

# WEEKEND READS

# 1.6.23



**Forward**

# A visitor to Paris finds a dark layer of Jewish history in the City of Light

By Jane M. Friedman

Think of Paris and you're likely to think of wine, food, fashion and romance — and maybe even Emily in Paris if you've been bingeing the frothy Netflix hit.

Like so many visitors to the City of Light, I fall in love with Paris every time I go. But on my most recent trip, almost every place I went had a connection to the German occupation of World War II or to the Holocaust. I didn't plan it that way. But my experience underscored the fact that there's a Jewish layer, and often one that speaks to tragedy, hiding in plain sight — even in spots that are well-trodden by tourists.

I arrived in Paris after a week spent in Israel communing with other second-generation survivors of the Holocaust like myself. I couldn't wait to eat, drink, shop and see family and friends in France. I had lived in Paris in the 1970s, covering fashion, nouvelle cuisine and cinema, and I was ready to dive back in.

But from the get-go, things seemed off. When I arrived in mid-November, the city was already festooned in Christmas decorations. When I asked my French cousin about it, she said the Christmas season there starts after the Armistice Day commemoration of the end of World War I. The French don't have Thanksgiving to delay the start of the Christmas shopping craze.

## A family's fate, obscured

I was staying on the Left Bank near the Eiffel Tower so I could easily make a daily pilgrimage to the gorgeous nearby Bon Marché department store, along with the usual museums. But I started my sightseeing with the Musée Nissim de Camondo, on the Right Bank. It was my only planned dip into the Holocaust.

I had learned about the Camondos, a famous Jewish banking family, from the description in Edmund de Waal's memoir, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, which is about de Waal's own family, the Ephrussis. In the 1800s, the Camondos established themselves in Paris, building huge mansions on the Rue de Monceau.

Both families met dire fates. The Ephrussis were scattered by the war and lost everything. Moise de Camondo, the Camondos' patriarch, bequeathed his mansion to the French state as a museum named for his son Nissim, who died fighting for France in World War I. Seven years after Moise died in 1935, his daughter Béatrice, her husband and their two children were arrested and deported to Auschwitz. They did not survive.

This mini-Versailles crammed with stunning 18th-century art and antiques collected by the Camondos was enchanting. But nowhere in the tour did I see a reference to

the four Camondos who were murdered at Auschwitz.

After drooling over the lavish furniture and Aubusson tapestries, I headed to the Parc Monceau, behind the mansion, with its groomed hedges and children's carousel. I thought how cruel it was that after they'd given so much to France, the family had been rounded up, along with 75,000 other Jews in France, and sent to their deaths in the camps.

### **The signs were everywhere**

I took the Metro back to the Left Bank and happened to see a sign pointing to the Place des Martyrs Juifs (Square of The Martyred Jews). I had no idea what it was and didn't pursue it just then. But I see now that the Holocaust had attached itself to me. I was running myself ragged going to art exhibits, shopping and seeing family. But I couldn't avoid places tainted by the German Occupation and the Holocaust.

The next day, I walked from my hotel past the imposing Hotel des Invalides, a military museum, and took in the gilded Pont Alexandre Trois leading to the Right Bank. Kudos to the French, I thought, for preserving these dramatic vistas.

My destination was Le Bon Marché, which means "cheap," though it no longer is. The store anchors the Sèvres Babylone quartier. Inside, huge red and gold globes hung from high ceilings and the escalators were wrapped in Christmas red. Customers were weighed down with the store's signature shopping bags.

### **A notorious hotel**

After gaping at gorgeous purses, most priced at \$700 or more, I grabbed a table at my favorite cafe, Sip Babylone. I ordered a Caesar salad and a cosmopolitan (shocking

to see an American cocktail on the menu!) and stared through the rain-splashed windows at the Hotel Lutetia across the square.

Oh Lord, the Holocaust and World War II were with me again.

The imposing structure, the only grand hotel on the Left Bank, was built in 1910 with elements of art nouveau and art deco styles. But here's the dark part: Paris fell to the Nazis on June 14, 1940. The next day, the Abwehr (German military intelligence) requisitioned the building. Here, suspected members of the resistance were interrogated and tortured for four years while German officers lived it up in the hotel, partying on stockpiles of Champagne and French delicacies.

I finished lunch and approached the hotel. It had been sandblasted and restored to its former glory, with cherubs and vines ornamenting its grand façade. A large plaque told of the concentration camp survivors who, after being liberated, wandered dazed into the hotel, which had become a repatriation center. They were still wearing their prison stripes and seeking relatives. The plaque contained no mention of the hotel's Nazi past.

And this was the pattern. Although former President Jacques Chirac and recently President Emmanuel Macron have apologized for France's collaboration with the Nazis and the massive deportations, the French in general avoid talk of this period. This was obvious at the Lutetia.

### **Schiaparelli and 'Shocking'**

On my last day in Paris, I took the Metro to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs to see a massive retrospective on Elsa Schiaparelli, the couturier who was inspired by surrealism. I emerged in the underground



shopping mall Le Carrousel du Louvre. Christmas lights and glass ornaments shaped into pendants spelled out “Joyeux Noel.” A stone’s throw away was the famous Jeu de Paume museum where the Nazis stored art and antiques stolen from Jews they’d arrested.

The show, called Shocking: Les Mondes Surréalistes d’Elsa Schiaparelli (“The Surrealist Worlds of Elsa Schiaparelli”), dazzled with sumptuous gowns and jackets that “Schiap” designed from the 1920s to the 1950s. There was a dinner jacket adorned with tiny shot glasses, a red swatch of silk and taffeta with huge ruby-like stones, and much more.

But the backstory was not included. Schiaparelli escaped France in 1940 with her friend and colleague Jean-Michel Frank, a Jewish furniture designer and cousin of Anne Frank. Frank received a lifesaving visa from the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux; Schiaparelli may have gotten one also. Together, they reached Portugal and eventually New York City. In 1941, Frank committed suicide. His designs are now classics, forerunners of contemporary minimalist design.

Don’t get me wrong. I don’t mean to discourage Jews from visiting Paris. My week there was joyous. I loved seeing the dog park in the Tuileries Gardens (a dog’s life in Paris is enviable). And I trekked to the Fondation Louis Vuitton to see the museum built by Frank Gehry and the stunning exhibit, Monet-Mitchell, pairing Monet’s late Water Lilies with canvases by the American abstract expressionist Joan Mitchell, who lived near Monet’s gardens and was inspired by them. Afterwards, I walked to Le Séquoia Café and gorged on risotto St. Jacques (risotto with scallops in a creamy sauce, oy, treyf) and a glass of cool Sancerre to relax and rejoice.

## **Place des Martyrs Juifs**

Yet the City of Light’s dark side kept surfacing amid its beauty. For example, when I finally looked up the Place des Martyrs Juifs, it turned out to be a small memorial to the 13,000 Parisian Jews rounded up by the French police in 1942. They were herded into the Vélodrome d’Hiver cycling stadium, detained for days without food, water, medical care or sanitary facilities, and then deported to Auschwitz. The French can’t blame this on the Germans. They did it themselves.

The memorial includes a small sculpture depicting a half-dozen detainees huddling in despair, installed in 1994 on an out-of-the-way promenade along the River Seine. The inscription in French says, “In tribute to the victims of racist persecutions and crimes against humanity.” Could it possibly be more vague?

Perhaps if the French were more upfront about their complicity in the Nazi genocide of the Jews, they could more efficiently confront the ongoing antisemitism embedded in their society. There is a Memorial de la Shoah in Paris, serving as France’s official Holocaust museum and research center. But its Wall of Names only memorializes the Jews in France who were deported to camps in the East. It does not mention the thousands of Jews who were arrested and killed in France.

The short days and gray skies of winter seemed to add a layer of gloom to my experience of these incomplete reminders of past sins. If, like me, you’d be drawn to these sites on your next trip to Paris, perhaps consider going in spring or summer, when the darkness in the City of Light might be easier to bear.

# A Ukrainian Jew made aliyah. Now he's back in his homeland fighting Russia

By Tamar Jacoby

KYIV, Ukraine — Growing up in Irpin, a small Ukrainian city not far from Kyiv, Serhii Pruzhanskyi had no idea he was Jewish. His first hint was at age 7 or 8, when a classmate taunted him with an antisemitic slur. When he ran home to tell his parents, his father changed the subject.

Fast forward a few decades, and Pruzhanskyi, now a decorated soldier fighting to defend Ukraine, goes by the call sign Yevrey (pronounced yee-vray) — Ukrainian for Jew. And he has drawn on what he learned serving in the Israel Defense Forces to help resist the Russian attack on Kyiv and, more recently, liberate the occupied city of Kherson.

## Unearthing the Jewish past

A hundred years ago, Jews made up 20% of Kyiv's population, and more than half in some of its neighborhoods. Today, they are all but invisible. Pruzhanskyi, 43, is the exception that proves the rule. But his story is an intriguing window on some of what's at stake in the war.

Religion was all but forbidden in the Soviet-controlled Ukraine of Pruzhanskyi's childhood. Antisemitism kept what Jewish life there was hidden behind closed doors.

By the time he came of age in a newly independent Ukraine, there was a fledgling Jewish community in Irpin. A family friend helped lead it, and a niece attended prayer services.

Then, Pruzhanskyi's sister traveled to Israel on a 10-day Birthright tour. Pruzhanskyi himself had no interest in religion, but he was struggling to find himself, and when a relative suggested making aliyah, it appealed to his sense of adventure. "Why not try it?" he recalls thinking.

The first step was proving he had the Jewish roots required to qualify for Israeli citizenship. This was no easy task in a part of the world where two world wars had killed millions and scrambled borders, driving mass migrations of Jews, Poles and Ukrainians. Pruzhanskyi knew his mother wasn't Jewish, but when he finally persuaded his father to talk, the older man opened up about his parents.

Serhii's paternal grandmother, Klara, had been born in Odesa to a family of Sephardic textile merchants. His grandfather, Leib, was from Poland. During World War II, Leib fought in the Red Army, while Klara and her 9-year-old daughter, Ida, were among

hundreds of thousands of Jews evacuated to the Soviet interior.

“They spent the war in Uzbekistan,” Pruzhanskyi explained in a recent interview in a cafe in downtown Kyiv. “That’s probably how they survived” — while more than a million Jews were murdered in Ukraine.

### **Making aliyah**

It was Pruzhanskyi and his sister, searching online, who found the manifest documenting Klara and Ida’s evacuation. It was the proof he needed to make aliyah, and in 2007, he arrived in Israel.

There, as in Ukraine, he struggled a bit at first. He attended ulpan — school to learn Hebrew — but still had trouble communicating in the language. He worked taking inventory in a warehouse, then in a bus factory and as a janitor. Already in his late 20s, he was too old to be drafted. His luck seemed to change when he served for a year in the reserves.

He finally landed a good job in security at Ben-Gurion International Airport. As he moved from thing to thing, he said, he was struck by the kindness and warmth of the Israelis he met.

“There’s a kind of trust I’d never seen before,” he explained. “Of course, people squabble there like anywhere else, but they’re united by something bigger than themselves, and when something happens — a missile attack, a storm, a war — they help each other.”

In 2019, Pruzhanskyi learned that his mother was ill, and he returned to Irpin for what he thought would be a few weeks to care for her. He buried her in 2021 and stayed on to deal with probate issues. In early 2022, he was preparing to return to Israel when Russia invaded Ukraine.

### **Enlisting to defend Ukraine**

Irpin came under attack in the first days of the war, and Pruzhanskyi was one of the first men in line at the recruiting office. “I didn’t have to think twice,” he said. “I knew I had to enlist and stand with my friends to defend Irpin.”

Like many Ukrainians, when asked about his experience in the war, Pruzhanskyi reached for his cellphone. He showed me a photo taken a few days after the invasion of him in a bulletproof vest with a Kalashnikov rifle. In the next image, he’s helping evacuees at the railroad station. “Things were completely chaotic,” he recalled. “But what I’d learned in the Israeli army kicked in. I knew how to turn off my panic and do what I had to do, how to keep my mind clear and make decisions.”

Over the next month, he saw active duty all around Irpin. Some 90% of the city’s 100,000 residents evacuated in the first days, many of them under a destroyed bridge widely featured in the media when a Russian missile killed four civilians trying to escape to Kyiv. Then the two armies fought at close range in the empty streets for more than four weeks.

By the time the fighting stopped, 70% of Irpin’s buildings had been damaged or

destroyed and local estimates suggested that as many as 1,500 civilians were dead.

Pruzhanskyi fought at the bridge. He helped evacuate 500 civilians from Irpin and nearby Bucha, driving into the shelling in his own car, a battered sedan with the license plate “YEVREY,” to pick up people hiding in basements and bring them to the bridge.

After a chance encounter with an elite reconnaissance unit, he said, he began supplying intelligence on the movements of Russian troops — activity for which he could be tortured and shot if captured.

By the time we met, nine months after the battle of Kyiv, Pruzhanskyi was splitting his time: half in Irpin, supervising a shelter for elderly people whose homes had been destroyed, and half on the front lines, now in southern and eastern Ukraine, serving with the reconnaissance squad.

### **‘Things will only get worse’**

Pruzhanskyi declined to say much about what he had done with that unit to help liberate the city of Kherson, which was occupied by the Russians from early March until mid-November. But he didn’t mince words about conditions in the shelter.

“The fighting is over,” he said, “but things will only get worse for these old people. Their homes are gone. They have nothing to return to. And they’ve been left here with almost no help to survive the best they can.”

He showed me a video of a sunlit day on the main square of Irpin where he received a medal from the mayor. He beamed with

pride as he described the ceremony but then turned somber.

“What you don’t see,” he explained, “is what came next. The widow of my best friend and comrade in arms also got a medal from the mayor that day.”

### **The echo of history**

If Pruzhanskyi sees the eerie echo of history that connects his grandmother Klara and the evacuees he rescued from Bucha and Irpin, he did not mention it. But he is eager for the world to know about the horrors he has witnessed. “You need to tell Americans about that sorrow and suffering,” he said. “You need to shout it to the world.”

Pruzhanskyi has noticed changes in Ukraine since he returned from Israel. He said he had experienced no antisemitism. “On the contrary,” he explained, “when I tell people I’m Jewish, they often respect me more, especially in the military.” And he feels the war has brought people together.

“It’s a little more like Israel,” he said. “People trusting and helping each other.”

As for the future — what he, like many Ukrainians, refers to as “after the victory” — Pruzhanskyi has no doubt he will return to Israel. “I was born and raised in Irpin,” he explained. “Now I’ve fought for it and for Ukraine. But I feel most at home in Israel. That’s where I belong.”

# How a Jewish family saved Thomas Jefferson's home

By Julia M. Klein

The exquisite neoclassical home that Thomas Jefferson built in the foothills of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains has become the locus of complex and evolving understandings of American history.

Monticello and its collections have long illuminated the third U.S. president's architectural genius, inventiveness, and predilections for both European style and American arcana.

In recent decades, historians have turned their attention to the enslaved Black population that made the 18th- and 19th-century plantation function. Its Mulberry Row dwellings and artifacts have been preserved and exhibited, its oral histories collected. The saga of the enslaved Hemings family — and of Sally Hemings, with whom Jefferson fathered several children — has become more central to the site's narrative.

But in the course of my visits and reporting on Monticello in the 1990s, I never heard of the Levy family, a Sephardic Jewish clan from Philadelphia that owned the estate from 1834 to 1923 and was integral to its preservation. Steven Pressman's new documentary, *The Levys of Monticello*, remedies that deficiency.

The 71-minute film, now making the festival rounds, is straightforward, even staid, in its approach. Like the celebrated documentaries of Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, it blends talking heads with archival and contemporary images, as well as actors reading excerpts from historical documents.

Monticello is first glimpsed from the air, iconic and serene, then in closeup, mirroring the director's intent to drill down into its history. The narrative focuses on the efforts of the Levys to restore Monticello to its former glory, despite antisemitic currents that persist to this day. The family were admirers of Jefferson's attachment to religious liberty. But, like him, they employed enslaved workers, the very paradox that has bedeviled Jefferson's reputation.

Pressman has previously directed two Holocaust-related documentaries, *Holy Silence* and *50 Children: The Rescue Mission of Mr. and Mrs. Kraus*. He draws the essentials of this distinctively American story from Marc Leepson's *Saving Monticello: The Levy Family's Epic Quest to Rescue the House that Jefferson Built* and Melvin I. Urofsky's *The Levy Family and Monticello, 1834-1923: Saving Thomas Jefferson's House*.



Both Leepson and Urofsky offer pithy commentary here, as does Monticello's longtime senior curator, Susan Stein. Another key source is Niya Bates, an expert on the former plantation's enslaved community. Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis, situates the story in a broader context. Also appearing in the film are two Levy descendants, a Black descendant of an estate gatekeeper and Daniel P. Jordan, former president of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which owns Monticello.

Pressman's principal research contribution, he said in a post-screening conversation at the Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival in mid-November, was to fill in the story of Uriah Phillips Levy's ties to slavery. Levy, after buying the home in 1834, enslaved as many as 20 people. (Jefferson enslaved up to about 140 at any one time.) When the Civil War broke out, Levy, a naval veteran of the War of 1812, chose the Union side. After his death in 1862, the Confederacy confiscated Monticello, precipitating years of legal wrangling.

A fifth-generation American with an ancestor who fought in the American Revolution, Levy was a pioneering and controversial figure even before Monticello. In the U.S. Navy, he was a staunch opponent of flogging and helped end the practice.

Though he eventually became the first Jewish commodore — and today the U.S. Naval Academy's Jewish chapel is named for him — he was court-martialed six times, twice ousted from the Navy, and twice reinstated. Being Jewish, it seems, made him a target, but the film fails to detail his

alleged offenses, leaving his naval career somewhat mysterious. (Pressman later said that Levy once killed a man who had insulted him in a duel in New Jersey but was acquitted on grounds of self-defense.)

Levy tried to leave the estate to the U.S. government as an agricultural school for the orphans of Navy warrant officers. After the protracted legal battle, it ended up, in 1879, in the possession of his nephew, Jefferson Monroe Levy. A three-term New York congressman, he spent lavishly to acquire more acreage and to repair and restore the home.

Not everyone was appreciative. Maud Littleton, the wife of another New York congressman, was among those decrying Levy's ownership (a sentiment the documentary attributes to antisemitism). She urged the sale of Monticello to the federal government. In 1923, the newly organized Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, a private entity, bought the property. In the mid-1980s, it created a historical marker highlighting the most tangible and poignant reminder of the Levys' long ownership: the grave of Uriah Levy's mother, Rachel.

The Levys of Monticello culminates in images of the terrifying white supremacist protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. And the documentary underlines one final irony: The mob chanting antisemitic slogans near the Thomas Jefferson statue on the University of Virginia campus apparently had no clue that it was the work of Moses Ezekiel, a Jewish sculptor.

# Jewish words of wisdom are popping up on billboards around Los Angeles. Just don't look them up.

By Louis Keene

To combat antisemitism, the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles is putting words of wisdom on billboards across town.

Just don't go looking for all the sayings in Jewish texts.

The signs — 10 of them are spread out across the city — each dispense a different epigram, unattributed, with the Federation logo and a link to [jewishla.org](http://jewishla.org) printed underneath. But while the Federation described the source of the phrases in a Dec. 22 news release as “ancient Jewish values and teachings,” many of them seem to come from elsewhere.

“Love is the most powerful force in the universe,” reads one billboard in Woodland Hills. That's often attributed to Albert Einstein — wise and Jewish, yes; ancient, no — but actually appears to be a fake. (Another Woodland Hills billboard, blazoned with “Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile,” is a real Einstein.)

“The highest form of wisdom is kindness,” says one in the Palms neighborhood. That's definitely not from ancient Jewish teachings — it comes from a 17th-century exegesis of

the New Testament, although it's frequently misattributed online to the Talmud.

Another billboard's Christian connection is even more straightforward. “Change your thoughts and you'll change the world,” which appears on a Federation billboard on the Westside, is a near-quote of Norman Vincent Peale, a Protestant clergyman and author of the bestselling self-help book *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

The executive who led the campaign, Federation chief creative officer Rob Goldenberg, said in an interview that any similarities between the quotes and Christian doctrine were incidental. He added that all the phrases had been vetted by the Federation's CEO, Rabbi Noah Farkas.

Asked to list the Judaic source of the apparently Christian quotes, Goldenberg produced passages that only slightly resembled what was printed on the billboards.

“I'm getting this from — believe it or not — my IT guy, who is the person who I study with at work,” Goldenberg said, noting the IT guy, Alex Klein, is an Orthodox Jew.

“Contrary to popular belief, not many people at the Federation wear kippahs.”

To be sure, the billboards don’t pose as Jewish literature, and the phrase “Any racism diminishes all of us,” which appears on a sign in Van Nuys, is hardly pretending to sound like Ecclesiastes (although Goldenberg’s IT guy, Klein, had a Talmudic source for it).

Goldenberg said the Federation tried hard to make sure that the billboards — whose space was donated by advertising company Outfront Media — didn’t feel like religious texts. The goal was simply to represent the Jewish community as a beacon of wisdom and love.

So the Federation elected to suit the audience rather than stick to the book.

That some of the sayings on the billboards may have been uttered first by Christians was not concerning to Rabbi Mel Gottlieb, former president of the Academy for Jewish Religion California, because, he said, the quotes’ underlying philosophy is still Jewish.

Even the notion of the overriding power of love, while commonly associated with Christianity, also predominates in Hasidic Judaism, Gottlieb said.

“Many spiritual messages are found in many scriptures,” Gottlieb said.

# **My German aunt died in the Holocaust. A Munich high school made sure she was never forgotten**

By Michael Felsen

On a chilly November day in Munich, my three sons and I examined the hefty criminal file on my deceased aunt Johanna that the city had maintained.

My family's presence in Germany was thanks to the efforts of Barbara Hutzelmann, the cultural historian of the city of Munich, who was now browsing Johanna's file with us as our guide and translator. Barely a month prior, Hutzelmann had found me through an internet search, and emailed me to share that her city would be hosting a ceremony honoring 20 Jewish young women, all students who had attended the previously all-girls Luisengymnasium, a 200-year old public high school. All 20 of these students had been murdered by the Nazis. One of those young women was my aunt — my father's older sister Johanna.

Each of the murdered students would have a metal plaque installed at the entrance to the school, with their name, date and place of birth and death, and an etched photo. Johanna was the only woman slated to be recognized for whom a family member could be found, and would attend. Hutzelmann

asked if I would speak at the ceremony, representing not only my family, but, in essence, the families of all of the young women. I was deeply touched, and let her know that I would be honored to take this on.

Johanna's crime was having a relationship with a non-Jewish Aryan man, in violation of the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws. My grandparents' home had been raided, and evidence of the relationship, including affectionate postcards, had been seized. Despite her protests, Johanna was deported to Poland. One of my sons noticed in her mugshot that there were tears in her eyes. I looked carefully at the photo — he was right.

Staring at her photograph, I could feel in my chest her humiliation, her anger, her disgust and her fear. I had known since I was young that her deportation was ultimately a death sentence. My father had searched for her after the war, and was told by the International Red Cross that she had perished, very likely in the Warsaw Ghetto in late 1942 or early 1943. But in that photo,



it felt as if she was very much there, looking out at us, the family she never knew.

When I first received the invitation, I immediately wrote to my three adult sons and asked if any of them wanted to come. In rapid succession, they all said yes, and within minutes it was clear their partners and kids would come too. So, in late November, 13 of us departed from four different cities and headed to Munich. I was deeply touched, and grateful, that Johanna would have so many members of her family there to witness this commemoration of her life, and also saddened that none of the other 19 murdered Jewish women would have relatives there.

I have been to Germany a number of times over the past several decades. My father and mother were born there, and were teenagers when they escaped Nazi persecution. My father especially would speak about how he was proud to be a German Jew before Hitler came to power. But both his family and my mother's were deeply traumatized by living under Hitler's regime, and by the losses their families suffered. This visit would be a small window on how today's Germany is facing that horrifying, shameful past. Our family, including children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the Holocaust, had not been spared its impact. This would be an opportunity for family learning and, hopefully, for healing too.

The Luisengymnasium memorial event took place on Nov. 23, a cold but clear fall day. The ceremony itself had been conceived with great care and thoughtfulness.

Members of the high school staff and its student body, hand in hand with city of Munich officials, had spent years researching the lives of the 20 girls in preparation for the occasion.

Our family was greeted graciously by the school staff and shown to our reserved seats at the front of the columned, two-story auditorium. When we worried two of our grandchildren, ages 3 and 6, might get restless, the school principal brought over three of the more senior students and offered their child-sitting services, which we gratefully accepted. Each member of my family was given a folder with English translations of all the speeches, so that we could follow along.

I spoke about the significance of this kind of remembering, but also about the work still to be done to fight the persistent scourge of racism, antisemitism and "othering," in Germany, in the U.S., and in too many "developed" countries. I also knew that I would choke up during my speech, and, to the surprise of no one in my family, my prediction was accurate.

The ceremony concluded with several students reading short biographies of the 20 murdered young women who had walked the same school corridors decades ago: a teacher, a lawyer, the director of a marionette theater, a pianist, a pharmacy intern, a lawyer who was companion to a Brazilian revolutionary and a clerk/stenographer (my aunt). We all then assembled at the front of the school, for the installation of the last four of the 20

memorial plaques. With a heavy but grateful heart, I helped to install Johanna's.

Much has been said about Germany's efforts, particularly in the past few decades, to come to terms with the unspeakable horrors committed during the Nazi regime. Monuments, museums, Stolpersteine (stumbling stones), and plaques like those for the 20 students, affixed to the columns at the entrance to Luisengymnasium, recognize and honor the millions murdered by Hitler and his Nazi executioners. Young people are taught not to look away from this heinous legacy, but to stare at it and absorb its significance. Germany has taken this reckoning seriously, despite extremist threats that persist to this day.

My family was deeply touched by the care and respect shown by the school, and the city, to the memory of each of the 20 murdered young women. Through the students' narrations, and with photos of their faces looking out on the audience, each of them was made real. None were forgotten. And now the 20, aunt Johanna included, face busy Luisenstrasse, declaring "We were here."

At the end of the ceremony, a young man, one of the students who'd been in the audience, approached me. He had tears in his eyes. He thanked me, and I thanked him for being there. We shook hands, and wept together.

# 23 totally accurate and sane Jewish pop culture predictions for 2023

By PJ Grisar

The Jews were trending in 2022 in a way few could have predicted — but, I have to say, I came kinda close.

At the end of 2021, I guessed that in the new year, Adam Sandler would start a “shlubleisure” line. That may not have happened, but at least Jerry Seinfeld became a fashion model. OK, sure, Steven Spielberg didn’t adapt the train-set-based musical *Starlight Express*, but there’s no denying the significance of model trains in *The Fabelmans*.

And while Kanye West did not, as I imagined he might, release a diss track of Leonard Cohen, he sorta dropped a (highly hateful, very bigoted) diss track on the entire Jewish people when he threatened to go “death con 3” on us.

And so I enter this year’s prediction business somewhat scared of my own powers. As I light latke-scented menorahs, parse the gematria of the opening lines of Leon Uris’ *Exodus* and play Debbie Friedman records at half speed, I will, as always, strive for accuracy, but also take care not to predict anything too egregious.

Here are 23 definitely accurate predictions for 2023.

1. Taking their cue from Tumblr’s elaborate meme of the never-made Martin Scorsese crime film *Goncharov*, cinephiles on Letterboxd plant a false memory of a bogus 1986 Coen Brothers film, *Hecky Plotz*, about a shmatta factory worker (John Turturro) in the 1920s who, through a series of darkly comedic events, becomes the fall guy for the Teapot Dome scandal. Also featured are John Goodman as Warren G. Harding and Frances McDormand as a narcoleptic flapper named Mabel Marfhan.

2. Comedian Gary Gulman and Google co-founder Larry Page launch a Twitter competitor called Kvetch. The first Kvetch will be sent from Gulman to Page, bemoaning the beta’s user interface.

3. Taylor Swift partners with Seth Rogen’s weed company, Houseplant, to produce ceramic bespoke “Lavender Haze” bongos, so named for her *Midnights* single. They’re included as part of the class-action settlement from TicketMaster botching her tour sales.

4. Paul Simon starts work on *Graceland 2: The Return*. He abandons it when he learns it’s no longer controversial to travel to South Africa.

5. The long-ago announced Fiddler on the Roof remake stirs up a casting debate when Dame Judi Dench is given the role of Yentl the Matchmaker. But, a screen test silences skeptics, with one leading scholar of Yiddish theater hailing Dench as “the second coming of Molly Picon.”

6. Following the success of Hanukkah on Rye, Hallmark announces plans for more Jewish holiday fare: Smooches in the Sukkah and Talk to You on Tisha B’Av. The Anti-Defamation League raves that these titles are “bizarre, misguided but not outwardly antisemitic.”

7. Kvetch is discovered by antisemites, who, in their eagerness to “troll the chosen” make it the third-most downloaded app on iTunes. Posing as Jews with names like “Sheldon Shekelstein,” many find themselves slowly charmed by the humor of actual Jews on the platform. The tide turns when Gab founder Andrew Torba, hiding behind an account called “Heeby Menorahberg,” makes and posts a picture of a challah recipe from Molly Yeh.

8. Doja Cat, who was rapping the praises of Taco Bell’s Mexican pizza for much of 2022, ditches the fast food taqueria for McDonald’s. To prove she’s all in, she has one rib replaced with a McRib, prompting many a topical sermon on Genesis 2:22.

9. Months after announcing his shocking conversion to Catholicism, French Jewish comic Gad Elmaleh leaves the faith. When pressed, he said he missed adafina, found communion wafers bland and was misled into thinking conversion meant his own Pope hat.

10. Marvel’s Moon Knight gets a second season on Disney+ and sways critics of its approach Jewish representation by introducing a new seminal trauma for the young Marc Spector: that time at bar mitzvah lessons when Rachel Weiner saw him trip on his way up to the bimah.

11. The Haim sisters reveal that there are also three Haim brothers, Ezra, Elan and Duvid. They have no musical ability to speak of, but play Magic: The Gathering competitively.

12. Longtime couple Henry and Nancy Kissinger separate. Not long after, TMZ spots Nancy dining at Nobu with a newly single Harry Styles.

13. Kvetch becomes a major platform in the lead-up to the 2024 presidential primary. In a format shift not seen since the televised Kennedy-Nixon debates, Kvetch conducts debates for the Republican and Democratic presidential fields in-app, with live commentary (read: heckling) by Eric Andre and Moshe Kasher. Ezra Klein will later opine that “this election will be decided by Kvetch.”

14. As Ukraine enters its second year of war, Volodymyr Zelenskyy makes a special Oscars appearance via video from a secure location in Kyiv. “I may not be a member of the Academy,” the president jokes, “but since Sean Penn lent me his Oscar, everyday I’m being sent a DVD of Confess, Fletch for my consideration. Putin can’t find me, but somehow Jon Hamm can!”

15. Following the splash made by New York magazine’s “Nepo Baby” cover,



generational talents Zoey Deutch, Ben Platt and Zoë Kravitz are spotted wearing T-shirts that read “Nepotism is Nothing Without Talent” and “Not Your Nepo Baby.” The trend gains some traction among famous children of famous people — until Yair Netanyahu posts an Instagram wearing a similar design.

16. After dropping Kanye West, Adidas recruits Richard Kind as the face of the label formerly known as Yeezy (new name: Clompys). The change of spokesperson is announced with an ad campaign showing the character actor petting puppies, dispensing balloons to children and picking a friend up from the airport. The slogan urges consumers to “try a little kindness.”

17. Leaked production photos for the second season of Nathan Fielder’s *The Rehearsal* hint that the comedian-auteur has reconstructed the Temple Mount in a Bushwick, Brooklyn, warehouse as part of a dry-run for peace talks.

18. Inspired by James Gray and Steven Spielberg’s respective autobiographical turns in *Armageddon Time* and *The Fabelmans*, Pauly Shore decides it’s time to tell his story. A dark horse in the 2024 Oscar race, *He Shills, She Shells* (by the Comedy Store), is the comeback no one saw coming.

19. “Kvetch” becomes the word of the year. It’s uttered in the halls of Parliament, the Kremlin and at Mel Gibson’s dinner table. The Yiddish world is ambivalent about the development, prompting the *Forward* article “Yiddishists kvetch that Kvetch has lost its Yiddishkeit.”

20. Having dipped his toe into Jewish waters with *Leopoldstadt*, Tom Stoppard announces that his next project will be a five-part play about the life of the Baal Shem Tov, a figure he finds “endlessly fascinating.” Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth Ephraim Mirvis is an early reader. “Tom did his research,” he tells *The Jewish Chronicle*, “But I had to remind him that the Besht probably didn’t use words like ‘knackered’ or ‘chuffed.’”

21. Timothée Chalamet and Bob Dylan are spotted touring the SPARK Museum of Electrical Invention in Bellingham, Washington. Chalamet explains he went to better prepare himself for the Dylan biopic *Going Electric* — to truly understand what the phrase means. Dylan is more cryptic, noting that he sometimes feels like the elephant Thomas Edison electrocuted.

22. The Israeli Antiquities Authority searches Mar-a-Lago following reports that former President Donald Trump flushed missing segments of the Dead Sea Scrolls down the toilet.

23. Kanye West, Elon Musk and Nick Fuentes lose thruster power on the maiden voyage of SpaceX’s Mars-bound shuttle. Presumed alive, their signal cuts out, leaving the world they left behind free of their opinions. With a slower news cycle, the *Forward* busies itself with the news that matters most: Nancy Kissinger’s rebound romance with Pete Davidson.

# The hottest Jewish trends for 2023 (and the 2022 fads we won't miss)

By Irene Katz Connelly and Mira Fox

2022 is drawing to a close, which means we're wondering — what happened this year? Or, more importantly, what trended this year?

Entering the bleak midwinter as we are, it's difficult to remember those happy days before Beanie Feldstein left *Funny Girl* and Kanye went "death con 3." But we looked back on a year's worth of cultural crazes so we can tell you what fads went out of style — in other words, got tired — and which trends are going to dominate 2023. (That is, they're wired.)

We created this comprehensive list of what's in and what's out based solely on vibes and our own little opinions. Grab your pickle jar, enjoy your deli raves and turn on a Nora Ephron flick. You never know what 2023 will bring.

Tired: Kombucha

Wired: Pickles

It's now a truth universally acknowledged that hot girls have gut issues, and that their unspeakable symptoms can only be staved off by ingesting large quantities of fermented substances. But in our humble

opinion, kombucha, the official drink of professional hipsters, is officially passé. Care for your gut the way our ancestors did — by piling pickled vegetables on literally every meal. Purchasing pickles at the supermarket is acceptable, but the real ones make their own.

Tired: Eating at delis

Wired: Partying at delis

You might think pastrami on rye, smothered in Russian dressing, seems like a symbol of a bygone era, your zayde's favorite order that's passé in a gluten-free vegan era. But you'd be wrong — the deli is so hot right now. Not just the food, also the aesthetic. Fashion designer Batsheva Hay had her New York Fashion Week show at Ben's Kosher Deli, you can rep Zabar's with a designer sweater from Coach, and Katz's even hosted a rave headlined by the hugely famous DJ Diplo. I hear a bowl of 4 a.m. matzo ball soup is a great hangover preventative.

Tired: My Unorthodox Life

Wired: Love Is Blind

This new season of My Unorthodox Life featured an overabundance of plastic surgery and far too few details on the most interesting plotline: Julia Haart's messy divorce from her billionaire husband. Love is Blind gave us a kvell-able Jewish contestant and ... a surprisingly genuine love story? Take your pick.

Tired: Lusting over Zelenskyy

Wired: Donating to Zelenskyy

When Ukraine went to war with Russia, people got outraged, but also, well ... thirsty. Now we're nearing a year of war and it's clear that turning Volodymyr Zelenskyy into a sex symbol is not helping Ukrainians. Instead of drooling over the president in his wartime camo, consider putting actual resources behind your obsession and send some dollars to efforts to aid Ukraine.

Tired: Quiet quitting

Wired: Union organizing

Quiet quitting — in which the worker does not actually quit, but does stop trying to work very hard — dominated headlines in 2022. It was an epidemic that threatened our economy, our society, the very foundations of American capitalism! It was also not a real trend. For 2023, workers are taking back the narrative with a pastime long beloved by our Yiddish socialist forebears: union organizing. This month alone has seen strikes at The New York Times, HarperCollins, The New School and across UC schools. Alabama coal miners have been striking for over a year. Workers' rights: so hot right now.

Tired: Jewish Museum menorahs

Wired: Six Bells Candles

The Jewish Museum's targeted advertisements have filled us with a hitherto unknown desire to own folk art-inspired terracotta menorahs. Alas, these bespoke treasures cost the GDP of a small country. Seeking to spend a stupid but not life-derailing amount of money on Hanukkah accoutrements, we turned instead to these taper candles from The Six Bells, Wing founder Audrey Gelman's home goods store. Clocking in at \$30 for a single taper, this candle will not fit in a standard menorah or help you celebrate Hanukkah in any way — which tracks perfectly with Gelman's approach to Judaica at her "country store." But as long as you only buy one or two they're a more affordable, if less lasting, way to bring hand-painted charm to next year's festival of lights.

Tired: Hanukkah gnomes

Wired: Hanukkah lions

Why did Jews get assigned gnomes as a Holiday mascot? We don't think it was meant to be antisemitic, but it still feels, ya know, a bit antisemitic. Thankfully, there's another Hanukkah animal coming in hot: the lion. Is it random? Absolutely. But Target is really leaning into the lion theme, and we're here for it.

Tired: Kanye West being antisemitic

Wired (but also tired): Kanye West taking his nap

You've been under a rock if you've missed rapper Kanye West's continued antisemitic outbursts over the past several months. But in his original tweet about going "death con 3" on Jews, West, who goes by Ye, opened by saying he was "a bit sleepy," a phrase that he's repeated in some of the subsequent antisemitic tweets. We get it! We, too, sometimes say mean things when we're tired — although most of us don't go so far as to praise Hitler. Maybe if West finally took a nap, we could all finally stop talking about him.

Tired: Hallmark Hanukkah movies

Wired: Nora Ephron movies

This year's crop of Hallmark Hanukkah movies may be the best this burgeoning genre has yet to offer. But when it comes to chic winter attire, crisp days in a romanticized, rat-free New York City, and whirlwind romances between protagonists who are definitely going to get divorced in two years, no one does it better than Nora Ephron. With this year's resurgence of '90s style, she's never been more relevant. Meg Ryan, we're coming for your exquisitely tailored leather coats!

Tired: Really bad Hanukkah merch

Wired: Really badass Hanukkah merch

For years, we've been complaining about our options for Hanukkah merchandise. Mainstays have included menorahs with the wrong number of branches, pillows with puns like "Oy to the World" and saccharine wall art about spreading light. We're over it. Hanukkah is a holiday about religious war.

So try some sweatshirts with slogans like "less assimilation, more celebration" and "revolt & rejoice." They're made by @hanukkahfails, an Instagram account that's been tracking all of the worst merch — so she knows how to make the best.

Tired: Funny Girl casting drama

Wired: Funny Girl itself

Beanie Feldman's hasty departure from this year's Funny Girl revival, and the decision to cast Lea Michele in her place, spurred the kind of pitting-female-celebrities-against-each-other internet discourse that we hope (but do not expect) will fade from the earth in 2023. The good news is, the musical itself still slaps. You don't even need to shell out for Broadway tickets. We recommend setting up at home with a bottle of wine, some knitting to get you through the boring parts (let's be real, any non-sung moment is a lost cause) and the OG Fanny, Barbra Streisand.

Tired: Memorizing Yiddish curse words

Wired: Reading Yiddish women in translation

Novelty items with misspelled Yiddish obscenities are out. Yiddish women writers are in: 2022 was a banner year for translations of this underrated demographic. This year saw translations of Ida Maze's autobiographical bildungsroman *Dineh*; Chana Blankshteyn's haunting stories of interwar Vilna in *Fear*; and Miriam Karpilove's caustic coming-to-America tale, *Judith*. And that's just to name a few. We



can't think of anything more wired than these new additions to a literary canon long dominated by men.

Tired: Banning books

Wired: Maus selling out

Banning books may be the most tired trend of all, in that it has happened before and historically worked out poorly. When a Tennessee school district banned the teaching of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, print sales of the novel rose 753%. Wired!

Tired: Coachella

Wired: Yidstock

Buying a TikTok-inspired wardrobe to go with your Coachella tickets? Tired. Wearing Black Sabbath gear to folk dance the early morning away at the Yiddish Book Center's annual music festival? Count us in.

Tired: Jewish dating apps

Wired: Simchat Torah

Apps like JDate and The Lox Club cater to Jews looking for love. They also don't feel very Jewish. Thankfully, at this stage of the pandemic, you aren't limited to the apps anymore. So try meeting your beshert the old fashioned way: at Simchat Torah.

Tired: The Fabelmans

Wired: Chantal Akerman

Chantal Akerman walked so James Gray and Steven Spielberg could, uh, make underwhelming prestige films about the

Jewish experience? Honestly, this year's highly touted Jewish releases did not impress. But Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Bruxelles* was crowned the best movie of all time by the British Film Institute. Watch it next time you have a free afternoon — and a healthy outlook on the world that can withstand this gutting work of cinema.

Tired: Cottagecore

Wired: Shtetlcore

Cottagecore — an internet trend of dressing like you're in a fairytale and photographing yourself around your rustic abode — has been bafflingly big for years, and boomed during the pandemic. Why not go further, and relive the subsistence farming lifestyle of your ancestors? After all, babuskha-inspired headscarves and tinctures your great-grandmother once made are very in.

Tired: Wellness

Wired: Shabbat

They tell us that clean eating and regular exercise will make us feel restored and rejuvenated, but have they tried singing an ancient blessing and eating an entire loaf of challah? Trust us, it works.



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