was notable for the exuberance and happiness of the bride and groom and their friends and their enthusiasm and pleasure in the traditions of modern orthodox Judaism. One other interesting aspect of the wedding was that amongst the guests were members of the families of all of the eight children of Mr and Mrs Charles Rifkind the great grandparents of the groom.

Michael and Sharon met whilst studying in Israel and presently live in Boston. Michael is an I.T. Consultant with Price Waterhouse and Sharon works for the Hillel Foundation in Cambridge Mass.

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JUDAISM FACES MODERNITY

a report on an Encounter Seminar held in Giffnock Synagogue on 3 December 1998

by Janet Mundy

The week before the first **Encounter** seminar in Scotland, I asked a friend from Glasgow whether she was planning to attend. 'Oh no', she said, 'we get so many of these things'. Whether that statement is true or not, to many of us in Edinburgh, the spread of **Encounter** to Scotland was a rare opportunity to explore our Jewishness outwith our own community, and to hear internationally renowned speakers. My friend's attitude was apparently typical of the Glasgow community, and, because of a poor response, the final programme was a considerably scaled-down version of the original plans. The number of speakers was reduced from five to three, and other fringe entertainments were cancelled. This did not lessen our community's enthusiasm to attend, and a 50-seater coach was booked for the trip to Glasgow. Participants from Argyll and Bute, and from Dundee also attended.

We arrived in Glasgow shortly after the introductory speeches had started, to discover that the Giffnock hall was already full to overflowing, and additional seating was hurriedly arranged. We thus had no opportunity to peruse the book or video stalls outside (although I picked up as many brochures as I could as we rushed past) or to sample the goodies on the Osem stand.

The title of the conference was 'Judaism Faces Modernity', and the opening speech of Rabbi Yisrael Roll, relating as it did to the speaker's brush with Princess Diana and Prince William at the hairdresser', certainly was pertinent to the theme! However, he also set the pattern for the rest of the evening by referring back to Jewish history, reminding the audience that we are all descended from kings and queens of Israel. Rabbi Roll was instrumental in setting up the **Encounter** conferences throughout

the country.

Rabbi Berel Wein made the keynote speech on the subject of 'Jewish Identity in a Modern World'. He is the author of many books and tapes on Jewish history, particularly on the middle ages. He made the slightly surprising assertion that it was easy to be Jewish in mediaeval times, as the Jewish world was perceived as literate, calm and light, in contrast with the dark, violent, ignorant world of the non-Jewish peoples. The enlightenment in the 18th century brought with it the idea that people could live without God and religion, and make their own choices between right and wrong. According to Rabbi Wein, it was expected that people would always choose right rather than wrong, and the Jews, in particular, believed that the Enlightenment would resolve problems, relieve anti-Semitism and provide equal opportunities. He stated that Jews made conscious choices based on the false premise that Jews could not be fully Jewish and full members of society. This was an idea that he and other speakers referred to several times during the evening, all maintaining that a respect for and involvement in the non-Jewish world did not preclude the keeping of all 613 *mitzvot*.

In contrast with the shifts in morality in the secular world, Rabbi Wein asserted that Torah offers Jews an unchanging morality, claiming that 'Torah has the perfect balance for us'. He gave the example of Nachum ish Gamzu, Rabbi Akiva's teacher, whose arms and legs had been cut off by the Romans. When his students wanted to move him and his possessions to a better house, he told them to move his possessions first, as his precarious house would not fall down as long as he was in it. Rabbi Wein said that this was a lesson about the Jewish world - we have no arms and legs

but we have Nachum Ish Gamzu living in our house, and as long as Jews study Torah our house will not collapse. If he is not in the house we don't know which gust of wind will take us down. He concluded by suggesting that Jews now have a hunger for knowledge of Judaism, as represented by the **Encounter** series itself, which he felt could not have happened 20 years ago.

Following on from the keynote address, the audience was given the choice of three workshops: Rabbi Wein again on the subject of 'Jerusalem - Eternally Jewish?', Professor Natan Aviezer talking on 'The Big Bang and Creation', and Rabbi Y Y Rubinstein speaking on 'Reincarnation and the Soul'. Because I had heard good reports of 'Y Y' as an entertaining and thought-provoking speaker, and thought his subject was an unusual one for a Jewish conference, I chose his workshop. I was not disappointed 'Y Y' is living proof of Rabbi Wein's point that one can live in a non-Jewish world without breaking Jewish law. He is a 'Govan lad' and trained as a teacher at Jordanhill College. He broadcasts on 'Thought for the Day' and made references to guitar playing and 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' during his talk. However, his subject matter flowed easily between these subjects and Jewish mysticism.

Reincarnation is a subject that I associate more with eastern religions than with Judaism, but 'Y Y' drew his audience into a recognition that there are references to reincarnation throughout Jewish literature, even in such familiar texts as the *Yom Kippur Machzor*, and the *Artscroll Siddur*. In response to a question at the end of his talk, he claimed that if one looks for them, one will discover many references to reincarnation in Judaism and that

'reincarnation is part of the library of what Judaism is'.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of his talk was that he constantly made the point that reincarnation is an opportunity for the soul to improve itself, and that becoming a better Jew involves becoming a better person. He gave two examples that demonstrate the connection between traditional Jewish values and those of today. The first was of Chazon Ish, giving a *shiur* in B'nei B'rak standing up out of respect to a near perfect soul in a Down's syndrome child. The second was of a father and son studying alongside one another in *yeshivah* rather than the father teaching the

son, in order that the son felt that he is his father's equal.

I was sorry to miss Professor Aviezer's talk on 'the Big Bang'. As well as being an interesting and topical subject, I gather he was an eccentric speaker, described as being in the vein of Patrick Moore or Magnus Pyke. Unfortunately he was not drawn into the question and answer session at the end, so I will have to attend another Encounter evening in order to hear his voice!

Those speakers that I did hear all used amusing modern-day anecdotes to illustrate their points, as well as Talmudic and other Judaic references. In addition to trying to show that Judaism is relevant to

modern life, they also demonstrated that the ancient art of Jewish story telling is alive and well!

I only wish that the event had been longer and that it had provided more of an opportunity for meeting other members of the audience and for asking more questions of the speakers. The point that studying Torah continues to be central to Judaism was certainly emphasised but I felt that many questions were left unanswered, not least about the position of women in Judaism, and the relationship between different Jewish denominations. Maybe next time! Maybe in the next life!

A Double Profile

ANITA AND DAVID MENDELSOHN

by Ian Shein



The elder of two children of a family who lived in Salisbury Road, and thereafter in McDowell Road, Anita Levitt became involved in the social and religious life of the Edinburgh Jewish community at an early age.

At no time could the community, whose social activities were centred on rooms in Duncan Street before it acquired a building opposite the Synagogue and then, later on, moved into the same building as the

Synagogue, be described as extensive. Anita became a keen supporter of all aspects of the community. She was a member of *Habonim*, played tennis with *Maccabi*, and participated in

practically all of the activities of the then, comparatively large, young membership. She attended James Gillespie's High School, and if she had she been a few years older, she would surely have qualified as one of Miss Jean Brodie's *crème-de-la-crème* girls. On completing her education, she obtained employment in the offices of Standard Life Insurance and continued working there until her marriage to David Mendelssohn. The young couple lived in the Balgreen area until they moved to their present home in Braid Hills Road. Tragedy struck the family in 1979 when Anita's brother Mannie, to whom she was very close, died suddenly at the early age of 43. Anita and David have two children, Elaine and Harold. Elaine and her husband David, with their children, Daniel (17) and Michael (12) live in Nottingham; while Harold and his wife Esther, with their children Cassie, who has just turned 21 and is an honours graduate of Leeds University, and Roy (15) live in Edinburgh.

Anita has been actively involved in the life of the community for all her adult life. For a time she served on the Ladies Guild before commencing her long association with the Communal Hall Ladies Committee, first as Treasurer then as Chairman, an office she again holds. She was for several years Chairman, and currently remains a member of, the Management Committee of the Community Centre. It is difficult to imagine a function in the Centre which does not bear the hallmark of Anita Mendelssohn. Her extensive work for the community included a spell in WIZO when, with Enid Oppenheim, she was Joint Chairman. During the presidency of Gerald Glass, she was elected the first female member of the Synagogue Council and has retained this position for more than 23 years. She is the only woman to have been elected a Trustee of the Synagogue. Extremely aware of the necessity of such duties for the community's continuing existence, she has always advocated members'

participation, an ideal which is often very difficult to achieve. Her unbounded energy and tireless enthusiasm has, over many years, resulted in numerous colourful events within the Community Centre. When her duties permit, and her highly renowned hospitality allows her, she loves going to the theatre, enjoys music, drama and the arts, and, it almost goes without saying, planning the next function.

In all the above, she has had the solid support of husband David. He was born in Glasgow, for which the Community has long forgiven him, the second eldest of a family of seven and came to Edinburgh when he was a few months old. Initially the family lived in the South Side of the city but moved to Marchmont at the beginning of the war. On leaving school, he joined the family tailoring business. In 1947, he was called up for National Service and joined the 17/21 Lancers, first at Catterick in Yorkshire and then in Dorset. At the age of 13, David had started to learn the piano and soon showed himself to be an accomplished pianist. Not surprisingly, when he was not engaged on military duties, he could be found in the recreation hall playing the piano. On one such occasion, his commanding officer heard him play and invited him to join the regimental band. The musicians played at many venues, including halls and bandstands, and David, already supremely proficient at the piano, periodically tried his hand at the clarinet. He later continued his military and musical montage with the Dragoon Guards. His only disappointment was his failure to realise his ambition of being drafted to Germany where his brother Ellis was a regimental tailor. Demobilised some two years later, he started his own wholesale stationery business. He renewed his friendship with Anita, whom he had previously met when on leave, and they married in 1952.

Apart from his love of music, David was always keen on sport. He

nostalgically recalls the Sundays he spent at the Glendenning School of Dancing with *Maccabi*, not, it must be said, enhancing his quick-step or fox-trot technique, but rather, playing sport before *Maccabi* moved to Duncan Street. He captained the cricket team, which included Norman and Lennie Berger, Mervyn Smith and Mickey Cowen, swam and played tennis and was taught the art of boxing by Harold Ordman. Badminton racquets were to the fore with Mossie Baker, Barney Hoare and Ellis Schulberg. Other communal involvement was with the Community Centre Management Committee of which he too became Chairman.

David's real forté is, however, clearly synonymous with synagogue services. In the pre- and early post-war years, the Synagogue Choir was conducted by Jack Levinson. When he retired the choir became defunct until, some thirty years ago, David was appointed Choir-Master. Regularly at the High Holidays, at weddings and other functions, the choir greatly enhances the services, celebrations and ceremonies within the Synagogue. David's talent in conducting the choir has provided the community with an expertise of which it is justifiably proud. His ambition has always been to perform additional choral work to supplement that handed down from older generations. With this in mind, and after detailed research, he has identified those parts of the High Holiday Services which can be set to music and the overall result has been much acclaimed both by members and by visitors.

To be in Anita's and David's company is uplifting. Their warmth, kindness and generosity is known far and wide. Deeply family-orientated, with a very large circle of friends, their hospitality and their concern for the welfare of others are unsurpassed. It is a pleasure to know them. For the Edinburgh Jewish community's continued well-being, it is to be hoped that they will continue their very time-consuming, voluntary commitments for many many years to come.

STAR TREK INTO THE PAST

In Issue Number 31, we published a photograph of the Maccabi Ball Committee. The young men in black ties were (from left to right) Michael Adelman, Geoffrey Lindey, Brian Abrams, Lennie Berger, and Mervyn Smith; the young women in ball dresses were Carole Lewis (now Carole Cowen) and Carolyn Smith (now Carolyn Levy).

The suggestion that we might conclude this series did not meet with a very enthusiastic response. By popular request, we therefore publish another photograph in this issue. Who can recall what play was being presented and who the members of the cast were? All will be revealed in the next issue.



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JEWISH?

Issue Number 30 carried a trailer for a new series of articles on 'Jewish Identity' in which a number of local residents, religious and secular, young and old, those who are very open about their Jewish identity and those who are less so, those who have 'converted in' and those who have 'married out', would be asked to write very short accounts about what being Jewish means to them. In this Issue, we publish the first four contributions. Any reader who wishes to contribute, or to suggest someone else who might like to do so, is invited to contact the Editor.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH - FOUR PERSONAL VIEWS

Hazel Cosgrove

A few months ago I was invited by the Chief Rabbi to take part in his *Rosh Hashanah* broadcast in which he intended to explore with a group of people from different walks of life what it means to be Jewish today. The invitation came without doubt on account solely of my unique position as Scotland's first and, as yet, only woman High Court judge. While it is that fact which arouses media and public interest, for me the simple and incontrovertible truth is that it is my Jewishness which is my dominant identity, which has shaped and given direction to my life. It even led me into a career in the law.

As a teenager I was an enthusiastic pupil at the Hebrew College in Glasgow where I was particularly inspired by the beautiful language and the profound message of the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Justice and mercy are prophetic ideals and Judaism cares passionately about justice. It is interesting to reflect that the fundamental principles of equality before the law, the right to a fair trial and the recognition of the supreme dignity of the individual human being have their roots in the Hebrew Bible and were developed in Rabbinic law long before any European Convention on Human Rights. Studying the law seemed to me to be almost a natural progression from studying the sacred texts and so my choice of profession was clearly indicated.

Incidentally, I was fortunate enough to be brought up by parents who prized education and who encouraged me to believe that effort and endeavour were the keys to success to the extent that it simply never occurred to me to worry that I had chosen a profession in which women had suffered discrimination. Success in my chosen profession has been of great importance to me but of greater importance has been the desire to remain true to my Jewish roots and ancient heritage.

It is a tremendous privilege to play an active role in the Scottish legal world and to feel wholly comfortable and at ease there and moreover to be integrated to the extent that even as a member of the Supreme Court bench I am untroubled by either religious or gender differences. But the focus of Jewish life is in the home and being a wife and mother and playing a pivotal role in a closely knit Jewish family observing timeless Jewish rituals is what is central to my existence and which for me gives meaning to the anxieties, mysteries and sufferings of the human condition. The greatest of all pleasures derives from watching our children and now our grandchildren enjoying the same intense, satisfying and precious Jewish experience. One of my earliest childhood memories is of the Sabbath candlesticks on my maternal grandmother's table and when I recently watched my two year old granddaughter cover her

eyes and lisp the traditional blessing over the Sabbath candles I was aware of being the central link in a five generation chain forged in eternity. Professional kudos is but a pale shadow beside our ancient and beautiful traditions.

Lady Cosgrove is a High Court Judge and a Judge of the Court of Session in Edinburgh

Ellen Galford

As the daughter of three thousand years of Jewish mothers, I'm as Jewish as they come in blood and bone and the conviction that the past is always with us. But I'm also seventeen different kinds of heretic. My home life (nearly 20 years, *keyn ayin hara*, with one beloved, lapsed-Catholic same-sex partner) is not going to endear me to anybody's Chief Rabbi. And I'd sooner invite Baruch Spinoza than either Ezra or Nehemiah to my Seder table.

I'm obsessed with Jewish history - with my own ancestors' late 19th century migrations from Kurland, Kovno Gubernia, and unknown corners of Galicia to New York City and the now long-vanished Jewish neighbourhoods of Newark, New Jersey. There is a rumour of a rabbi, a few generations back, but I'm more intrigued by the great-great uncle, a socialist printer, who was allegedly sent to Siberia for some affront against the Tsar. And I wish I knew more Yiddish.

Jewishness, for me, is also about ethics, social justice, tolerance, and generosity (both material and emotion). For an avowed agnostic, I spend a lot of time thinking about, talking to, arguing with God – but I see religion as a very private thing. Even as a child I never felt at home in the synagogue, or at ease with acts of communal worship. Out in the Scottish landscape, walking in Torridon or along a beach in the Outer Hebrides, is where I come closest to prayer. So you are unlikely to find me at the Edinburgh shul, (apart from meetings of the Lit.).

My own practice is a mosaic of contradictions. I light *Shabbos* and *yortsayt* candles, fast on Yom Kippur, and I have a *mezuzah* on the door, but I unashamedly prefer a dozen Loch Fyne oysters to a plate of gefilte fish. (More traditionalist members of our tribe accuse people like me of having a 'pick and mix' approach to Judaism. But it takes only a modest acquaintance with our communal history to realize that even the most ultra-*frum* have been equally selective...).

I'm no fan of fundamentalists, ours or anybody else's: religious authoritarianism has too much blood on its hands. I believe that dissent is an ancient and honourable part of Judaism as orthodoxy – and that the sparks struck between these two poles are what keep the flame alive.

Ellen Galford is a novelist and writer, and a frequent contributor to The Edinburgh Star

Malcolm Rifkind

Each of us has several identities which make up our whole personality. We are Scottish, we are Jewish, we are British, we are European.

Some feel more comfortable emphasising one element of their background. They reject or ignore those parts of their identity which seem alien or disagreeable. For

many Jews this often takes the form either of rejecting their Jewishness and assimilating or so identifying with it that it defines not only their religious but also their cultural and social life.

For me being Jewish is a natural part of my identity of which I am proud. While not being observant, it is my religion but it is also more than that. It makes me part of a people and a tradition that goes back several thousand years and has made a unique contribution to civilisation and to mankind.

But we live in a world where the common humanity and the universal values that we share are becoming more recognised and where different religions, races and cultures are seen as complementary rather than as alternatives.

For this reason I choose my friends and not just my colleagues at work from the whole community of which I am part and not just from co-religionists. My lifestyle is secular rather than religious. It tries to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

I recognise that such a view can have dangers for the survival of small minority communities including the Jews of Britain. But the strength and vitality of the Jewish tradition does not need to be nourished only by separate social and cultural ways of life. It needs to achieve a balance of the secular and the religious, of the Scottish and the Jewish, of the particular and of the universal.

Each person, and each family have to work out the answer for themselves.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind was Foreign Secretary from 1995 to 1997.

Bill Simpson

I began to write this article during the week of *Parashah Haazinu* in which Moses exhorts the Jewish people 'Apply your hearts to all the words that I testify against you

today, with which you are to instruct your children, to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah, for it is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life, and through this matter shall you prolong your days on the land'.

I believe these words to be the very essence of being a Jew and my definition of a Jew is a person who believes in one God as revealed to us in the Torah, and to the best of his/her ability tries to increase their knowledge of God, to observe the Sabbath and the dietary laws and to live by the commandments.

As a convert my choice was based upon a little understanding but a commitment to increase my knowledge and observance of the *Mitzvot*. To my mind therefore, the term 'secular Jew' is a contradiction in terms and I have no understanding of the expressions 'ethnic Jew' or 'cultural Jew'.

Bill Simpson is Honorary Treasurer of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation.

Community Centre

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LIFE WITH THE CAMBERGS

by Samuel Robin Spark

On a cold, crisp afternoon in October last year about twenty members of the Edinburgh community met in the Jewish section of Newington Cemetery to re-consecrate two gravestones - one for my paternal grandmother, Rachel Spark, and one for my great-great aunt, Sarah Joel. As we shall see Sarah had a very important contribution to make to my life.

In the autumn of 1945 I arrived in



Bernard and Sarah Camberg,
circa 1945

this country from Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and came to stay with my maternal grandparents, Bernard and Sarah Camberg. It was to be a strange and exciting but rather tumultuous time. My sojourn with the Cambergs was to last for the remainder of their lives, until my grandmother passed away in her eighty-fifth year.

Life with the Cambergs was never dull. I recall that my grandparents were visited by many members of the Jewish community and were in their turn entertained by them. The Rapaports and the Rosenblooms spring to mind. Mrs Rapaport came from a well known

Jewish family, the Epriles, and lived in Greenhill Gardens. One of her daughters, Natalie, was a professional classical singer. She married Emmanuel Young, a highly talented conductor, with whom I am still in contact. Shortly after the engagement of Emmanuel and Natalie, my grandparents and I went to see him conduct a stupendous performance of 'Aida' and later one of 'La Boheme' in Edinburgh. These were my first experiences of opera and to have actually conversed with the conductor, the tall, handsome fiancé of Natalie's, filled me with awe then and is still a cherished memory.

The Rosenblooms were also great friends. Simpson Rosenbloom owned the music shop in the Arcade off the Bridges. A clever and generous man who still spoke in heavily accented English, he had 'made it' in this country and went on to be the Treasurer of our community and to play an influential part in the administration of the *Shul*. His wife, Gertie, was quite a comic and she and my grandmother shared many a joke. She had been quite a beauty in her youth and still looked impressive to me, tall and elegant in her beautiful clothes. Simpson, on the other hand, was short and, with his constant clowning, could have been a big hit on the music-hall stage. However, I realised, even at that early age, that behind the humorous facade lurked an astute brain. His own story of, as a youth, being a conscript in the Czar's army in Russia and then fleeing the country in disguise, with the prospect of the death penalty if he had been apprehended, was one of high drama.

Later when my grandmother was widowed and, because of her age and infirmity, was effectively confined to her flat, she was visited by many friends of long standing including the Eivans and the

Langskaills of 'Friends of Israel'. The late Mrs. Leah Julius also visited quite often, accompanied by her sister, Mrs. Jean Abramson, the mother of my old friend Frank. Grandmother loved company and the visits of these friends were always happy events and often prolonged. Her non-Jewish neighbours often visited her too, including Lady Illingworth and her two sisters, Mona Crabb and Betty Crabe. [Curiously, though their surnames were spelt differently, they were pronounced alike.] Grace Illingworth and Mona Crabb lived in the tenement immediately opposite ours and Betty, who had a house in Crail, was often with them. The three ladies and my grandmother were great chums. What they chatted about I do not know but there were always hoots of laughter when they visited. I surmised that, like grandmother, they had been very attractive young ladies in their time and would have had many dashing suitors. Perhaps they were reminiscing about these young men or about the various characters in the neighbourhood.

Another caller was Mrs. Morris, mother of Albert Morris, well-known to readers of *The Scotsman*. Like my grandmother, she was Jewish and they enjoyed talking about the highs and lows of the Jewish community, who was doing well' and who was not, whose children were getting married and whose divorced - it was all grist to the mill.

But grandmother loved the company of young people in their late teens or early twenties just as much as that of those of her own generation. When I went to *Shul* on *Shabbat*, she loved me to bring back visitors to share our Sabbath meal. Over the years we must have entertained very many young Jewish people from Israel, America, England, France and other

countries. Some still keep in touch with me and I hear from them from time to time, especially at *Rosh Hashanah*, *Pesach* and *Chanukah*.

I hope that these few examples of my grandparents' wide circle of friends will give some idea, however inadequate, of the rich and varied social life that they, and therefore I, enjoyed. I am happy to say that there are still many friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in Edinburgh and throughout the world, who can testify to my grandmother's generosity of spirit and charismatic personality and my grandfather's kindness and concern for other people. The Cambergs were warm, friendly, outgoing people who attracted like-minded people of different faiths and persuasions. My own tolerance and love of different peoples is largely due to my having taken on board their philosophy of life.

Above all, however, I absorbed their staunch belief in Judaism. Faced with a rather unruly and troubled grandson in his eighth year, my grandparents nevertheless showered me with kindness and affection. I had no prior knowledge of Judaism and very little of my own family background. However, my grandparents soon set about putting matters right. Grandfather took me to visit the Reverend Bernard Zucker, *Shochet*, *Chazen* and teacher to our community. I was to learn Hebrew and prepare for my *Barmitzvah*, along with other boys such as Barry Leigh, Morris Sagman, Frank Abramson, Joe Aronson, Edwin Hoffenberg, Philip Oppenheim and Harold Stern. My grandparents had seen their own son through to his *Barmitzvah* and they repeated the process with me. In due course I said *Maftir* and *Haftarah* and subsequently enjoyed the celebrations at the Balmoral Restaurant in Princes Street. Some very happy *Erev Shabbat* suppers and *Seder* nights were spent at the Zuckers' flat in Clerk Street and I still have and sometimes wear the *yarmulke* that Mrs. Zucker embroidered for my thirteenth

birthday. Morris Sagman and Barry Leigh, friends of my *Barmitzvah* days, died tragically young some years ago but I am still in frequent contact with Frank Abramson and with 'the man with the golden voice', Joe Aronson. To hear him sing on the High Holy Day services is a truly uplifting experience.

My academic education prior to coming to this country had been very rudimentary and here too I had a lot of catching up to do. To assist me in clearing the hurdle of passing the entrance exam for secondary school, my grandparents asked Dorothy Napier, the daughter of a close friend of theirs, if she would give me some tuition. Dorothy Napier would, I guess, have then been in her mid or late twenties. She was a primary school teacher and had been a pupil at James Gillespie's Girls' School. Teaching and, in particular, imparting of the three R's seemed to come effortlessly to her and I made swift progress. A deeply religious person, she made a comment that I have never forgotten. It was to the effect that I was honoured to be a member of the great Jewish people who had survived so much tribulation and succeeded in preserving their faith in God. I had never thought about Judaism in this way before and her remark, coming as it did from such a lovely person, a Christian, who had successfully helped me to overcome my educational difficulties, had a profound and lasting effect on me. I passed the entrance examination for Daniel Stewart's College and spent four years there. My best subjects were Art, English and Mathematics. At sport, though, I was a non-starter and managed to come last in the obstacle race on sports day at Goldenacre!

My grandparents remained members of the congregation all their lives. One Annual Report and Financial Statement, for the Salisbury Road Synagogue in 1932-33, shows that Mr B Camberg was allocated seat no. E427 and that he owed £3:7s. He paid £1:19:9d

leaving arrears of £1:7:3d. Mrs Camberg was allocated seat no. D373 and owed £2:10:3d which was paid in full. [Should our industrious Treasurer, Mr Bill Simpson find that my grandfather's arrears were never cleared, I would be happy to wipe the slate clean!] My grandparents' son Philip had his *Barmitzvah* in the Graham Street Synagogue on Saturday, August 1st, 1925.

Having lived with my grandparents from early childhood until their deaths, I came to know them extremely well. They had a long and successful marriage and always showed great affection for each other, although they were in many ways contrasting beings.

My grandmother, Sarah, was English, the child of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother. To her dying day she retained her clear English accent. She had a natural chic and her interests were artistic and creative. My grandfather, Bernard, on the other hand, was a typical hard-working practical Scot with a



Adelaide Hyams

love of football and horse-racing. An engineer to trade, he worked for over forty years with the now defunct North British Rubber Company in Edinburgh.

So how did these two individuals, Bernard, a first-generation

Scottish Jew and Sarah, the offspring of assimilation, meet? From an early age I was fascinated by stories, especially those of my own kith and kin and I listened attentively to this one.

The story really starts with Sarah's mother, my great-grandmother, Adelaide Hyams, by all accounts a most remarkable lady. Adelaide came from a Jewish family who settled to the East End of London in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Prior to her marriage, my grandmother told me, Adelaide had been in the service of Louisa, Lady de Rothschild. Although her two elder sisters, Sarah and Kitty, both married Orthodox Jews, Adelaide married a non-Jew, Thomas Uezzel. The marriage took place in St Bartholomew's Church, Bethnal Green, on 3 January, 1886. Adelaide seems to have been the kind of person who did nothing by halves and she threw herself with gusto into her new life-style in the town of Watford some 20 miles north west of London. She did not, however, lose touch with her family. She continued to maintain close and affectionate ties with both her sisters. Kitty had married Philip Abrahams in 1869 and Sarah had married Henry Joel in 1876, both marriages taking place in Orthodox synagogues. Kitty remained in the East End, but Sarah moved up to Edinburgh. Adelaide, by then widowed, spent the last few years of her life with my grandparents here in Edinburgh and when she died in 1933 she was buried in the Jewish section of Piershill Cemetery.

Adelaide described herself as a 'Gentile Jewess', by which she meant that she was a Jew by birth who lived with her Christian husband in a non Jewish environment. But she retained a loyalty to her Jewish roots and, when her daughter Sarah (known in the family as Cissie) reached her late teens, she sent her to live with her recently widowed sister Sarah here in Edinburgh so that she might take

her place in a Jewish community. Adelaide's two sons followed in the Christian tradition of their father.

I must say that I am extremely grateful to my grandmother's aunt Sarah Joel for agreeing to Cissie staying with her in Edinburgh. Had she not done so, Cissie would not have met and fallen in love with the short, stocky but handsome young man who was to become her husband and there would have been no Robin Spark today!

It was her mother's idea, my grandmother explained to me, that she, Cissie, should come to Edinburgh to learn about the Jewish way of life and, if possible, meet an upstanding and loving partner in the community here and so return to the fold. Certainly Cissie's

knowledge of Judaism when she arrived in Edinburgh must have been rather sketchy. After all she had grown up in a non-Jewish environment and the Uezzel family were Anglicans. No doubt her aunt Sarah Joel had much to teach her. But the beliefs and customs of Judaism would not have been entirely foreign to her. She had a close friend in her cousin Ada, one of: the seven daughters of her aunt Kitty Abrahams. Postcards still remain which were sent by Ada from her home at 111 Victoria Park Road in the early 1900's to my then teenage grandmother at her parents' home in Watford. They constitute an animated and happy correspondence and I judge Ada to have been no less a joyful and positive person than my



Bernard and Sarah Camberg's Ketubah (marriage certificate).

grandmother was. I wonder what happened to Ada? She became Mrs. Lassman but then seems to have disappeared from the scene. Did she die young? It would be so interesting to know.

From the time of her arrival in Edinburgh, my grandmother practised Judaism and, in due course, she married my grandfather. The wedding took place in London. She and Aunt Sarah Joel stayed with Aunt Kitty Abrahams in Victoria Park Road before the wedding which was solemnised at the East London Synagogue on February 1st, 1911. Aunt Sarah signed as witness. My grandmother signed her name as Sarah Uezzel Hyams, taking her grandfather's name because her own father was not Jewish. I have their *Ketubah* in my possession. (see above)

It is probable that the Hyams family came from Lithuania. The Cambergs certainly originated there, my grandfather belonging to the first generation to be born in this country. Grandfather had ten brothers and sisters! But even before settling in Lithuania the Cambergs were used, as a rabbinical family, to being on the move. In fact the name Camberg is really that of the town in Germany whence they came to Lithuania.

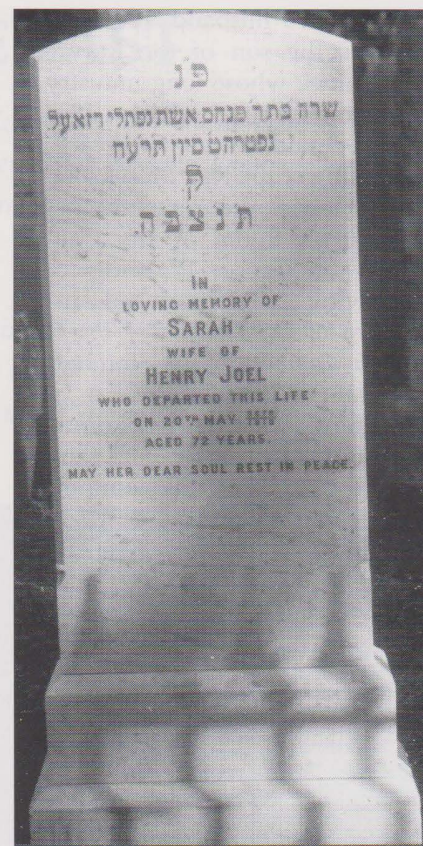
The Spark family also emigrated to this country from Lithuania and it may interest those of you who are acquainted with my friend Gershon Mendick to know that his father and mine came from the very same town in Lithuania. My paternal grandfather, Samuel Spark, whose name I bear, had at one time been conscripted into the Russian army. To avoid further service in the Russian-Japanese conflict, he came to this country with his wife, Rachel, and little son, my father, Sydney Oswald Spark. Two more children were born to Samuel and Rachel after they settled in Edinburgh. Alas, at the age of thirty-eight, Rachel died in childbirth when my father was only nine years old, leaving him

to care for his younger brother and sister while Samuel travelled around the farms and villages of the Borders selling his goods. Despite hardship and deprivation my father was a brilliant scholar, excelling both at primary school, Sciennes, and at secondary school, Boroughmuir. Assisted by scholarships he went on to take his MA degree at Edinburgh University.

For a boy from a relatively poor background, this was a major achievement. My father would have liked to pursue a career in medicine but the cost of taking such a long degree was out of the question. So he became a teacher instead. Before the Second World War he emigrated to Southern Rhodesia. My mother went out to join him there, they were married and I was born there. Among my dearest possessions is the samovar my grandfather Samuel Spark brought with him from his home in Lithuania. It has pride of place by my lounge fireside.

My paternal grandmother, Rachel Spark, my Camberg great-grandparents, and Sarah and Henry Joel are all buried in the Jewish section of Newington Cemetery, which, like the rest of the cemetery, was, for many years, left in a state of quite unbelievable neglect. Giant hogweed had taken over and much of the cemetery was impenetrable. In 1994, however, Edinburgh City Council was able to acquire the cemetery from its then owner and, since then, a transformation has taken place. On visiting the cemetery, I was able to locate the gravestone of Henry Joel, which was still upright, that of his wife, Sarah, which was in a sorry state, having fallen from its plinth and so black with the dirt of so many years that the inscription was barely discernible. Of Rachel Spark's stone I could find no sign.

To the rescue came Mr. George Bell of the City of Edinburgh Council's Burial Services Department. His search through the cemetery records located the lair and we found upon it a large



Memorial Stone for Sarah Joel in Newington Cemetery.

gravestone lying face down and half submerged in the ground. I had Rachel's stone re-erected and professionally cleaned. When I went to look at it after this work had been done, I was incredulous - and absolutely thrilled. There stood revealed a magnificent white marble gravestone sparkling in the sunshine, just as it would have looked to her desperately grieving husband and children all those years ago.

Inspired by this success, I then had Sarah Joel's stone renovated. Lo and behold, another beautiful white marble memorial emerged! And so we come back to the re-consecration ceremony with which this article began. I should like to record my warmest thanks and appreciation to Mr Alec Rubinstein for officiating at the service and to all my friends who so kindly gave up their time to be present at the ceremony. My forebears had, I felt, been most fittingly honoured.

The memorial stone to Henry

Joel, Sarah's husband, reveals that he was the son of the Reverend Moses Joel, whose long ministry to our community lasted from 1831 to 1863, a period of thirty two years. An engraving of the Rev. Moses Joel, by J. G. Howie, can be seen in the Edinburgh Room of the Central Library in George IV Bridge. The engraving is reproduced in *A History of the Origins of the First Jewish Community in Scotland* by the late Abel Phillips, a past president of the community. Apparently Rev. Moses Joel was the second minister of the community, having succeeded the Rev. Meir M. Rentle in 1831, in which year he was granted a licence to practise *Shechita*. I still possess the cover of a *Machzor* bearing the Rev. Moses Joel's signature. I also at one time had a rabbinical commentary belonging to and signed by him. I gave it on loan to our then rabbi, Rabbi Isaac Cohen. The book was mislaid and never returned. I therefore offer this maxim to the readers of **The Edinburgh Star**: 'Never lend precious books to anyone, not even to the Chief Rabbi of the Republic of Ireland!' as Rabbi Cohen subsequently became. The Rev. Moses Joel is also mentioned by the late Rabbi Dr. Salis Daiches in his article 'The Jew in Scotland' in connection with the small synagogue in Richmond Court, which was used by the congregation for some fifty years from 1817 onwards.

I wonder how many more stories, interesting, amusing, sad, dramatic, lie behind the stones in the old cemetery? It would be wonderful if more of them could be restored and a part of our history properly recorded and preserved.

As for myself, I am sometimes a little sad to think that my particular twig on the family tree will sprout no more. But I am pleased to think that the tree is still branching vigorously all over the world.

After working as a civil servant, Robin Spark studied at Edinburgh College of Art, graduating in 1987. He is both a practising artist and a teacher of art.

ON HESHEL'S KINGDOM

by Dan Jacobson

Heshel's Kingdom is not a novel but a mixture of autobiography and family memoir; it is also a travel-book about a journey I recently made to Lithuania. In addition it reconstructs - from the documents and artefacts available to me - the life and character of my grandfather, Heshel Melamed, rabbi of the Lithuanian *shtetl* of Vorna, who died in that town ten years before my mother gave birth to me in Johannesburg, South Africa.

As far as I know, Heshel Melamed made only one journey to a destination outside Lithuania. In 1912 he was invited by some *Litvaks* who had settled in Cleveland, Ohio, to take up a position as the rabbi of a small, new congregation they wished to establish. On this journey he went not only to Cleveland, but also some other cities in the American North-East. After a few months he returned to Lithuania. The United States, he had decided, was no fit place for a pious Jew. To his strict eye, the Jews who had migrated there were rapidly ceasing to be Jews. They shaved their beards, they rode in street-cars on the Sabbath, they ate anything and everything, their women dressed immodestly, they mocked Jews like himself who wished above all else to preserve the traditional Jewish ways of life. He was not prepared to expose himself, or his children, to the temptations which were apparently inseparable from the move to the new country.

Seven years later he died, at the early age of fifty-three, leaving his wife and nine children penniless and homeless. He could not know that his early death was the greatest favour he could have done for them. Had he lived to enforce his wishes on his family, as he was determined to do, then all those who obeyed him would have perished twenty years later - as indeed did every single one of the pious cousins and

uncles and in-laws who remained in Lithuania. My mother of course would have been among them. As luck would have it, however, Heshel's widow and children had



made their way to South Africa in 1920. There, in South Africa, an extensive cousinage had already established itself and had acquired the means to help the bereaved family.

Thus they were saved. Strangely enough, however, my grandfather's misgivings about what would become of his children if they left Lithuania were amply vindicated by their subsequent behaviour. With a remarkable rapidity and unanimity they did indeed jettison all the beliefs and practices he valued so profoundly. But they lived. That is the central irony around which my book turns. In a passage about their departure from Lithuania I describe a formal photograph of the family which was taken just before they left the country. Through a series of questions rather than answers, I go on to speak briefly of all the unpredictable and often unhappy ways in which the individual careers of the children shaped themselves in the new country. Then I write:

Take up that photograph again. Nine lives in waiting. Nine escapees from the rifles and machine guns of the German *Einsatzkommandos* and their Lithuanian hirelings; from the burial pits and pyres that would have consumed their bodies in their natal land. Nine young people spared as a result of their father's early death to make the best or worst of the opportunities given to them and denied to those they had left behind.

I go back again and again to that thought. I have to do so. As much as anything else it is what provokes me to seek them out now, and their father lying in the Varniai cemetery. Or to feel myself sought out by them.

For them, safely landed in South Africa, the privilege of vicissitude: success, failure, appetite, disappointment, wreckage, growth, an individual exit from existence. For the others, for the family in Kelme, for neighbours and townsfolk in Varniai, for the entire nation they were born into - nothing. A single, common fate.

On one side of the ocean, life. On the other, death.

If you can look into the seeds of time

And say which grain will grow and which will not. [Macbeth, 1, iii, 58-59]

The longest single section of the book is an account of my visit to Lithuania. Among the places I visited were my grandfather's Vorna and my great-grandfather's Kelme. I found the entire experience even more distressing than I had feared it might be, not least because of a kind of shame which gripped me while I was travelling about the country. As I put it in the book:

How feeble my imagination was! How carefully I had protected it, or allowed it to

protect me, from the pain that might otherwise have threatened it! How shaming it was that I had to visit the country where these things had been done, and go to some of the places where the murdering took place, to feel the horror of it so intensely! Did I of all people - someone who had mentally reproached his rabbinical grandfather for the near-fatal rectitude of his innocence - did I really need such 'aids' to reflection and recollection?

Apparently so...

On one side of the ocean, death. On the other, life. The gulf between those swallowed by the catastrophe in Europe and those who escaped it is unbridgeable. A commensurate gulf yawns between the catastrophe itself and the words I have to use in speaking of it. Even when I try to speak directly to you, Heshel Melamed, my dear grandfather, as I now try to do. I sit here transcribing from my notebook SS Colonel Karl Jaeger's tally of his unit's killings on this or that day in a single town, Rasenai, in August 1941. (On 18 August, for example: 446 Jews, 440 Jewish women, 1020 Jewish children.) Those are his words and figures. And my words? They describe my own memory of a visit to Rasenai. The discomforts of the Hotel Neris, in Kaunas. My visits to other 'mass massacre' sites. A childhood in Kimberley. The landscapes of Lithuania. Your journey to Cleveland, Ohio in 1912. Vera, the last Jew in Varniai. The woman with her weighing machine on Gediminas Street, Vilnius.

This adjective or that? A full-stop or a semi-colon? The active or passive mood? Seeking and finding the answers to such questions, by instinct or calculation, I know that anyone who truly opened his imagination to just a fragment of

what happened on the outskirts of Rasenai on 18 August 1941 might well be struck dumb forever. And that was the tally of one day's killings of helpless people, most of them children, outside a single provincial town in Lithuania. Comparable events took place elsewhere in Lithuania and in many other countries on that same day. They went on unabated, every day, without pause, all over eastern Europe, for a further three and a half years.

There we are. We not only write in the shadow of Holocaust; we live under it too. We are left to know as a fact that which we cannot believe. To believe what we cannot imagine. To imagine what we cannot speak of. To speak of that for which there are no words.

Dan Jacobson is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at University College, London and the author of many novels including *The Beginners*, *The Rape of Tamar* and *The God-Fearer*. His most recent book *Heshel's Kingdom* is published in hard cover by Hamish Hamilton and will be published in paperback by Penguin Books in February 1999. This article is based on his talk to the Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society on 1 November 1998.

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A LETTER FROM ISRAEL

by Edwin Hoffenberg

A summons in the Lake District

It was a beautiful sunny day in June 1982. We sat and luxuriated in the lush grass by the side of Lake Windemere, sharing our delight with other picnickers whose children played nearby. We mused on how the same sun that was shining benignly on us, accompanied by a cool breeze, was parching the land of Israel, our home, and making people there feel uncomfortable and drained.

After several hours of relaxation, we decided that the time had come to move on to Glasgow to visit my wife's father. We found a phone box to let him know we were coming. Doreen's face blanched as she spoke to him. Our daughter Gila had telephoned from Israel to say that war had broken out and I had been called up on the first day. I was to return to Israel immediately.

My first reaction was to contrast the relaxed demeanour of the other picnickers with our own agitation. We debated whether I should return immediately or continue to Glasgow and clarify the position from there. We chose the latter course and when we got to Glasgow, I spoke to Gila again. I asked her to contact my unit, find out where they were and get further instructions. She got back to me after an hour or so, having succeeded in reaching my base, and was told that the army was doing very well without me and that I did not need to join my unit until I returned to Israel after our holiday. Although I felt somewhat deflated at the thought of not being indispensable, this did enable us to continue with our holiday and to visit our families.

Dentists in the Israeli Army

During the Yom Kippur War, in 1973, it had become clear that dentists, in spite of their medical backgrounds, could not be used to treat the wounded as their training was not deemed to be adequate for this task. As a result, many dentists had felt



Edwin Hoffenberg on a recent visit to the UK.

terribly frustrated that they could make no real contribution to the war effort. I was fortunate to be attached to the Rambam Hospital in Haifa, but this was due to my friendship with the Head of Anaesthetics who had asked me to help out because of a shortage of anaesthetists there.

Later on, the Army decided to remedy the situation by sending young (and not-so-young) dentists on a two-month course in traumatology and emergency treatment. In 1976, I was called to Tzrifin, the old British camp in Sarafand, to take such a course and, when I had completed it, I was assigned to an army unit. We dentists were given the inflated title of *hachyaa* (resuscitation doctor) and it was our job to stick with the doctor, learn what we could and pray to God that we would never be

used and that our inadequacies would not be shown up. Until then, my reserve (*miluim*) duty involved practising dentistry. Now I alternated between doing that and roving the country from Lebanon to Sinai and the Suez Canal with my new unit. On one occasion, I was actually allowed to turn up a day late, consideration having been shown to enable me, as a Scotsman, to go to Ramat Gan Stadium to watch the Israel-Scotland match. It was difficult to know who to shout for.

Army bureaucracy being what it is, the Dental Department did not strike me off their list when I was assigned to the Medical Unit and, as a result, I found myself doing twice as much *miluim* as anyone else, sometimes as much as 70 days a year when the normal period was 35 days. This did not do my practise any good but I lived in the hope that my patients would be understanding, which they were, until my vociferous protests to the army bore fruit.

Back to Military Service

On returning home after our trip to Scotland, I was sent to join my unit in Lebanon. An army lorry took me and one other soldier, a young officer from Rosh Pinah. In conversation (in Hebrew) he asked me what I did and when I told him, he reeled off a list of Glasgow dentists and asked whether I knew them. 'What is your connection with them?', I asked. 'My father was Julie Shafer (a Glasgow dentist with whom I had worked and whom I knew well)' he replied. So here were two Hebrew-speaking Scotsmen, driving into Lebanon to fight for their country. Fortunately, the war was over by the time we arrived and three days after joining my unit, we were pulled back. My war experience was over and I returned to dentistry.

The Changing Jewish Community in Edinburgh

In all the 30 years we have lived in Israel, our emotional ties with Scotland have never been severed. Not only because of the families we left behind but also because, in my case, of fond memories of my childhood and youth in beautiful Edinburgh. I must confess that, when I was growing up in the city in the 1950s, I did not think the community had a future. By the time I left in 1961, attendance at *Shul* had dwindled, there was little activity in the *Cheder*, and the once-active *Habonim* and *B'nei Akiva* organisations were no longer functioning. Most of my contemporaries had decided to leave, mainly for Israel, and I can remember being admonished by my late cousin Philip Goldberg, who argued that if only I and my friends were to stay in Edinburgh, we could have a vibrant community. But it was not to be.

And now I must confess to my joy in witnessing the revitalisation of the Edinburgh community, with the injection of new blood in the persons of the Adlers, the Cosgroves, the Leifers, the Sheins and many others. I do not know them although I feel I do from reading *The Edinburgh Star*. Readers of the magazine should know that those of us from Edinburgh who now live in Israel are proud of what you have done in producing this magazine and eagerly await the arrival of every issue, to read about the about the personalities we knew from the past and the activities of the community today. This is in stark contrast to the moribund attitudes of the leaders of the community in my day when the main issues were decorum in the *Shul*, stopping people from dancing in the *Shul* on *Simchat Torah* and presenting a civilised face to the wider community.

The Changing Nature of Life in Israel

And what of life here in Israel? Does the idealism which brought us here still play an important part in our

lives 30 years on? Can we still recommend to our fellow Jews abroad that they should come and join us in our adventure? Is the adventure, building and developing the land, still the same as it was for us? In the main, I would answer 'yes' to all these questions. Of course, over the years, the nature of Israeli society has changed. There has been a large influx of immigrants many of whom, particularly those from Russia, are not here for altruistic reasons. However, over time, immigrants do add - both in cultural and in economic terms - to the richness of the melting pot, even if, initially, they appear to be a burden to the host community.

The *kibbutz*, that pioneering socialist experiment, has had to change its format, in part for economic reasons, and no longer has the same significance for Israeli society. *Kibbutniks*, well as the general population, have had to come to terms with the market which is becoming increasingly deregulated so that we can compete in the global economy and are not left behind. We have become a more materialistic society and any remaining socialist ideas only find expression in welfare provisions. The *Histadrut* is still kicking and screaming and attempting to protect workers' (and its' own) interests. However, as in other countries, unskilled workers are declining in number and the emphasis today is on training and retraining.

However, it is in politics that most unrest is undoubtedly felt. There is too much factionalism and too many vested interests, and many people feel that the national interest is being sacrificed. Most of us from the West, especially those of us from Britain, who have known a two-party system of government feel that would be more effective, albeit less democratic, in that it would reduce the power of minor parties whose influence is excessive in a system of proportional representation.

The image of Judaism, and of the

religious, including religious Zionists, has been badly tarnished in the public mind through their involvement in the machinations of politics and the wheeling and dealing to obtain public funds and political influence. They must climb down off this ladder and present Judaism in its true form as a palatable alternative to the secularism that prevails, largely as an expression of distaste at the behaviour of religious Jews. On the other hand, I believe that the non-religious have an obligation to educate their children in the ethical and philosophical values of Judaism and to encourage a greater degree of tolerance between the religious and the non-religious. To obviate the fears of the religious, I am in favour of a constitution that would embody *Shabbat* as our national day of rest, *kashrut* in all public institutions and the freedom to choose religious education.

The deepest rift of all is created by differences in opinion over the current peace process. At no time in our history has Israel not craved peace and not been prepared to make sacrifices for it. But many people believe the Arabs have not manifested an equal willingness to eliminate the hatred engendered in their people against us.

My optimism for the future of Israel lies in its ability to progress, in spite of social, economic and political turmoil. The quality of medical care is of a high standard, our electronics and computer industries are on a par with those of the leading nations, and in terms of production and exports, we have nothing to be ashamed of. Social justice is a very strong part of our Jewish heritage and, if we can learn to be more considerate towards and more civil to each other, then we will have created a state of which our ancestors would be proud.

Edwin Hoffenberg was born in Edinburgh and studied dentistry at Edinburgh University. he went on aliya 30 years ago and now practices dentistry in Haifa.

DIFFICULT PEOPLE, a play by Yosef Bar-Yosef shown at the Traverse Theatre from 9th-13th December 1998

reviewed by Yvonne Berger

Difficult People shown at the Traverse Theatre was written in 1968 by Yosef Bar-Yosef, a seventh generation resident of Jerusalem with an Orthodox background and education. After studying at the Hebrew University, he has written numerous plays and won the President's Award for Drama.

Difficult People, performed by Theatre Flux, has a cast of only four people. Rachael is the only female character. Single and unlucky in love, she avoids problems by making cups of tea. She is a symbol of 'girl power', and very *avant-garde* for her time. She has had two previous lovers, both of whom she has supported financially, which was very progressive for the period in which the play was set. No exact date is given, but we are told that the play takes place not long after the British Mandate.

Simon is Rachael's big brother, who has taken on a father-like role following the death of both their parents. Simon is the typical protective brother. He wants Rachael to be married, although not necessarily to the perfect man. He is simply concerned that, at the age 42, she should be someone's wife. It is for this reason, that, at the beginning of the play, he returns from a visit to Israel with the 'perfect Jewish boy' for his dear sister.

Leyzer is the Israeli gentleman who has been flown over for Rachael to meet. He is hardly the tall, dark and muscular Israeli one expects. On the contrary, fat and balding would be a better description. Leyzer is a loner, who has been totally let down in life. He was a disappointment to his father, he has had numerous jobs, at all of which he was unsuccessful, and, needless to say, he is not rich. His first wife rejected him, after which he ended up in a mental hospital and he no longer has access to his

child from this marriage. Leyzer is clearly not the 'perfect Jewish boy' who is going to sweep Rachael off her feet.

The fourth character is Benny, a Marxist cobbler, who is Rachael's landlord and lives next door. Apart from when he plays the trumpet loudly, Benny has a quiet role in the play. He admires Rachael from afar, but is too shy to do anything about it. However, he does support her, and tries to help her in difficult situations.

The story begins with Simon informing Rachael that, when he was in Israel, he met a 'wonderful' guy for her. Rachael is totally disinterested and chooses to ignore the situation by making a cup of tea. During this time, her brother humorously describes Leyzer. He knows that this is perhaps not a match made in heaven, but nonetheless, he pursues the possibility. He has even lied about Rachel's age and the amount of money she has, to ensure that Leyzer will be even more attracted to her. Rachael reacts to this news with a 'thanks but no thanks' attitude. She does not want a *shidduch*, especially not with this man although, on the other hand, she remains loyal to her brother, and agrees to meet Leyzer.

The cobbler walks in from time to time during the conversation between Simon and Rachael. Rachael looks longingly at Benny, but she is also too shy to do anything about her feelings. Leyzer arrives, and after a few awkward moments, they sit down and chat, or at least try to break the ice. We can deduce that Rachael is still in love with her ex-lovers, as her main conversation point is medicine, because both her ex-boyfriends were medical students. Leyzer is just as bad, because the first thing he does is test Rachael to see how

similar she is to his ex-wife. When it comes to age, perhaps to spite her brother, Rachael tells Leyzer that she is really 42 and not 39. The Israeli feels horribly lied to, and when Simon finds out that Rachael has told Leyzer the truth, he is furious that all his matchmaking plans have been ruined.

This is just the beginning of the verbal confrontation between the three characters which is to follow. It is at this point that all truths are revealed: Rachael tells Leyzer that she has had previous lovers, and that she does not own the flat she lives in. In a way, both Rachael and Leyzer are very similar in that they are both used to being let down: Leyzer by his wife and father, and Rachael by her two lovers, who took her money and left. After hearing these facts, Rachael expects Leyzer to follow in the same vein and walk out. However, the Israeli is stunned because he can not only relate to her, but is satisfied that she has told him the truth. At the end of the day, this is all that Leyzer has ever wanted. He has been lied to so often in his life that all he craves is for someone to be honest. There is a complete change in atmosphere at this moment as the two characters now sit down and view each other in a new light. It appears that the seed of a new relationship is about to be sown.

Simon wants Leyzer to leave, but his request is ignored. Rachael's brother is now feeling rejected because, for the first time in his life, he is not able to involve himself in his sister's matters. This is quite ironic considering he has spent most of the play trying to steer Rachael's life. However, now that she no longer needs him, he is jealous. In order to capture the couple's attention, Simon begins to make fun of Leyzer by mocking an old family tradition. Rachael laughs, which

instantaneously offends the Israeli. Leyzer walks out of the flat in disgust, leaving Rachael torn. The chance for her to settle down has again fallen from her grasp.

Difficult People is an intense Jewish play, with a lot of humorous elements. It is centred around loyalties and relationships, rather than hard-core action. One can sympathise with all the characters because they each have their own problems. The play was appealing because of an added twist - unlike the typical 'Jewish Matchmaker' story, *Difficult People* does not have a happy ending. By the end of the play, all truths are revealed, and the characters know more about themselves. They have even grown

stronger, but there are no winners, heroes or heroines.

The staging of *Difficult People* was effective. The characters performed realistically, and the *mis-en-scene* captured the period well. Moreover, the fact that the play was shown at the **Traverse** made us feel we were sitting with the characters in their living room.

This was the first time I had seen any work by Yosef Bar-Yosef and I was impressed by his powerful composition. More Israeli productions in Britain, please! My leaving thoughts: 'Well, all you single people out there, just beware the next time you are offered a *shiddoch*!'

Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Shadows On The Hudson*, published by Hamish Hamilton, London 1998, pp. 548, £16.99.

reviewed by Ros Abramsky

America - land of the free, haven for the oppressed - has garnered to herself the cream of Europe's exiles. New York in the late 1940s provides the backdrop for this saga of a handful of these, reasonably well-off, companionable, talented Jews. United by a common background, these figures seem to come alive only in each other's company.

Boris Makaver, into whose well-appointed flat the half-dozen individuals are welcomed, is perhaps the most stable of these scarred drifters. His passage to late middle age has been smoothed by his success as a businessman, his talents easily transferable from Warsaw to New York. His daughter Anna has not been so lucky: wealth, good looks and intelligence have brought her neither success in love nor any other consuming interest to occupy her. And so it is almost out of ennui, of sheer boredom and aimlessness, that she falls into a flirtation with Hertz Grein, a disappointed intellectual whose marriage and teenage children seem

to have made no impact whatsoever on his consciousness.

Makaver, who almost alone among the group sticks to traditional values and practices, is horrified at this performance, but apparently can do nothing to prevent the pair, who had first known each other in Warsaw as tutor and pupil, from throwing themselves at each other and even running off together, defying parents and spouses in a mad escapade that spawns tragedy on every side, even after it has almost as quickly burnt itself out. Indeed, as in much of Singer, the characters hardly seem to communicate with each other at all. Instead, Singer treats us to their internal reflections. We see how the exigencies of daily life and manners in the new world set off echoes of the world they left behind.

As the aftermath of the affair unfolds, the pasts of these two unfortunate individuals come back to haunt them in more concrete ways. Anna's first husband turns up

to torment her as she finally asserts herself and her talents in rescuing her father from an unwise business deal. Meanwhile, as Grein's wife dies of cancer, he takes up again with a long-standing mistress who, in despair at his poor response to her consistent and undemanding devotion, marries someone else.

By today's standards, the story is vastly overwritten and slides greasily along in a mode we would now call soap opera. However, the author carries us through in his wonderful way, seducing us into following the protagonists' struggles between passion, metaphysical reflection and general world-weariness. Not far beneath the surface, however, Singer is probing the consciences of his protagonists. These people have grown up against the backdrop of the highest ideals, before them has unfolded the greatest evil. How then can their little sins be seen as serious?

For Singer, indeed, the new situation poses a literary problem. For his chosen tokens of interference with the well-being of the soul, the malign spirits of Yiddish demonology, have not fared well on the voyage to the New World. The US Immigration Department has strictly excluded the breed, and any lost traces have been wiped clean as their erstwhile hosts have committed to memory the Declaration of Independence. Free now to engage in life, love and the pursuit of happiness, are the Makaver circle doing a better job than they could have done in haunted, hating, vengeful Europe?

In some ways, the answer has to be yes. They have anchored themselves in a place of physical safety and made the most of their opportunities for prosperity and the freedom to live the way they choose. The aspect of their cleverness that matches up to the standards of modern rationality can find fertile ground on which to grow without the hindrance of superstition or prejudice.

But what Singer actually shows us is a group of lost souls. No local context satisfies them for long, no

goal seems worth striving towards, but the spiritual path seems alternately ridiculous and unattainable. What is Singer trying to tell us when Grein ultimately abstracts himself from his friends and his family and runs away once more, this time to live among the pious? How is it that he ends up on the moral high ground, while Singer reserves the real punishment for those who have kept the faith, as if the sins of the children were to be visited on the fathers?

In America, as in the *shtetl*, Singer works his intense magic to confront the day to day world with a faith whose justice and efficacy he

resolutely refuses to believe in. Yet he cannot let go of it, or even allow that privilege to any of his characters, however much they strive to be free of it. That is the power of his work and the basis for the morality, a sort of theological agnosticism, more poetic than rational, more anguished than doctrinal, that he has left us as his legacy to the modern world.

Shadows over the Hudson was originally written in Yiddish and appeared in serial form in *The Forward* between January 1957 and January 1958. This new edition was translated by Joseph Sherman – Ed.

SURVIVING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948*, published by Schocken Books, New York, 1996, pp. 155, \$11.00

reviewed by Tammy Fransman

In this review of Benjamin Wilkomirski's remarkable narrative subtitled '*Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948*' I am concerned with two questions. Firstly, how does a child aged four, alone, separated from his family survive some six years of life in the German death camps? Secondly, having grown up in such a traumatic environment, how does he then readapt to the 'normal' world?

In just 155 pages, Wilkomirski recounts 'fragments' of his experiences of being a very small child of about 3 or 4, separated from his parents and later his brothers and growing up alone in a series of death camps. Interwoven with these early memories are later ones of his release from these camps and his journey to and sojourn in a foreign Switzerland, initially in a children's home and later with foster parents. It is hard to describe this book chronologically. Indeed, the author demands from us the suspension of the 'ordering logic of grown ups' which 'would only distort what happened'. (p.4) The memories that have floated to his surface are a series of disconnected fragments,

recalled as an older boy in Switzerland or as an adult when he had the maturity to do so. The memories often cluster around particular themes.

Thus, for example, having been given bread in the Swiss orphanage is linked, with heart-breaking poignancy, to his memory of being taken by a uniformed warden to see a woman lying on a straw bed, who he believes to be his mother, who offers him a precious piece of bread. His arrival by train in Switzerland reminds him of the endless, initially hopeful and then hopeless, journeys made before. He has learned not to go to sleep, to keep watch because grownups – particularly in uniforms – can be dangerously unpredictable and kill. This reminds him of how after enticing a camp guard into a child's game, the guard threw him against a wall. There are clear memories of his kind, patient, and gentle older brother, Motti, teaching him how to make a paper glider. He hoards food in the orphanage because he had learned in the camps that each meal could be his last meal and that only those who were alert and planned ahead could survive.

He is terrified when, in the orphanage, his socks and shoes are removed to be cleaned and he follows the lesson that Jankl, his adopted camp brother, had taught him. He ties rags to his feet to protect them, much to the amusement of the other children.

In this way, one of the most remarkable qualities of the book is revealed – the author's courage in remembering and describing his experiences as a child in the first person without recourse to age or any other form of distance as a defense against the pain. The result is that the images are enormously powerful and the language simple, direct and even poetical.

What then made it possible for the little boy, Benjamin, to survive in the death camps against all odds when he was so obviously meant to die? There are many possible explanations but a large part must rest with fate – that is Benjamin being in the right place at the right time or not being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Certain other qualities may have helped. Benjamin showed an enormous will to survive in the face of horrific personal trauma. Only once does he feel he can no longer carry on.

From his earliest memories one wonders at the quality of quiet observation that sets him apart, alone. He witnesses his father's death and is able to understand that his father's turned away face is not a sign of loving him less, but the result of an external threat that was stronger than his father. Benjamin observed and learned the rules of survival quickly.

Benjamin must have established very loving and full relationships before being separated from his family. This enabled him to transfer trust onto others. In the first camp Benjamin formed a close relationship with Jankl – a boy the same age as his older brother Motti. In his own words:

'Jankl was good.

It was Jankl I had to thank for everything ... I owe my life to Jankl ... He was always there when I needed him. He protected me, he gave me advice, he taught me a lot, he

alerted me to dangers...He showed me patiently how to tie a knot, and why it mattered.' (pp.72-3).

Later there were the women who hid him and looked after him. Benjamin must also have had an ability to induce love and protection in others. For example, even the uniformed warden who had brought him to his first camp, Majdanek, risked taking him to see his mother.

What of the second question – of Benjamin's adaptation to the outside world? Much of the book deals with his painful re-entry into so-called normal society. Here two points can be made. Firstly, Benjamin teaches us how an adult can never presume to 'know' a child's authentic experiences, particularly when they have been so traumatic. For example, when being shown the boiler in the basement of his foster parents' house, Benjamin is convinced that this is like the furnace in the camps in which he

was finally meant to be burned.

Secondly, Benjamin's attitude to his new life in Switzerland was paradoxical. He longed to return to his 'home' in the death camps where he was 'known' by the other children, where he understood the rules and was 'safe'. In the outside world, where he had clothes and food, he was lulled into a false sense of security. All was chaotic and confusing and all the more dangerous because at any moment it could change. He could not trust. He secretly followed the camp rules and saw his new life as a trap. When as a teenager he saw his first documentaries on the liberation of the camps he was shattered:

'Goddamit – who got freed? And where was I when everyone else was being freed? No-one freed us, and nobody brought us food ... Nobody ever told me that the old times and their evil games and rules were over and I could go forward without fear and threat into a new time and a

new world with new peaceful games and new rules.' (p.149)

All he was ever told was to forget; it had been a bad dream. 'Nobody ever said right out to me: Yes, the camp was real, but now its over. There is another world now, and you're allowed to live in it.' (p.150). Through writing this book Wilkomeski has attempted to bring his two worlds together – to be heard and understood. His courage and honesty in doing so are further testimony to his will to survive fully in his present world. I have no hesitation recommending this masterpiece to all those interested in bearing witness to a child's harrowing, but moving, story of growing up during the holocaust. I felt considerably enriched having read this book as I am sure many others will be.

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In Memoriam

The Editorial Board expresses its condolences to the families of the late Bert Hallside, Ellen Lewis, Mary Davidson and Riva Cohen who passed away recently. It also expresses its condolences to Tony Gilbert and Gordon Plotkin on the deaths of their fathers. We wish them both a long life.



JULIE BURTON

15.2.1918 – 26.10.1998

Born Julie Tobias in Glasgow eighty years ago, my mother-in-law was the youngest of a family of three who were very close, supported each other and remained close through good times and bad. The Talmud says that when you live to eighty, you acquire the gift of special strength and Julie had many strengths which enabled her to succeed when lesser people would have given in. In the early years of her wonderful partnership with my father in law, Monty Aronson, when he was desperately ill over a long period, she nursed him back to full health with patience and dedication. She demonstrated that same loyalty and dedication when years later he suffered a stroke; whatever the weather, however good or bad she was feeling, she was always there at Monty's side.

Julie loved Queen's Park Synagogue and all its institutions and was a tower of strength to its Clergy. She served on the Synagogue Council, chaired the Ladies' Guild and Friendship Club

but above all enjoyed attending regularly on Sabbaths and Festivals; she lived and loved the Jewish Tradition. She had a wonderful sweet smile, which combined with her charm and relaxed manner endeared her to all her friends and family.

It was remarkable how her conversation was always directed towards the welfare of the person to whom she was speaking. It was this charm that in later life Sidney Burton fell for and they had a happy life together until he became ill and, yet again, she was called upon to give so much of herself. An accident some ten years ago when she very nearly lost her foot was a tremendous blow to her. But due to her courage and fortitude she survived and with the aid of a wheelchair and stick was able to visit Israel with us several times.

But it is as a mother, mother-in-law, grandmother and great-grandmother that we will remember her. She was the person who made sure that her daughters had a sound secular and religious education. That was her priority and their success gave her much pleasure. She was always there to encourage, at times to discourage, to give a friendly word of advice, a word of caution. Always so sensible, so down to earth, so fair, but above all, always available. She was such a good listener, always cheerful. She loved her grandchildren and great-grandchildren above all and regularly kept in touch with them wherever they were and it was a source of great happiness to her that she got to London in July for the *bris* of her great grandson, Saul. To me, she wasn't just a mother-in-law; she was my friend and confidante. To Hazel and her sister Danielle, she was not only a role model but everything you could wish a mother to be, and more.

John Cosgrove



RABBI ELI CASHDAN

1.6.1905 – 14.11.1998

The death of Rabbi Eli Cashdan in his 94th year has deprived British Jewry of one of its outstanding scholars. Over the years, regular attenders at the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation have enjoyed Rabbi Cashdan's annual visits to the city. On several occasions he "*layened*" for the congregation and his distinct, precise and absolutely accurate rendition of the Torah from the Scrolls made the Sabbath reading come alive.

He was primarily a scholar and a teacher and hundreds of Rabbis in all parts of the world (including the present Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks) have benefited from his erudition and wisdom. Born in Minsk, he was brought over as a baby to Liverpool where his father was the chief *shochet*. He left school at the age of 12 and studied at the Liverpool *Yeshiva* gaining his Rabbinical Diploma at the age of 17. He taught himself Latin and Greek by going to public libraries in Liverpool and educated himself sufficiently in secular subjects to enable him to enter Jews' College in London where he gained a first class honours degree, followed by an MA degree with distinction in Semitic Languages at University College, London. He made one unsuccessful attempt to become a 'pulpit' Rabbi. applying for the then prestigious

post of Minister of the Cricklewood Synagogue in London but was pipped at the post by Edinburgh-born Rabbi Dr Louis Rabbinowitz, arguably one of the great preachers of his generation who was later to become Chief Rabbi of South Africa.

Had Rabbi Cashdan been successful, the rest of British Jewry would have been deprived of one of its finest teachers for he would not have had the time to devote himself to scholarly pursuits such as the translation of part of the Babylonian Talmud and two books of the Bible for the Soncino Press.

He studied Law and qualified as a barrister at the English Bar but when the war broke out he joined the RAF to become Senior Jewish Chaplain in the Middle East. For part of that time he was stationed in Cairo and was promoted to the rank of Wing Commander. In 1951, he was appointed lecturer in Jews' College and it was there that he was able to inspire generations of Rabbis with his expert knowledge of Bible, Talmud and medieval poetry which he combined with a love of sport and a passion for cricket. His popularity with his students soared when he applied the same serious tone used in Talmudic argument to

the intricacies of one of the finer points of cricket.

That popularity was recognised by his regular invitations to lecture to teenagers at Jewish Youth Study Group (JYSG) Summer and Winter Schools. His lectures were always the best attended and it was at these schools that he was able to influence among many others, Ian Leifer, Norma Brodie and Elaine Samuel all of whom have given so much to Hebrew education in Edinburgh.

Those who had the pleasure of meeting him will remember him for his infectious enthusiasm for Jewish learning, for his willingness to explain complex issues in comprehensible ways, and for his vast knowledge. It was this, combined with his easy accessibility, which made him a walking Jewish encyclopaedia. The late Chaim Bermant once described him as a 'polymath' and a 'cherished institution'. Others have described him as 'The Rabbi's Rabbi' but he will undoubtedly be remembered as the person who translated the latest edition of the Daily Prayer Book (Singer's) into comprehensible modern English.

John Cosgrove

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

May I, through **The Edinburgh Star**, express my grateful thanks to the Edinburgh Jewish Community, the Council of Christians and Jews, Edinburgh Inter-Faith and my Glasgow friends for their continuing support through visits, cards and phone calls while I was in hospital. With everyone so concerned for my well-being, I really felt part of a very large family. Thank God, I am now home and feeling much better, though it will be some time before I am back to full strength.

I cannot finish without a special word of thanks to my sister Ruby, to Rabbi Shalom and Rachel Shapira for their frequent 'phone calls from Israel, and to David Goldberg, without whom I do not think I would have survived. Bless you, David.

With thanks and best wishes.

Rose Orgel
89 Polwarth Terrace
Edinburgh EH11 1NW.

Willie and Betty Caplan

wish to thank Rabbi Sedley, the President and Members of the Council, members of the Friendship Club, the Ladies Guild, the Luncheon Club and all their friends who kindly visited them at home after their accident, and for the many telephone calls, cards, gifts and offers of help which they received. They were quite overwhelmed at the kindness of the community.

With Compliments

from Mark and Judith Sischy

With Compliments

from
**JOHN AND HAZEL
COSGROVE**



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Monday to Friday 9.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday 1 to 4 p.m.

COMING EVENTS

February 1999

7th Sunday	Literary Society Dr. Michael Gruneberg (University of Wales, Swansea): <i>The Appliance of Science to Learning Hebrew</i>	8.00 p.m.
15th	Monday Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.
18th Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews Mr. David Goldberg (Edinburgh): <i>Victim of the Holocaust</i>	7.30 p.m.
21st Sunday	Literary Society Prof. Yehoash Hirschberg (Hebrew University): <i>The Vision of the East and the Reality of the West - Music in Palestine, 1920-1940</i>	8.00 p.m.

March 1999

7th Sunday	Literary Society Jaclyn Chernett (City University, London): <i>Torah Reading by Hand Signs</i>	8.00 p.m.
11th Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews Sass Judah (Edinburgh): <i>Christian Influences on Indian Jewry</i>	7.30 p.m.
21st Sunday	Literary Society Stephen Smith (Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial Centre): <i>Title to be announced</i>	8.00 p.m.

April 1999

1st Thursday	First Day Pesach	
2nd Friday	Second Day Pesach	
19th Monday pm	Lodge Solomon	7.00

Junior Maccabi meets on alternate Sundays from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm. For further information, contact Judy Fransman (447 5861).

Senior Maccabi meets on Sunday evenings in members' homes. For further information, contact Howard Nicholsby (317 7563).

The Jewish Philosophical Society meets every month on a Sunday in members' homes.

The Luncheon Club meets every Tuesday and Thursday at 12.30 pm.

The Friendship Club meets every second Sunday at 3.00 p.m. For further information, contact Willie Caplan (667 7984).

The Parent and Toddler group meets on Sunday mornings at 10.00 a.m.

All meetings are subject to alteration.

All the above events, unless otherwise stated, take place in the Community Centre, 4 Salisbury Road.