The Best of the Forward

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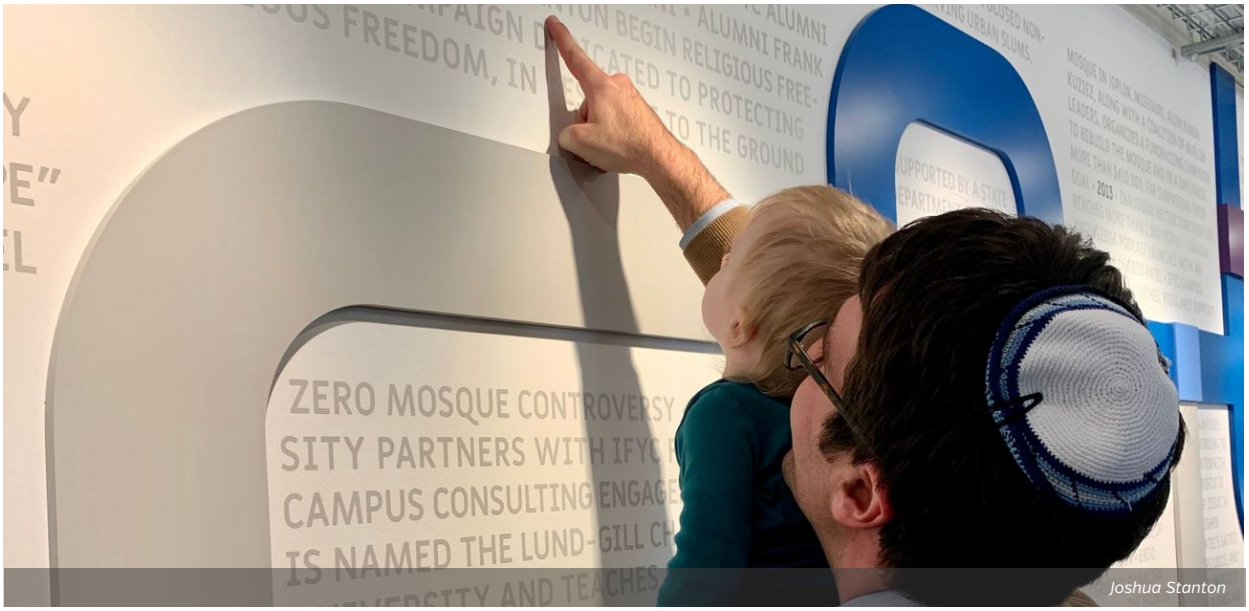


Joshua Stanton

Life

# Pride And Anxiety: 23 American Jews on choosing to wear their Jewishness

By Forward Staff

A middle-aged man tattooed a Star of David on his forearm. A secular man put on a kippah outside of synagogue – for the first time in his life. An Orthodox woman chose to wear a headscarf instead of a wig – to ensure that her identity is clear. A Jewish Sunday school teacher designed an "Angry Vest of Jewish Spite." A father in New Jersey created a facsimile of the armband Polish Jews had to wear in World War II – and plans to wear it now.

Last fall, an American Jewish Committee poll found that 31% of American Jews avoid displaying their Jewishness in public, out of fear. But a few months and dozens of high-profile anti-Semitic attacks later, it seems there has been a counter-trend, of people purposely showing their identities in response to the violence.

Inspired by the AJC's recent #JewishandProud social media campaign encouraging Jews worldwide to share selfies of their symbols, we asked readers: Are you wearing your Jewishness on your sleeves?

We received 82 answers, from people ages 19 to 80, and from every major denomination, across 25 states. We were struck by the range of responses, in style and in sentiment: Some opted for jewelry or tattoos, others kippot or long skirts; and some were unwavering while others were definitely wary of whether they were doing the right thing.

Below are 23 of these readers' stories, edited for length and clarity.

**"We're staying. And we won't be quiet about it, either."**


Rafaella Gunz

I had not worn any expression of Judaism since my bar mitzvah – until Charlottesville happened, and I purchased a *Chai* necklace and have worn it ever since. After seeing people chant "Jews will not replace us" in the

streets, I wanted a way to honor Holocaust survivors and also to express my identity.

I also started attending synagogue more regularly and decided to take my son with me –he had had no religious education, experience, or exposure prior to that, and was only vaguely aware that we are Jews. Since Monsey, I have worn my kippah outside of shul several times, most often during my commute, but this feels a little strange as I am not at all observant. – **Frans Koster, 34, New York, N.Y.**

I started wearing a Magen David every day after the Pittsburgh shooting. I never thought much about being Jewish until I realized things were getting bad for us again, which inspired me to turn to studying Torah. After the most recent bout of anti-Semitic attacks, my boyfriend, who is completely secular, started wearing a kippah to show visible pride in his Jewishness and that he was not afraid of anti-Semites.

I've gotten anti-Semitic comments and vandalism, but I'm not just going to pretend the Jews have gone away. We're staying. And we won't be quiet about it, either. – **Jasmine Lewin, 19, Eugene, Oregon**

I study counter-terror, with a specialty in the far-right. I like to work outside my apartment - or I like to read while walking, or I check out some very odd books from the local library - and the materials I often carry around in public tend to be...well, covered in swastikas. My apartment is in the geographic center of three synagogues, and I've started wearing kippot as a sign to other Jews in the neighborhood that I am not, as I may seem at first glance, an incredibly dedicated anti-Semite. (Though I'd be lying if I said it wasn't also a "fuck you" to the people whose indescribably terrible writing I have to slog through for hours each day.) – **W., 28, Washington, D.C.**


Elena Gormley

I wear an "Angry Vest of Jewish Spite™," which has Jewish pins on the front, and a bunch of Jewish patches and Am Yisrael Chai written in Sharpie in the back. The vest was prompted by the aftermath of the Tree of Life shooting – I wear it I teach Sunday school, and students are very curious and ask questions about it. It's also what I wear to a lot of activist events. I did get screamed at by a man who accused Israelis of murdering children as I was leaving a vigil for the anniversary of the Tree of Life shooting. – **Elena Gormley, 30, Chicago, Illinois**


Joshua Katz

I plan to wear a facsimile of the armband Polish Jews had to wear in War II. I'll add it to my jackets and bags. – **Joshua Katz, 43, Montclair, New Jersey**

Every day since I was 18, I have worn a silver Magen David around my neck. After the shooting at Tree of Life, I became a lot more cautious. I put it on a longer chain and started being careful to wear it inside my shirt. But then, I read an article about how one in three American Jews has taken steps to reduce the ways in which they were viably Jewish.

I realized I was one of those, and it sat heavy in my mind...Since then (shortly before Chanukah) I've been wearing a kippah every day, something I haven't done in a very long time. While my motivations for increasing my Jewish visibility were originally colored by defiance, anger and indignation, that has changed. This has been more than an outward transformation for me. Since beginning to wear my kippah, I find myself praying every single day. I engage in more Jewish rituals at home. I am more conscious of my engagement with mitzvot. I care more about going to services. Like many aspects of Judaism, wearing a kippah for me has benefited me in many areas. It has connected me more deeply to my community. – **Matan Shechter, 26, Falls Church, Virginia**

**"I don't want to leave Jewish pride – and the dangers that come with it – solely to the Orthodox"**A yarmulke, a Magen David (outside my shirt, not inside anymore), and tzitzit. It was the rising anti-Semitism back in 2016 that caused me to publicly re-embrace Judaism by going to shul and posting more about it online. But the recent spate of violence in Brooklyn and beyond has caused me to think more about how anti-Semitism isn't solely a Trump- or alt-right-made phenomenon, even now. I plan to be more visibly Jewish, because I don't want to leave Jewish pride – and the dangers that come with it – solely to the Orthodox (I'm Reform). It's particularly hard for me to believe that this is going on in Brooklyn, my home of more than a decade. – **Daniel Margolis, 43, Worcester, Massachusetts**


Laurie Pollack

In September I learned that my name, Twitter handle, and photo was on a Telegram list of Jewish Twitter users who either had tweeted against racism, or are LGBTQ. The list is maintained by an apparent neo-Nazi, has currently 7,000 white supremacist followers, and contains 1,300 Jewish

names. This seemed however inconsequential in comparison with the actual physical violence going on – but it paradoxically made me more comfortable in displaying this rainbow star heart on my handbag in solidarity with those who have suffered these terrible attacks in New York and New Jersey, and also with those who are visible 24/7 due to their practice. It is double visibility – as I am also lesbian, and I and the love of my life Mary have been together since 1995 and legally married since 2014. No hate, no fear. – **Laurie Pollack, 61, Lansdowne, Pennsylvania**

I wear a visible Magen David necklace everyday and I have tzitzit tied on many of my shawls. I began doing this after the events in Charlottesville, because people of color cannot hide in plain sight and I wasn't willing to be unseen. – **Ketzirah, 46, Washington, D.C.**

### "A way to open myself to inquiry"

I wear a kippah every day. I was ordained in August 2019 as a Kohenet and began the practice of wearing a kippah a few days after that. I felt it was a way to acknowledge my new clergy status, open myself to inquiry, and show defiance toward the threat of anti-Semitism. I have noticed lots of new questions and many comments, both from people I had already known who weren't aware of my Jewish identity or commitment, and from strangers. A great deal of the comments are focused on the idea that "women don't wear yarmulkes"–mostly from non-Jews. I haven't noticed any actual aggression directed at me, but I am a bit more vigilant about my surroundings. I have had friends admire my "courage" but I just feel like it's the right thing for me at this time. – **Liviah (Laurie) Baldwin, 59, Herndon, Virginia**

I always wear a silver Star of David necklace, and do my best to see that it shows. I've worn it since I chose Judaism ten years ago, and the reactions I've gotten (in California) have all been very positive. I'm about to move to Texas, and am looking for a couple of T-shirts with Magen Davids or Hebrew lettering to wear in my new home. I feel that most prejudice is built on ignorance, and so being *visibly* a Jew – a reasonable, friendly, normal human being – is the best way for ME to combat that ignorance. – **Annye, 56, Thousand Oaks, California**

I decided to wear my kippah in public for the month, as a show of support following the surge in recent attacks. I haven't noticed any changes in external behavior thus far, but I do feel changes in my personal behavior. Once visibly marked, I find myself both more self-conscious about how I may be perceived and how my actions may reflect on all Jews, and more defensive about people's motives or thought processes as they engage with me. – **Benjamin Myers, 36, Washington, D.C.**

I have been wearing my Magen David necklace since the AJC #JewishandProud day of unity on January 6. As a Rockland County, NY resident, I was left feeling shocked, frustrated and depressed following the anti-Semitic attack in Monsey, a town where my dad used to teach in local yeshivas. I realized that wearing the Star of David as a sign of worldwide solidarity for one day is great, but wouldn't it be even more impactful to wear it regularly! I saw a co-worker glance at it in the office, but I haven't experienced any other reactions. – **Leslie Kogan, 42, Nanuet, N.Y.**

### "I wear my Jewish identity permanently"


Max Fleischman

On Birthright, I encountered Kabbalah at the Tzfat Gallery of Mystical Art. I found Avraham Loventhal's depiction of Tashuv-Hey, the idea that the divine can be felt through unconditional love, to be beautiful. It was at this point that I first considered getting a "Jewish" tattoo.

After Birthright, I returned to college – and to spates of local and national white supremacist anti-Semitism. People claiming to be affiliated with the KKK placed flyers advocating against race mixing and LGBTQ relationships in the city surrounding my small upstate New York liberal arts college. Not long after this incident, I studied at a university in Washington, D.C., where individuals put up posters directing people to neo-Nazi websites. These events so close to home shook me to my core and caused me to internalize what my Jewish identity means to me. Finally, the Tree of Life Shooting pushed me to a new level of understanding of my Judaism. I decided the next day that I would wear my Jewish identity on my shoulder permanently. – **Max Fleischman, 22, New York, N.Y.**

Star of David tattoo on left inside forearm with barbed wire strand through center, to remember the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, including my relatives lost.

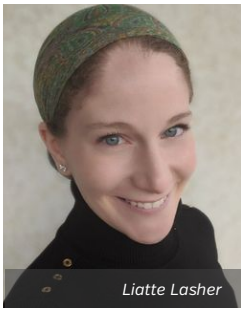
People seem to be mostly respectful of the meaning and the reasoning. – **Ken Wolf, 64, Columbia, South Carolina**

I got a tattoo of a star of David and Hebrew words on my wrist last October. – **Laura Solomon, 51, Brooklyn, N.Y.**

### "I've become less interested in fitting in"

I now often wear a kippah that stands out on my head, so that people can see more easily that I am joyfully Jewish. – **Rabbi Joshua Stanton, 33, New York, N.Y.**

I've certainly felt more self-conscious with the spike in anti-Semitic incidents, but didn't feel like I stuck out with my curly wig and more modest clothing that blends in more during the winter months.


*Liatte Lasher*

On the day following the brutal attack in Monsey, I felt like I wanted to express unity with my ultra-Orthodox brothers and sisters whose Judaism is seen from down the street, and I spent that Sunday around town in my mitpachat (headscarf) instead of the wig I usually would wear, and have been wearing it more often. I'm not scared to show that I'm Jewish. – **Liatte Lasher, 30, Stamford, Connecticut**

I've definitely become less interested in fitting in by wearing shorter skirts and have started to wear longer skirts and tichels [scarves] more frequently.

I remember after they found Leiby Kletsky back in 2010, I happened to be on the train and wearing a long skirt. Strangers kept coming over to me and saying, "I'm sorry for your loss," and I felt so connected to my Jewish kin at that time. Now that I'm married with a Hasidic husband who bravely walks around on Shabbos with his streimel in Brooklyn, I've been feeling so inclined to recapture that spirit for myself.

It's sort of a combination of feeling like "come at me, I'll fight you" (stupid, I know) – and just wanting to make sure that people who see me know that I'm Jewish and proud. I feel so irked by people who get to take off and put on their Jewishness at will, and then claim to be in the same boat as those of us who wear it all the time. – **T, 26, Brooklyn, N.Y.**

### "I admit that I'm scared"

I have worn my Jewish star since my husband bought it for me and removed it only once in fear, when I was alone on a Polish train traveling from Krakow to Warsaw in the middle of the night. For the last eight years, I live in the Pocono Mountains, where Jew-hatred and racism thrive, and I do not remove it. – **Jeanette Friedman, Paradise Valley, Pennsylvania**

I'm a proud progressive secular Jew, and I've never been comfortable wearing a yarmulke in public, in part because that would make me unable to be invisible. I'm proud to be a Jew, but I admit that I'm scared. I'm 72 years young this month, and I don't want to invite anyone to perpetrate violence against me. – **Eric Lessinger, 72, Gloucester, Massachusetts**

Growing up, I was discouraged from displaying Jewishness. My family moved from the East Coast to a small, conservative town with a predominantly Christian population, where we were literally the only Jewish family. We were overtly harassed and discriminated against, and couldn't really celebrate holidays since the closest synagogue was two hours away and our school and extracurriculars didn't accommodate for Shabbat or holidays.

Over the years, our family stopped eating kosher, stopped keeping Shabbat, stopped speaking Hebrew, and essentially tried our best to assimilate without realizing it. I had been very proudly Jewish before, but the way the other students ostracized me made me feel subhuman; to them, I was not "Jewish", but "a Jew."

There were times where, feeling a desperate need to reconnect to this part of myself, I asked my mom if I could have a Star of David necklace, but my mom said that she never wanted to see any of us wearing a gold star after what her grandma went through in the Holocaust. So I was surprised when my mom bought me a star of David necklace this past Hanukkah. I told her then that I would wear it and never take it off. But the first time I wore it to school, I felt incredibly exposed and uncomfortable. I kept thinking of all the attacks in New York and asked myself if my Jewish pride was worth my life. I took it off after an hour. – **Maya Lyubomirsky, 22, Irvine, California**

News

# Of Herzl, Einstein, Chagall and George Kennan: Memories of working with YIVO's librarians

By Forward Staff

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research is the world's preeminent center for the study of Yiddish language and culture. Founded in Vilna in 1925, YIVO is now based in New York and includes an academic center, an archive with 23 million item, and a library with 400,000 books.

On Monday, the Forward reported that YIVO's board, facing a shortfall of $550,000 in its general operating budget, had laid off all four of its librarians. Some 1,200 scholars and students have since signed a letter urging the board -- whose 15 members include two who also sit on the board of the Forward -- to reinstate the librarians.

We asked some of the people who know YIVO best to share a personal story about its beloved library.

**'Something in hand that she knew would interest me'**

The first time I visited the YIVO library was in 1967. It was a dreary winter day, with pale sunlight drifting through the windows of a ballroom of the Vanderbilt mansion at 86th Street. With a bank of card catalogues at one end of the room, walls lined with shelves of reference works, and readers at tables in the rest of the space, I had the feeling I was in Europe, not New York.

The doyenne of this domain was Dina Abramowicz, a petite and modest woman of inestimable knowledge of the greatest collection of books in Yiddish and other languages on the history and culture of East European Jews. She had been part of YIVO in Vilnius, survived the Holocaust, and carried on the great YIVO tradition of supporting scholarship.

Neither the card catalogue nor the electronic databases that supplanted it could offer what Dina could give to the researcher, novice and experienced alike. She not only knew what was in the collection and where to find it, but also she would bring you material you knew nothing about – and she did so with utmost generosity of spirit. I would arrive to the library, and there would be Dina, with something in hand that she knew would interest me without my even asking.

*Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett*
*Professor emerita, New York University*
*Chief Curator, Core Exhibition, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*

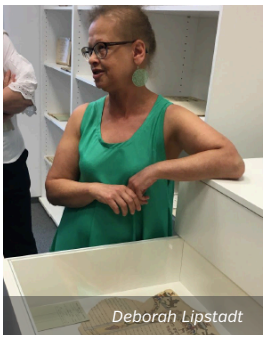
**'You are going to see something amazing'**

For the last five or so years, I have taught a summer course on "Research Methods in Yiddish Studies," where I introduce students to the treasures of the YIVO collections. I would request a long list of reference books from Lyudmila Sholokhova – rare Soviet Yiddish publications, obscure dictionaries of Yiddish place names, unpublished bibliographies found only at YIVO. No matter how busy she was with her many other duties, Sholokova -- known as Mila -- would run from her office to the reading room to the stacks gathering the materials and present them to me, ready and waiting on a library cart, with a smile.

Fruma Mohrer, an archivist, would sometimes come with a cart of items, including Herzl's diary, letters from Einstein, and humble notebooks from schoolchildren studying math in Yiddish. She would say to the students, "You are going to see something amazing" – and they did. But I also told my students that of all the resources at YIVO, the most important were the staff members with their decades worth of knowledge that cannot be found in any book or website.

*Cecile E. Kuznitz*
*Associate Professor, Bard College and Senior Academic Advisor, Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies, YIVO*

**A letter from Marc Chagall**


Deborah Lipstadt

I visited Vilnius with a group of scholars for a conference about 18 months. The most exciting and memorable part of the conference was not the paper, but our visit to the Vilnius national library, which is in possession of a number

of documents from YIVO's earliest collection. The amazing librarian there, Lara Lempertiené, organized a small exhibit for us and among the papers was Marc Chagall's letter (in Russian) agreeing to be on the board of the newly formed YIVO. A YIVO without librarians is hardly a YIVO at all.

*Deborah Lipstadt*
*Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies, Emory University*
*(Lipstadt is a contributing columnist at the Forward)*

**Using email to make the archive a global resource**

Except for a few spans during summers, my career has not been based in New York. YIVO's librarians have made the archive a national and indeed global resource. Not only does my email archive show how helpful they have been to me from afar over the years, but their knowledge base has made time spent on-site in the reading room far more efficient.

On a trip to YIVO in 2015, I was looking for a needle in a haystack: I knew that Zuni Maud had drawn a magnificent cartoon to accompany a Chelm story in some issue of Kinder zhurnal, and I wanted the image for the cover of my first book. But the periodical started publishing in 1920 and continued for more than five decades, and Maud lived until 1956.

There was now way to do it but to start in 1920 and flip through issue after issue, until I found the drawing in question. The librarian on duty mentioned that while touring in Europe and the Soviet Union (1929-31), Maud was unlikely to have contributed. In an instant and through expert librarianship, three years were shaved off the haystack.

*Miriam Udel*
*Associate Profesor of Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture, Emory University*

**Citing relevant works 'off the top of her head'**

I was in the reading room of the old YIVO Library on Fifth Avenue when the legendary American diplomat and historian George Kennan paid a visit circa 1978.

He was working on his book "The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890" (1979), and was looking for sources on a very conservative, Jewish-born convert (and physiologist) Élie de Cyon (1843-1912), a native of Telšiai (Telz, Lithuania), whose name he had come across in his research.

Kennan sat for at least half an hour with Dina Abramowicz, YIVO's Head Librarian from 1962 to 1987. She referred him to Yiddish books by Saul M. Ginsburg and Samuel Leib Zitron about Jewish apostates in Tsarist Russia, and offered to translate passages where Cyon was mentioned. That Dina was able, off the top of her head, to cite these works testified to her extraordinary expertise and memory.

I like to think that Kennan must have been intrigued by his encounter with Dina, a contemporary of his who was raised in the Russian-speaking home of Jewish intellectuals in Vilna, during the same years that he was studying Russian while serving as a junior diplomat in Riga (not far away).

*Zek Harye*
*Assistant Librarian, YIVO Institute*

**'The staff actually knew not only the holdings but also the subject matter'**

It is hard for me to provide one particular anecdote or one particular date. I have been using the YIVO library for 40 years. The YIVO library has always been different from some other major research libraries in the area in that the staff actually knew not only the holdings but also the subject matter. They were able, therefore, not only to retrieve items, but to guide researchers in the right direction.

*Daniel Soyer*
*Professor of History, Fordham University*
*(former YIVO student and staff member)*

**She 'taught me what my exhibit could be'**

I had the idea of having a small exhibit of Bais-Yaakov-related material from YIVO in the lobby at my book talk at the Center for Jewish History. Eddy Portnoy, who worked in the education department, introduced me to Lyudmila Shokolova, the library's director and YIVO's associate director for external relations with Eastern Europe and Russia.

In her crowded office, Lyudmila worked for me, over the course of weeks, to select material from the library and archive, write captions, and arrange the exhibit. After years spent writing more-or-less alone (though always with the support of YIVO's archivists and librarians), this collaboration was enormously rewarding.

Lyudmila showed me journals I had only seen in

microfiche, found books I had missed in my research, and taught me what my exhibit could be. Just as my book was entering the world, she helped me see clearly how much of it depended on the generosity and knowledge of librarians like Lyudmila, who get so little credit for the scholarly enterprise they make possible.

*Naomi Seidman*
*Chancellor Jackman Professor of the Arts, University of Toronto*

**'She shares what and whom she knows'**

Rather than a musty interaction involving a tome or two or three, my love, admiration and respect for YIVO's [suddenly 'former'] library director, Lyudmilla 'Mila' Sholokhova, covers two decades of mostly emails. A digital trail flowed between us, routinely, the way telephone calls and telegrams used to. To peek inside them is to hear me claiming I'm doing my best to be honest about why we need permission to publish a YIVO image, or how we need to flip through an archival file box or two and publish our findings, immediately, and with limited funds.

The emails express deadline panic–and my desperation at trying to act as un-barbarian as possible in the face of my utterly cultivated Kievian colleague.

Sholokhova is among the world's experts on the Ansky expedition, that pioneering Ashkenazi Jewish ethnographic moment. Without it, maybe Yiddishists and Yiddishland wouldn't exist. Her generosity of spirit, collegiality and low-pitched but strong networking skills extend around the globe to other research facilities I wouldn't necessarily have relationships with -- if not for her. She shares what and whom she knows.

Researchers such as Sholokhova don't blow in everyday. They've given their lives in service of Jewish literacy. Sholokhova forever.

*Chana Pollack*
*Archivist, the Forward*
*[Pollack worked part-time at YIVO for several years]*

News

# Letter from Alabama: 'Rabbi, will you take my dog when the Rapture comes?'

By Rabbi Jonathan Miller

I was blessed to spend the bulk of my rabbinic service in a place I didn't belong. I am a Yankee, born in New York, who served a synagogue in the Deep South. When I first arrived decades ago, I found myself anxiously striving keep Judaism – and Jews – from being submerged in the waters of Bible Belt Christianity. Gradually, I learned to relax and float on top of the water and not try to swim against the current. I learned so much about faith and religion, which reinforced my appreciation for my own.

Many Christians in my part of the country live in a state of constant anticipation of what they call the "Rapture." They believe the end of time will come in stages. The first stage, the "Rapture," will draw believers into heaven to be close with Jesus so they can avoid the end of time travails; Armageddon, in other words. After that, God will judge those who remain behind and bring some to heaven and cast the rest to eternal perdition. We Jews are not lost, entirely, because we're in the first group. We have reservations on the train to eternal bliss – it just leaves a little later.

That I live amid this view of reality came home to me in an especially poignant way a few years ago. It was the Spring of 2016. In Alabama, no time is more beautiful. I had anticipated a quiet, uneventful day in the office. The phone message light was on when I came in, so I pushed the button. A man with a southern country drawl had left me this:

"Rabbi, my name is Renferd Higgins [not his real name] and I need me a Jew to take care of my dog. Sure would 'preciate you to call me back at …"

I stared at the telephone and thought, "It's a joke, for sure, or some Looney Tunes. I may as well call him and get this over with."

"Mr. Higgins, this is Rabbi Miller in Birmingham. You

just called me, and I am returning your phone call."

"Oh, Rabbi Miller, thank you so much for calling me back. I live in Brookhill, Mississippi. (Not a real place.) Do you know where that is at?

"No, help me out."

"We are in the country not too far from Meridian. I need me a Jew to take care of my dog."

I stared at the phone. What exactly does a Jew say when asked by a stranger to dog sit?

"Mr. Higgins, this is a rather unusual request. Can you share with me what you are thinking?"

"Well Rabbi, I am here in a Bible study, and we are studyin' about the Rapture. Are you familiar with the Rapture?"

"Yes, I am, Mr. Higgins."

"Well, before the Second Coming, Jesus is gonna appear and all good Christians are gonna be swept into heaven, and the only people left on earth are gonna be the Jews and the atheists. Now don't you worry, Rabbi, before the Second Coming, God's gonna take care of the Jews too. So, when the Rapture comes, I need me a Jew to take care of my dog. I don't want my dog being raised by no atheist."

The Yankee part of me wanted to chew the caller out for being so … obtuse. "For real? You think your dog needs to be raised in a religious home?" But I pushed back against my instinctive response. I told myself, "Be southern."

"Mr. Higgins, tell me about your dog."

"Oh, she's a sweet thing. Name is Millie. 'Bout three years old. A yellow Lab mix. I love her a lot."

"Clearly you do." (Now, what should I say?)

After some silence I said, "Mr. Higgins, I will take care of your dog."

"You would, Rabbi? You would take care of Millie?"

"Mr. Higgins, when the Rapture comes, I will take care of Millie. Now, don't you worry a bit."

"Oh, I feel so much better. Thank you so much, Rabbi. I was so worried about Millie." (Another long pause.) "Uhhh, how is Millie gonna get to you?"

"Mr. Higgins, you just put the synagogue's address on the inside of her collar. When the Rapture comes, I will fetch Millie. Promise."

"That is so great. Thank you, Rabbi. Thank you."

"You are welcome, Mr. Higgins. Is there anything else on you mind?"

"Just one more thing, Rabbi. You may be getting yourself a whole lot of dogs. And if you have to, you can put Millie down. It will be allright."

"Mr. Higgins, don't even think about that. It will be my pleasure and honor to care for Millie during the Rapture. I will make sure that she is in good hands with a loving Jewish family."

"I feel so much better. I was so worried about Millie. And now I have you, Rabbi Miller, to watch out for her. Wait until I tell the folks in my Bible study that I got the rabbi to take care of Millie when Jesus comes."

"It's been a pleasure talking to you, Mr. Higgins. Is there anything else you need from me?"

"No, Rabbi, you have a good day and thank you very much."

"You are most welcome. Goodbye, Mr. Higgins."

It is too easy to think about our different religions as opportunities to compete and to dominate, or as kernels of truth that we have to defend at all costs. As a Yankee rabbi in Birmingham, I have learned that living with others gives us opportunities to be kind in ways we never thought and to give and receive gifts that we never would have imagined. Mr. Higgins blessed me as I blessed him.

And as the former owner of Scruff, a black Lab whom I adored the way Mr. Higgins adores Millie, I would be very happy to take Millie if the world has come to the end of time.

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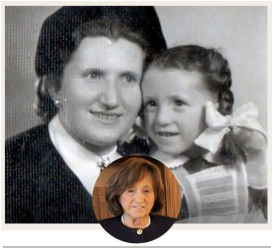
*Jonathan Miller is Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham, Alabama. He is writing a novel based on this conversation which he hopes will appear sometime in 2020. He's also got a lot of great stories about Scruff, which he loves to share over a glass of wine.*

News

# On liberation anniversary, Auschwitz survivors in their own words and photos

By Donald Snyder

Angela Orosz Richt is nervous about her upcoming trip to Auschwitz to commemorate the 75th anniversary of its liberation. She was there on that day, although she doesn't remember it, because she was only about a month old. Richt is one of the very small number of people who were born in a death camp and survived it.



Angela Orosz Richt

On Jan. 27, Richt will join more than 200 Holocaust survivors, as well as numerous heads of state, at the death camp where more than 1.1 million people were murdered, 90% of them Jews. That United Nations designated that date International Holocaust Memorial Day precisely because it's the anniversary of the camp's liberation by the Soviets. This place of genocide has become a symbol of the Holocaust, with more Jews killed here than in any other Nazi death camp.

## Angela Orosz Richt, 75

"When I walk there, I'm scared to step on the ground," said Richt, who was born on Dec. 21, 1944, weighing two pounds. Nursed by a starving mother, she could not walk until age seven. "Maybe someone's blood, someone's ashes, someone's tears, someone's murdered body is under the earth," she told the Forward.

Ronald Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress and chairman of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation, will emphasize the importance of Holocaust memory at a time of rising anti-Semitism in his keynote speech at the ceremony.

A 2019 survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League found that a quarter of Europeans harbor strong anti-Semitic attitudes, with such sentiments particularly on the rise in astern and Central Europe. The ADL's most recent audit of anti-Semitic incidents in the United States also documented a dramatic increase in physical assaults.

"Anti-Semitic incidents and expressions of violence have proliferated in the United States as well as in Europe," Lauder told the Forward. "As the number of Holocaust survivors dwindles and eye-witness memory of the Holocaust fades, it is more important than ever for us to ensure that the facts of the greatest crime in humanity are remembered accurately and widely."

## Ernest Ehrmann, 92

Courtesy of Audrey Ehrmann

"History does repeat itself," said Holocaust survivor Ernest Ehrmann, 92, who will attend the commemoration.

"Unfortunately, there will always be anti-Semites, " he said during a phone interview, noting the difference now is that Israel provides refuge for Jews in danger.

Ehrmann recalled one of his darkest days at Auschwitz. His brother had typhoid fever and was barely conscious. Ehrmann managed to get extra food to his brother, forcing him to swallow it.

"The two of us pulled each other through," he said. "We couldn't survive without each other."

## Peter Somogyi, 86

Courtesy of Anna Somogyi

Somogyi and his twin brother, Thomas, were 11 years old in July, 1944 when their family was taken from Hungary to Auschwitz-Birkenau. [Their photo is above. Peter is on the right in the historical photo, and on the left in the inset.]

During an interview at his home in Pleasantville, N.Y., Somogyi recalled the chimney flames and smoke he noticed upon arrival at Auschwitz, thinking at first that it was a factory - not realizing that death was the industry, although the stench of burning flesh was pervasive.

Dr. Josef Mengele, notorious for his experiments with twins, took him and his brother away from their mother and sister, without giving them a chance to say goodbye, Somogyi said. They were sent to the special barracks for twins and immediately tattooed.

Somogyi asked an older prisoner in Mengele's "care" whether he could he see his mother. The older boy pointed to the flames, indicating what had happened to her.

Somogyi remembers Mengle as someone who wore white gloves, loved classical music, and whistled Mozart melodies.

For most of his life, Somogyi did not speak of his experience in Auschwitz. In recent years, however, he has devoted himself to telling his story and teaching about the Holocaust.

When he visits Auschwitz, Somogyi will bring a candle, seeking the right place to kindle its light as a memorial to his murdered mother.

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*Donald Snyder is a freelance writer.*



Opinion

# Holocaust education at my high school is atrocious. No wonder anti–Semitism is surging.

By Jack Elbaum

On Wednesday, the Pew Research Center released a new study that examined what the American people know about the Holocaust. What they found was disappointing, but unfortunately, not surprising: While the majority of Americans have a baseline understanding of the Holocaust, many still have large gaps in knowledge – especially young people. Despite the fact most people know the Holocaust was the genocide of Jewish people, far fewer knew that six million Jews were exterminated.

This is especially true among young people. Only 38% of teens know that six million Jews were killed, compared to 45% of adults. And only 33% of teens know that Hitler came to power through a democratic vote, compared to 43% of adults. Just 53% know what Nazi ghettos are.

The deplorable state of Holocaust education among America's youth isn't exactly news; it's been demonstrated before, in 2018, for example, when a study found that two-thirds of millennials do not know what Auschwitz is, and nearly a quarter have never even heard of the Holocaust.

But the reason these statistics were not particularly surprising to me when I saw them was that I've experienced this lack of education first hand.

I am an 18-year-old high school student who lives in a largely Jewish town, attends a largely Jewish high school and lives in one of the eleven states that require Holocaust education. So you might assume that I have learned extensively about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism in school. If you did, you would be wrong.

Throughout my thirteen years of public schooling, I learned about the Holocaust in just two classes. Those

classes were not AP or honors courses in high school, but rather a 7th-grade social studies course and a 7th-grade English course. In my social studies class, we simply learned about it in the context of our generalized "genocide" unit.

At my high school, we have an optional event on Yom HaShoah where students during their lunch period can go to the library and listen to family members of Holocaust survivors tell their stories. This is both unique, riveting and more than most schools do. But at the same time, it is a far cry from the mandatory event our school used to have and no longer does. In fact, there is currently a push by many students at my school to reinstate a mandatory event to commemorate the Holocaust. But those concerns have been met with inaction from the administration.

As a result, I have had to rely on outside sources for this necessary education. Whether it's going to the Holocaust museum with my family, participating in the American Jewish Committee's "Leaders for Tomorrow" program, or simply listening to speeches from leaders within the Jewish community, that is where I have gotten my education on Jewish history and anti-Semitism.

Unfortunately, most people do not have those opportunities.

Considering the obvious lack of adequate education on Jewish history, why would we be surprised when anti-Semites assault Jews on the streets of New York, go on a stabbing rampage in a Rabbi's house in Monsey or shoot-up a synagogue in Pittsburgh or Poway? Isn't it a predictable outcome of years of ignoring our history?

Education may not be the final step, but it sure is an important first one. There has never been a time when Holocaust education is less effective, yet more necessary, since the end of the war. It's time to invest in Holocaust education for young Americans. We can't wait.

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*Jack Elbaum is an 18-year-old High school student. His writing has been featured in the Forward, Daily Wire, and Chicago Tribune. You can reach him at jackelbaum16@gmail.com.*

**The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.**

News

# World Zionist Congress election turnout is up — and secured with blockchain

By Aiden Pink

Voting in the World Zionist Congress elections surged on the first day ballots were open, according to the leader of the organization that runs the election process.

"More than double the number of people have voted in half a day than voted in the whole first day in 2015," American Zionist Movement executive director Herbert Block told the Forward on Tuesday.

Block was pleased by the fact that #ZionistElection was trending on Twitter on Tuesday, the first day of balloting. Voting is open on the American Zionist Movement website until March 11. It will determine the American delegation – 152 of the 500 total participants – to the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in October, which will in turn determine $5 billion in spending on Jewish causes over the next five years.

Any United States permanent resident who is Jewish and signs a statement supporting Zionism is eligible to vote - though much of that is on the honor system. The AZM has contracted with Votem, an election security company, to conduct the voting and protect against voter fraud. Votem, which uses blockchain technology, had previously been hired by the state of Montana and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Some have grumbled about having to pay a $7.50 voter fee [$5 for people aged 18-25] – but Block said there were multiple reasons for the feature. The fees will raise the money to cover the cost of running the election in the first place, and Votem uses the credit card information to protect against double-voting. But also, Block argued, the idea of paying to participate in the World Zionist Congress process goes back to founder Theodor Herzl himself, who instituted a

system where voting privileges could be secured by buying a "Zionist shekel."

Block estimated the cost of running the elections at a few hundred thousand dollars. The $7.50 fee – which is actually lower than the $10 amount five years ago – was set because that will help the AZM break even if voter turnout is equal to the last election. But if turnout exceeds expectations, as it appears it will, Block said that the excess money will likely be saved until the next election in five years' time.

The 15 slates running in the election don't have any limits on how much they can spend on their campaigns – but they are forbidden from paying the fees or otherwise compensating voters. The rules say they're allowed to criticize the other groups' statements and policies, but prohibit "demeaning or denigrating another slate or competing organization by name or inference."

Where the line is drawn is open to interpretation; the Orthodox party Eretz HaKodesh warns on its website that high Orthodox turnout could "prevent values of the liberal movements from infiltrating the Torah atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael," and the Zionist Organization of America warned in an email that if they don't win, other parties "will turn the World Zionist Congress into the anti-Zionist Congress."

"We expect vigorous and robust debate," Block said, speaking generally. "You can disagree, but you don't have to be disagreeable."

Most other countries do not hold elections to the World Zionist Congress in this way.

The Israeli delegation will be determined based on the outcome of their parliamentary elections in March. A party that gets 10% of the Knesset vote will get 10% of the Israeli seats – 199 in total.

Canadians, on the other hand, will have to wait two months to find out whether they are having an election at all. Canadian Zionist Federation president Les Rothschild told the Forward that because of the high cost of voting, it decided in the past two election cycles to instead determine its delegation based on the size of the country's Zionist groups – with the bigger ones getting more seats than the smaller ones.

In March, its seven member organizations – the three major Jewish denominations, three representing various views on Israel and the Canadian Forum of Russian-Speaking Jewry – will share their membership lists and decide whether to award its 20 delegates proportionately. But if one of the groups thinks it can get a larger share of the delegation after a community-wide vote, they have the right to call an election.

Rothschild said he wasn't sure whether an election would occur, but he said that many Canadian Jews were aware of the excitement the vote has engendered south of the border. However, he stressed that the American vote was only open to American permanent residents. "Canadians cannot vote in the United States election," he said.

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*Aiden Pink is the deputy news editor of the Forward. Contact him at pink@forward.com or follow him on Twitter @aidenpink*

Culture

# Jeff Goldblum, Marc Maron and Terry Gross find their roots

By PJ Grisar

Courtesy of PBS

Two celebrated interviewers and perhaps the most eccentric interview subject of all time, learned about their shared Jewish pasts in Eastern Europe on PBS's "Finding Your Roots."

On the January 21 episode of the series, podcaster and comedian Marc Maron, "Fresh Air" host Terry Gross and actor Jeff Goldblum found common ground: Namely, the Eastern European Pale of Settlement, where Jews were allowed to reside in the Russian Empire.

"My three guests have dramatically different personalities and came to fame by dramatically different paths," the show's host, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. said. "But they also share something profound: Each has deep, Jewish roots and each told me that while they feel connected to their ancestors culturally, they knew almost nothing about the lives those ancestors actually had lived."

Goldblum learned that his ancestors come from Zlocow, Austria – now Western Ukraine – and that his maternal grandfather, Sam Temeles, accused of burning down his business for insurance money, had a heart attack in court and died the same day.

Informed that the ship his great-grandfather traveled on caught fire and sank two years after his journey to America, Goldblum said, "It's just a random piece of luck that I'm here at all, I guess!"

Gross discovered that her own family was affected by a fire as well; her great-grandparents' home in a Russian shtetl was destroyed, leaving them homeless for a year. Soon after, her grandparents left, leaving the older generation behind.

"I always wonder how did my great-grandparents feel about my grandparents leaving them for America," Gross said. "Cause they probably knew they would never see each other again."

Maron found out that his family came from Drohobycz in Galicia (later Poland and now Ukraine), an area known for oil production, and that his great-great-grandfather worked in a petroleum factory.

"That's crazy," Maron, who grew up in New Mexico, said. "This is cowboy stuff. You don't think about Polish oil!"

Maron's ancestors fled to America following pogroms by the Russian Army during World War I and then the Poles. "It does resonate," he said. "The fact that no matter how religious you are or what makes you Jewish in your particular life, the fact that you are defined on some level in a very real way by the reality of anti-Semitism."

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*PJ Grisar is the Forward's culture fellow. He can be reached at Grisar@Forward.com.*