

Stories for you to savor over Shabbat and Sunday

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News

After year of isolation, fully vaccinated grandparents head to in-person Passover seders

By Marie-Rose Sheinerman

Ruth and Jerry Kirschner haven't seen four of their grandchildren, ages 7 through 12, since January 2020. "This is the age when you want to see them," Ruth said. "They're young. They understand we can't be with them, but they're always like, 'How much longer? How much longer?'"

Thanks to the COVID-19 vaccine, the Kirschners can finally say it won't be much longer. The retired couple, based in Chicago, normally visit with their Boca Raton, Fla. grandkids at least three times a year. But amid the pandemic, as social isolation became a public health mandate and cross-state travel an unwise medical risk, they've spent the last 15 months hundreds of miles away. Now, with their second vaccine doses administered, they plan to fly out to Florida in a couple of weeks – just in time to hide the *afikoman* and hear their youngest ask, "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

For Passover 2020, Lidia Epel had already booked flights to visit her daughter and grandchildren. "But Passover came and the pandemic started," Epel, 79, said. "I still have that ticket, I never came."

The last time the New York-based grandmother had seen her teenaged twin grandkids was in 2019. After two vaccine doses and the proper waiting period, "I decided I'd had enough of not seeing my grandchildren," she said. On Feb. 10, Epel flew to Florida, rented a place near her daughter and has been there ever since.

"It was very emotional," she recalled of seeing her grandchildren for the first time in so long. "They have changed."

"They've made a reservation for a sleepover at our house," she said. "Popcorn, movie, ice cream – it's all in the works." Jerry Kirschner, 73, interjected: "It's two weeks away."



Chicago-based Jerry and Ruth Kirschner visiting her grandchildren in Florida shortly before the pandemic outbreak. Courtesy of Kirschner family

The lost year: 'We're never getting it back'

Ellen and John Moir (pictured at the top of this article) have spent the past year visiting with their son and grandsons – one born just weeks before the pandemic hit – every other weekend masked and outdoors. The weather in California makes the 45-minute drive from Santa Cruz to Monterey worth it for porch-only visits, but there's something important missing for the retired couple.

"We haven't hugged or kissed the boys in a whole year," Ellen, 71, said. "That's been one of the hardest things." As their older grandson turns four in a few weeks, John admitted that he and his wife began to feel the weight of the "lost year." "We're never getting

it back. Oh my goodness, we don't want to wait any longer."

So on March 17, after their allotted waiting period post-second-dose has passed, "we're giving some kisses away," the grandmother said. They recognize, the couple explained, that even with both doses of the vaccine, some risks remain and mask-wearing continues to be CDC recommended protocol. But after a year of warning their beloved three-year-old grandson to "not get too close to grandma and grandpa," hugging him is a risk they feel is worth taking.

"We're not sure what it's going to be like," John said. "We're going to have to let the kids be the guide... it'll be as strange for them as it is for us."

At the end of the day, for these vaccinated grandparents, despite knowledge of the risks inherent to flying to visit family or taking off their masks to kiss their grandchildren, they've come to the conclusion it's a risk they're willing to accept.

"The more I read, the more I understand that really there's no instructions," Ruth Kirschner said. "We don't go anywhere, we don't go to restaurants, we do curbside grocery pickup. So it's really a scary step to take."

The vaccine, after all, is not full proof, she said: A small percentage of fully vaccinated people can [still become infected](#) with the coronavirus.

"It's just that at some point, you have to start living," Kirschner said. "So we're going to start living."

Her excitement to see her grandkids can only be matched by their excitement to see her. In the meantime:

"Well, they're telling us things that they would like us to buy them."

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News

In a bad economy, some Jewish giving is up—way up

By Stewart Ain

The economy is at a standstill, people are out of work and stuck home – and big Israel-support organizations are having a banner year.

The Jewish National Fund raised a record \$100.8 million last year in the United States, even as the pandemic canceled live fundraising events and JNF-sponsored trips to Israel.

At the same time, State of Israel Bonds also set a record of \$1.8 billion in sales worldwide last year – \$1.5 billion in sales in the U.S. alone, an increase of \$400 million over its original goal.

"People are home and have had time to be a little introspective," explained Mark Ruben, executive director for Israel Bonds in Palm Beach, Florida. "Happily, many thought about Israel and how important it is to them."

Israel was not the only beneficiary of Americans' largess last year. The Jewish Communal Fund, based in New York, is one of the largest Jewish donor-advised funds in the United States. Its fund holders distributed a record \$536 million in grants to charities during the 2020 fiscal year, representing a 17.5 percent increase from 2019. They recommended a record number of 64,188 grants to thousands of charitable organizations, an 18% increase over 2019. And the average grant was \$8,352, an increase of 16%

"Our generous Fundholders have stepped up amidst the coronavirus crisis to distribute funds to charities serving those in need," Susan F. Dickman, JCF's executive vice president and chief executive officer said in an email. "As the needs have increased, so have the number and amount of grants that JCF is distributing to charities in all sectors."

Eileen Heisman, president and chief executive officer

of the National Philanthropic Trust and a nationally recognized expert in charitable and planned giving, said she had believed the pandemic would have prompted people to be “generous to organizations that were helping during the pandemic, such as researchers working to find a vaccine, frontline workers, and groups dealing with food security. But what happened is that people gave to all the new things and they were very loyal to existing charities.”

The pandemic got people thinking in survival mode, said Heisman. Increased giving to Israel, she said, “was a reaffirmation that the religion and the country are important to people and they wanted to make sure that things important to them were being taken care of.”

Ruben said that his office, which covers both Palm Beach County and South Palm Beach County, raised \$130 million in Israel Bonds, ranging from \$36 bonds to a number of \$1 million bonds. The previous record was \$80 million, he said.

“We had more investors buying bonds in our community than ever before,” Ruben added. “And those who bought before invested even more.”

He stressed that people buying the bonds were doing so strictly to support Israel, not as a highly remunerative investment– the rate of interest on a two-year \$25,000 bond is only .62 percent, a figure that is based on U.S. Treasury rates.

The Jewish National Fund similarly did not miss a beat when the pandemic hit, noted Russell Robinson, the organization’s chief executive officer. He said that even without any event or parlor meetings, donors contributed more than expected. In the first quarter of the new campaign – from last Oct. 1 through Dec. 31 – its goal was to raise 33% of its \$100 million campaign. Instead, it raised 52% of its goal and had 2,300 new donors last year.

To overcome the lockdown and economic insecurity, organizations innovated online giving and events. JNF began running hour-long, five-day virtual tours of Israel hosted by Israeli tour guides, followed by a one-hour discussion. Some 6,000 people – 40% of whom were brand new to JNF– have taken the tours, which



Finance Ministry Accountant General, Yali Rothenberg addressing global Israel Bonds leadership and staff Feb 9 via Zoom. Courtesy of Facebook

run Monday through Friday for a fee of \$50. A maximum of 25 Zoom boxes is permitted per tour group.

In addition, JNF created an “On Demand” website that includes video recordings of some of the virtual discussions and programs it has hosted since the pandemic began, including a reading series, cooking demonstrations and lectures. More than 137,000 people have attended [these programs] [jnf.org/ondemand]. The increase in attendance and fundraising came even as JNF faced criticism for its decision to [extend its land purchases into the West Bank](#).

Given their success, these strategies will likely outlive the pandemic that created them.

“We are going to have virtual missions forever,” said Robinson. .

The group started bar mitzvah-oriented virtual tours. This week alone JNF will conduct week nine different “trips.”

Virtual fundraisers will continue, too. Last June, JNF raised more than \$2 million with a four-hour telethon featuring performers and lay leaders.

“We are an organization that did not stop and say, ‘Woe is me’ when the pandemic hit,” Robinson said.

To attract more attention, JNF two weeks ago began offering to plant a tree in Israel for free for each person who gets vaccinated. More than 3,000 have already signed up.

Opinion

To truly welcome Jews of color, seminaries must ordain intermarried rabbis

By Edmund Case

In December 2019, Rabbi Rick Jacobs [called on the Reform movement](#) to “dig deeper into social justice activism through the Religious Action Center to address racism in our broader society,” and to “commit to our sacred equity, diversity and inclusion work.”

“I cannot imagine our movement without all the voices, hearts and minds of our Jews of color,” he said.

But the movement’s racial equity and inclusion efforts, including the installment of Yolanda Savage-Narva as director of racial equity, diversity and inclusion at the RAC, are undermined by a policy of its seminary, Hebrew Union College, not to admit or ordain rabbinic students who are in interfaith relationships – because that policy has the unintended impact of discriminating against Jews of color.

All of the available data shows that Jews of color are more highly intermarried than other Jews. HUC sociology professor Bruce Phillips, an advisor on the 2013 Pew Report, told me the data underlying that report indicated 69% of Jewish respondents of color were intermarried, compared to 53% of white non-Hispanic Jewish respondents. The Cohen Center at Brandeis has reported data showing that in Washington, D.C. in 2017, 62% of Jews of color who were married or partnered were intermarried, compared to 44% of all Jews, and that in the Twin Cities in 2019, 80% of couples that included Jews of color were intermarried, compared to 65% of all Jewish couples.

I don’t believe that HUC intends to discriminate against Jews of color. I expect the school would welcome more Jews of color as rabbinic students. But it’s undeniable that its admissions policy has a greater adverse impact on Jews of color because they are more highly intermarried.

HUC officials clearly understand that this policy has the effect of dissuading a serious number of potential candidates. Rabbi Adam Allenberg, who directs HUC’s admissions, was recently [quoted by The Forward](#) as

saying that the intermarriage rates found in the Pew Report mean “that 40 to 60% of our eligible pool of students isn’t eligible.”

It’s a plain fact that when it comes to Jews of color, that percentage is even higher.

So why is HUC sticking by the policy? Allenberg’s explanation is that the consensus is that the American Jewish community still thinks of clergy differently and “expects rabbis to be exemplars of a Jewish home.”

But at least 72% of new Jewish homes are formed by interfaith couples. In my advocacy for interfaith couples including Jewish partners, I have long argued that intermarried rabbis would be [ideal role models](#) for extensive engagement in Jewish life by other interfaith couples. Certain other rabbinic ordination programs have agreed. Rabbi Ed Stafman, an intermarried rabbi ordained through ALEPH has written that, when he [applied](#) to the program, “while intermarriage was a factor, they look at the whole person, his/her circumstances, whether they would serve the Jewish community well as a rabbi.” The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College began ordaining rabbinic students in interfaith relationships in 2015.

HUC could and should adopt a non-prohibitory approach similar to that of ALEPH. It is time for the Reform movement to stop treating interfaith relationships as effectively second class. It should eliminate all policies and statements to that effect, including one CCAR resolution stating “we do not condone mixed marriage,” and [another](#) that disapproves of rabbis officiating interfaith marriages because intermarriage “should be discouraged.”

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Edmund Case, the retired founder of InterfaithFamily (now 18Doors), is president of the [Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism](#) and author of “[Radical Inclusion: Engaging Interfaith Families for a Thriving Jewish Future.](#)”

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

Opinion

Confessions of a vaccine tourist: Is crossing state lines to get a shot against Jewish ethics?

By Barry Leff

I recently crossed state lines to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Does that make me a bad person?

I'm a 65-year-old rabbi who splits his time living in New Mexico and Jerusalem. But I went twice to Texas over the last month to get the Pfizer shots. Because of my age, I'm eligible to get the vaccine near my home in Las Cruces, N.M., but so far have not gotten a call for an appointment. Since late December, I've been getting emails from my Israeli HMO encouraging me to make a reservation, but I felt like an airplane trip to get a vaccine was too risky right now. At the same time, I badly wanted to get both shots before my next scheduled trip to Israel, in late March (presuming the airports reopen).

I guess my story could count as an example of the much derided "privileged white person traveling to get vaccinated." In early February, I rented a small plane and flew myself to Midland, Texas, to get my first shot, then made another 600-mile round trip last week in my motor home for the second, visiting a couple national parks along the way.

Spoiled? Yes. Unethical? Let's discuss.

I'm a Conservative rabbi with a special interest in business ethics. The Talmud tells us that R. Meir could come up with 49 arguments from the Torah that a reptile was pure, and 49 arguments from the Torah that a reptile was impure. We already know what I decided – but am I, like R. Meir, capable of arguing either way, and simply favored the arguments that suited what I wanted most to do? Those who deride "vaccine tourism" say it is unethical for people with money to use it to get inoculated before those with less means.

Canada is very adamant about this approach to healthcare. Canada has a national healthcare system in which everyone is treated the same. Citizens can purchase private insurance to cover perks such as a private hospital room, but you can't pay to get treated faster or better. So many [Canadians were outraged](#) by

reports that wealthy Canadian "snowbirds" flew to Florida to get vaccinated. The CEO of a big Canadian pension fund resigned after [news reports](#) that he flew to Dubai to get vaccinated.

Universal health care is an important Jewish value. A physician is obligated under *halacha*, Jewish law, to treat a person who needs healing even if the person cannot afford to pay.

But *halacha* differentiates between people who are seriously ill and others. The physician is not obligated to treat someone who is not in urgent need of care. If someone who is not in need of urgent care pays the doctor, she can choose to treat that person – indicating that it's certainly permissible to spend your money to get better healthcare than you otherwise would get.

Israel, like Canada, has universal health care, but you can also pay extra to get a "private appointment" if you want to be seen sooner or by a particular specialist.

The Globe and Mail [reported](#) that a couple from Vancouver recently chartered a private plane to fly to the Yukon Territory, where they posed as motel workers (deemed essential there) in order to get vaccinated. What they did was clearly illegal and unethical. They were not yet eligible for the vaccine, so they were "line jumping." And of course, they lied.

We have a principle, *pikuah nefesh docheh et hakol* – saving lives overrules all other commandments – with one of the exceptions being murder. You can't kill someone to save yourself because, as the Talmud puts it, "Is your blood redder than his? Perhaps his blood is redder than yours!"

It was not "murder," per se, for those Canadians to go to the Yukon, but if they are not in a vulnerable group and they are taking a vaccine from someone who is, it's definitely not justifiable. In fact, it's theft because they are taking something they are not entitled to.

In my case, I didn't "jump the line." As I said, I am eligible for the vaccine both in New Mexico, where I live when I'm in the United States, and in Texas, where I got my shots.

Some people argue it's not appropriate to cross state lines to get inoculated because vaccines are being distributed based on how many people live in each state. Some also argue that it's not right for well-off people to get vaccinated in poorer neighborhoods while public-health authorities are working to ensure that vulnerable populations – including the poor – get vaccines.

I admit this is a bit self-serving, but in my case, I think I actually provided a useful bit of "vaccine arbitrage."

The argument that vaccines are distributed according to state population doesn't take into account the fact that in some locations there are more people who don't *want* to get vaccinated than in other locations.

Midland, Texas – where I got my vaccinations – has a per capita income of \$119,691 a year. It's a wealthy town in the heart of oil country, and it's also big-time Trump territory. According to [Civiqs polling](#), vaccine hesitancy is highest [56%] among white Republicans – [Midland County](#) is 75% Republican, and 88% white.

I live in Las Cruces, which has a per capita income of \$22,000 and generally votes Democratic. So I took two doses of vaccine from a wealthy community with a lot of people not interested in getting vaccinated rather than from a poor community where more people are eager to get vaccinated. Sounds like fostering health care efficiency!

If you're uncomfortable with the idea of crossing state lines to get inoculated, don't blame the "vaccine tourists" such as myself, blame America's patchwork vaccination system.

The vaccines are paid for with federal tax dollars. Ideally, we'd have one single system nationwide, with everyone subject to the same criteria and timelines. Instead, we have at least 50 different approaches.

In New Mexico, there is a statewide website where you sign up to get vaccinated, and they call you when

there's an appointment available (they haven't called me yet). In Texas, the state posts a map of where they have shipped vaccines, and you have to contact individual vaccine locations to sign up.

Amarillo, a city of 200,000 in the northern part of Texas, has become a popular destination for vaccine tourists because they don't even require appointments: if you're eligible for the vaccine, regardless of where you live, you just show up, and they'll vaccinate you. [NPR reported](#) on a guy who flew in for the day from Los Angeles to get a shot.

Many states are only vaccinating residents; others, including [New York and New Jersey](#), are also welcoming people who work in that state but live elsewhere. Others, like North Carolina, don't care where you come from.

"Federal law prohibits restricting access to the vaccine based on jurisdiction," a health official there [told](#) WIS-TV in Columbia, South Carolina. "Vaccines are a federal resource and as we know, this virus does not recognize county or state lines. All North Carolinians will benefit from as many eligible people as possible receiving the vaccine as quickly as they are able."

A basic *halachic* principle is *dina d'malkhuta dina* – the law of the land is the law. Clearly it is against Jewish law, then, to break any U.S. (or other civil) law to get vaccinated. If you're comfortable and don't have any extenuating circumstances, such as a health condition or need to travel, you might as well wait until the vaccine is available where you are.

But if you have a strong need to get vaccinated and have a legal way to do so, it's not unethical to spend your own time and money to get vaccinated sooner rather than later, even if that means crossing county, state, or even national borders.

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Culture

Eulogy | The improbable friendships of Ruth Dayan

By Anthony David

Three days before Ruth Dayan died at her home in Tel Aviv last month, I rang her up from a park near my apartment in Tangier. Her assistant, Ethel, answered the phone and told me Ruth, just shy of 104, was too weak to talk; she put me on speaker. With Moroccan kids kicking soccer balls around me, I told Ruth some of my memories of our time together.

“Ruth,” I asked, “do you remember how the first time you rang me up?”

Ethel told me Ruth was nodding and smiling.

I had met Ruth in 2009, when I was living in East Jerusalem. Ruth had gotten my telephone number from her longtime friend – and my agent – Dorothy Harman. “Shalom, I’m Ruth Dayan and I need to see you,” she declared without prelude.

It seems she had read “Once Upon a Country,” the 2007 book I had written with Sari Nusseibeh, the Palestinian philosopher and human rights activist, and was convinced I was the right person to help her share a “secret story” she had been lugging around for decades. She invited me to her apartment so she could tell me more.

I had just finished teaching my morning seminar at Al Quds University in the West Bank. What could the widow of General Moshe Dayan – considered by some a military genius and by others, like my students, the eye-patched pirate who stole their country – possibly want with me?

Did she finally want to lash out at Dayan, a serial philanderer who died in 1981, for having betrayed her a hundred times? Or maybe it was some juicy gossip about her sister, Reuma Weizman, who had been married to Israel’s seventh president? I’d always thought of Ruth Dayan as the Israeli Rose Kennedy because of her famous children and grandchildren, so perhaps she had something to reveal about one of the celebrity singers or actors in the family.

Whatever it was, I was eager to find out.



Ruth with former Israeli President Shimon Peres

The next morning, I made my way down from the Mount of Olives to meet Harman, who drove us to Tel Aviv. When we arrived at Ruth’s building, she buzzed us in and told us to come to the third floor, where I found her – then age 92 – standing in the doorway in a flowing blue dress she could have worn to a ballroom dance on the Titanic – but barefoot.

“Hi, I’m Ruth,” she said, then she shook my hand and ushered me into her living room

I was dazzled by the paintings, books, archeological artifacts, rugs, and – most of all – the photographs lining the walls. One was of two lovers reading poetry in a field.

“Oh, that’s Moshe and me,” Ruth said, looking over my shoulder. “And this one,” she added, pointing to a picture of three children, “is of our kids when we lived in Nahalal,” the moshav in northern Israel where the couple met. “Moshe and I were so happy in those days. It was just after the war in Europe. Work was hard and the kids drove us mad, but we were happy.”

I paid most attention to her youngest son, Assi, an actor I thought of as Israel’s Marlo Brando. I was a fan of his sitcom, “Be-Tipul,” the inspiration for the HBO hit “In Treatment.”

After a few more minutes chatting about family

photos, I asked about the “secret story.”

“Oh, yes, the secret,” she said. “Do you know Raymonda Tawil?”

I nodded. In the 1970s, Tawil was a prominent Palestinian journalist who built her career crusading against General Dayan and the Israeli occupation. The Israeli army had chased her out of the West Bank, but she returned after her daughter, Suha, married Yasser Arafat in 1990.

“Well, Raymonda and I have been best friends for 40 years,” Ruth told me, “and I want you to write a book about us. Maybe we can show people how to get over all this ridiculous hatred between Jews and Arabs.”

From that first encounter, I was sold, and for the next five years we must have driven a thousand miles together around Israel and the West Bank as I studied Ruth, Raymonda and their unusual relationship; we also flew together to the United States and to Malta, to meet Raymonda.

My book, “[An Improbable Friendship](#),” was published in 2015, and I left Jerusalem that same year. But Ruth and I continued to Skype, email and talk by phone, and whenever I returned to Israel to do research for my next project, we’d catch up in person.

And so, on Feb. 2, I spent half an hour sitting in a park in Tangier and recounting memories of our time together over a speaker phone held by her aide, Ethel. Once, I had asked who most understood her.

“My friends, of course,” she had said

“Who’s your closest friend?”

“All dead,” she smacked her lips. “Every last one of them.” She was 92 at the time, sitting in her armchair as still as if in a Norman Rockwell painting, only her hands moving – knitting pink socks for a Palestinian baby.

Not Raymonda, I reminded her. And who else, I asked, among the living: who’s your best friend?

“Right now, at this very moment? Maybe you!” Ruth exclaimed. “When I don’t want to kill you.”

I must have looked at her with big, blank eyes of

surprise. “I used to kill chickens and turkeys,” she said. “Why shouldn’t I kill you, too?”

‘Would you like to tag along?’

The minute I hung up the phone, more memories flooded back. Soon after Ruth and I met, I quickly realized she was much more than the widow of a military man who redrew the map of the Middle East. If she mentioned the general at all, it was because they had once worked the land together and started a family. Far more frequently, she talked about helping people.

In my mind, I saw Ruth in her armchair next to a table covered with ballpoint pens, scrap paper, and her tattered address book, a phone in each ear. One conversation would be with someone from the West Bank who needed a permit to cross into Israel for a medical emergency, and the other would be with former Israeli President Shimon Peres or some other heavyweight who could make it happen.

Once, while rifling through boxes of her papers, I dug up a 1953 photo of Ruth with Eleanor Roosevelt. When I asked her about it, she explained matter-of-factly how Golda Meir, then Israel’s minister of labor, had called her for advice on how to integrate recent immigrants from the deserts of Yemen. In the photo, Ruth was introducing Mrs. Roosevelt to one of those immigrants.

The next year, Ruth founded Maskit, a fashion house where she was able to both create jobs for poor immigrants and preserve Jewish handicrafts and cultural traditions; she ran it for 30 years.

From the same box, Ruth handed me a letter she received in 1960 from a woman she met at a jungle hospital in the Congo started by the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Albert Schweitzer. To get there, Ruth had taken a canoe up the Ogowe River like Katherine Hepburn’s character in the “African Queen.”

I read the letter aloud: “After seeing you off, even as I was standing on the dock with the black umbrella and the drizzle in the air, very warm tears came to my eyes and I had to blink them away all the time,” the woman had written.

"I don't think I can explain it and maybe it can't be explained, but you stirred a very human feeling inside of me when I first looked at you. I felt you were kind, had much gentleness of spirit, purity of heart, modesty of soul and that you were suffering within yourself some."

I handed the letter back to Ruth and told her I understood exactly how the writer felt. Ruth blushed, then swatted my hand. "Oh, so I don't forget, Assi

sends his greetings," she said of her most famous son, who had just been sentenced to house arrest for hitting his girlfriend. "He finally finished one of your books. With oodles of time on his hands in the desert, what else is he going to do?"

Ruth had accompanied Assi to court, and I had watched the scene outside on the evening news. The paparazzi swarmed like buzzards around Ruth, her head held high, holding her son's hand as they left the building. Now she told me she was going to visit Assi the next day. "Would you like to tag along?" she asked.

'We believed in free love and no property'

The next morning, as we made our way to where Assi was staying a few miles from the Dead Sea, Ruth filled me in on his history of drug abuse and previous run-ins with the law. He had bridled against rules and boundaries his whole life; as a 3-year-old in 1948, Ruth told me, Assi had wandered off into the mined no-man's-land separating west and east Jerusalem. She said he had picked up a cocaine habit from his friend Jack Nicholson, who he met working on the 1969 film ["A Walk With Love and Death."](#)

Talking about Assi's problems got Ruth tearing up, so I handed her a tissue from the box on the backseat. She blew her nose, cleared her throat, and steadied her voice. "Sorry for being so silly," she said.

We stopped at a Bedouin village near Beer Sheva called Segev Shalom. The director of an art cooperative introduced us to a local ceramist, a woman born in a tent who had managed to study at an art school but could not afford to buy clay or tools when she graduated. Ruth had helped raise money to buy her a kiln.

After another hour of driving, we pulled up to the "101 Rest Stop and Oasis," where Assi spent his court-ordered confinement. The owner was Shimon Rimon, a legendary former Special Missions commando, and he was waiting for us in the torrid heat next to a broken neon sign with a bulge of chewing tobacco in his cheek.

Ruth disappeared into Assi's bungalow, and Rimon led me to mine. I lay down on the lumpy bed and picked up a Hebrew translation of Philip Roth's "Operation Shylock" from atop an empty beer keg acting as a nightstand.

I had just begun reading when I heard a knock on the metal door. It was Ruth. "Assi's tired from all his work and wants to sleep," she said. "Dinner's in an hour. Can I come in?"

She sat on the edge of the bed and stared at me with her wide blue eyes like a mashup of Maude in "Harold and Maude" and Mrs. Which from "A Wrinkle in Time." Grinning mischievously, she said: "If I were 72 and not 92, I'd fall in love with you."

She was born the same year as my grandmother, 1917. "And I'd be a lucky man, too," I replied.

As the sun set an hour later, we sat around the picnic table eating chicken. Ruth regaled me with memories of being a teenager at the agricultural school on Nahalal, sloshing through mud up to her ankles, planting crops, and braving malaria.

"We believed in free love and no property," she recalled of those days before Israel became a state. "We were so idealistic, and now everyone in this country is racing around after money, just like you Americans.

"Maybe I was stupid," Ruth continued. "Why was? I *am* stupid! My mother thought I read too much Tolstoy. But it wasn't just me. All my girlfriends felt the same way! One could have been a world-class musician, another a great mathematician. But they all wanted to become kibbutzniks."

She squinted as if thinking hard. "Maybe that's been the problem with Assi all along. He has never been

willing to live in a hut and milk cows at 4 in the morning.”

The next day, I finally met Assi when he emerged from his bungalow around 9 to join us for breakfast. He wore Winnie the Pooh swimming trunks and his eyes were bright and glassy. He nodded politely in my direction, then sat down at the picnic table next to Ruth, who lit a cigarette, took a puff, and handed it to her son.

For the rest of the morning, the three of us discussed Assi’s conflicted relationship with his father. In 1963, Moshe’s nephew Jonathan Geffen – who became one of Israel’s leading poets – moved in with the Dayans, and Jonathan and Assi became inseparable. They spent afternoons reading the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud and cranked up Bob Dylan’s “The Times They Are A-Changin’” on the record player.

Moshe began to think that Assi was a good-for-nothing peacenik.

“And how did your mother respond to your conflict with Moshe?” I asked.

Assi glanced over at Ruth and, his eyes twinkling, declared her the “Jewish Mother Theresa.”

‘I married a farmer not a general’

I knew the cemetery where Ruth was going to be buried because she had taken me there in the spring of 2016 to see Moshe’s grave.

In one of our many conversations about the general, I had asked Ruth about a story Raymonda had told me. It happened in the West Bank city of Nablus in 1969: Dayan’s soldiers, in a battle with guerrillas from the Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization, had shot several children.

The first time Ruth and Raymonda met was at the hospital while visiting the victims – the Palestinian woman had torn into the Israeli because of what her husband had done.

“Yes, she was mad as hell,” Ruth recalled. “Did she say how I responded?”

I shook my head.

“I told her that I married a farmer, not a general.”

And that was why Ruth wanted me to experience the cemetery.

The drive there took us through the Galilee, the greenest part of Israel, and at one point Ruth gestured toward the King George Forest, which she, Moshe and their fellow socialist pioneers had planted in the 1930s. “Oh, you see those ruins up there,” she said, pointing to what looked like a Crusader fort. “Moshe and I used to make love up there.”

Half an hour later, we drove past Nahalal to the cemetery on Shimron Hill, a legendary place mentioned in the Book of Joshua: “Now these are the kings of the land, whom the children of Israel smote, and possessed their land.”

Ruth pointed out the graves of friends killed in Israel’s various wars. I noticed a fresh mound of earth, where the fighter pilot Asaf Ramon had just been buried next to his father, Ilan Ramon, Israel’s first astronaut.

Ruth sat down on Moshe’s gravestone, pulled out a banana from her bag, offered me half, and flung the peel down the hill toward the spot she had already picked out for her own future resting place. “Like I told you a hundred times, Moshe was a kibbutznik at heart and never set out to oppress anyone,” she said. “He fought because he wanted us to remain free in our own country.”

I said I understood.

“Do you think Moshe knows I am here now?” she then asked, tears welling up in eyes. “Do you think he can see us?”

Like so many socialists of her generation, Ruth had always assured me she didn’t believe in life after death, and yet here she was asking me if I thought the soul of Moshe was staring down at us from the clouds.

“I wouldn’t put it past him,” I said.

“I just want him to know that his boy Assi will be OK.”

We sat in silence for several minutes, until we were interrupted by a group of women whispering a few

meters away. “It’s her!” one said softly, nodding in our direction. “I’m sure it is!” Seeing Ruth sitting on top of Moshe’s grave was more than they could have hoped for.

“We better go,” Ruth finally said, and gave me her hand, as if leading me off of a dance floor.

On the drive back up the coast, inspired by the sight of a woman born during the dying days of the Ottoman Empire sitting next to the grave of an astronaut, I asked Ruth about the meaning of life. “Living for something higher,” she said, “for your friends, your people – for humanity. This sounds naïve to some people, I know, but I hope you know what I mean.”

I nodded and started to respond, but she barreled on: “I can die any moment, and I’ll be gone forever,” she said. “After a few sniffles and speeches, my kids will move on, and you will, too.”

I told her to stop being macabre.

“I’m not! There are a lot more important things than my little life.”

“Like what?”

Gripping the steering wheel, her face turned somber. “My country,” she said. “Someone like you can’t understand – you don’t know what it’s like to build a country and sacrifice everything for it. But loving my country doesn’t mean I have to step on someone else. Moshe felt the same way deep down, and so did the friends I grew up with.”

‘Against Your Unbelievable Light’

I watched Ruth’s funeral via livestream. In the eulogies, mourners recounted all the reasons she was so loved – mainly, for her indomitable humanity. The most moving scene for me came after the speeches were over and family and friends walked past the marble headstones of Assi, who died in 2015, and his older brother Udi, who died in 2017, to set flowers on her grave.

I saw Dorothy, my old agent, give Ethel, the aide who had been by Ruth’s side when she died, a hug while Ruth’s favorite song, “Veulai,” played in the background.

Watching the procession, another of her favorite songs came to mind. It was “Livkot Lache,” [To Cry for You] which Jonathan Geffen’s son Aviv, one of Israel’s finest pop stars, wrote after a friend of his died in a car accident. Aviv sang it at the peace rally in 1995 minutes before Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, and he sang it again a week later at the memorial service.

*I am going to cry for you, be strong up there
My longings are like doors opened at night.
Forever, I will always remember you
And at the end we will meet, you know,
I have other friends but they all fade away
Against your unbelievable light.*

–

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Culture

Yes, Dr. Seuss wrote racist books. He still has things to teach us.

By PJ Grisar

My first introduction to fascism was the tin-pot dictator of Sala-ma-Sond.

Yertle the Turtle, the king of a “nice little pond,” clean and quaint with temperate water and plenty of food, was an expansionist. From his lowly rock he determined that, while lord of all he could see, he couldn’t see enough. Like a shell-wearing Nimrod, he built a tower on the backs of his people. Yertle, Dr. Seuss made no secret of the fact, was Hitler.

But he was a sanitized Hitler, one fit for childhood consumption – an allegory to be internalized. Just as the “Butter Battle Book,” with its fanciful arms race, skirted the existential dread of the nuclear age, Yertle never exhibited any thread of ethno-nationalism, offering a simpler lesson about corrupting power and taking advantage of those beneath you. Theodor Seuss Geisel, who would turn 117 on March 2, was not always so subtle or, it turns out, morally lucid.

Geisel, as many young readers learn later in life, was a political cartoonist before he hit it big as a children’s author, operating in the same whimsical style in which he rendered the Cat in the Hat and Horton the elephant. Some of the Dartmouth grad’s cartoons were trenchant and vociferously anti-Nazi when that was not the default position for his Ivy-educated milieu.

A telling example, teasing the Hitler analogue in his later work on “Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories,” is a one-panel of a matron reading to children from a book titled “Adolf the Wolf.”

“... and the wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones,” the woman tells the saucer-eyed children. “But those were Foreign Children and it really didn’t matter.”

The woman’s shirt reads “America First,” for the isolationist organization started by Yale Law School

... and the Wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones ...
But those were Foreign Children and it really didn't matter.”



An October 1, 1941 cartoon for PM Magazine. It was one of a number of anti-isolationist pieces Seuss made in the early '40s. Two months after this was published, America First disbanded after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Image by Wikimedia Commons

students in 1940. The cartoon, for PM Magazine, was one in a [series](#) condemning the America First Committee’s appeasement of – or worse, affinities for – fascists, and notably the only one to invoke children and imply their indoctrination.

But not all of Seuss’ cartoons from that period have landed on the right side of history, nor have all his children’s stories. Racist imagery and attitudes have been rightly challenged in his bibliography in recent years. Last week it was falsely reported that schools in Loudoun County, Virginia, were banning Seuss from “Read Across America,” a literacy day timed to the author’s birthday. The reality, like Seuss’ legacy, is more nuanced.

“Dr. Seuss books have not been banned in Loudoun County Public Schools,” a spokesperson wrote in a [statement](#) to the Washington Post, but went on to say that “strong racial undertones” have been revealed by “research in recent years,” prompting the district to provide guidance to their schools to not to make the day an explicit celebration of Seuss. It’s now an opportunity – a welcome one – to elevate other voices in children’s lit.

Fox News, coming off the anti-Cancel Culture CPAC theme, [rang alarms that](#) a woke mob was out to get Seuss. “Calling Seuss racist sounds like an Onion headline,” a columnist concluded.

Yet there is solid scholarship on the issue. A February [2019 study](#) found that at as a student at Dartmouth, Seuss drew antisemitic stereotypes of Jews and portrayed Black boxers as gorillas. He didn't outgrow prejudice after graduating and entering the world of grade school letters. Philip Nel, author of “Was the Cat in the Hat Black?,” has noted how Seuss' most iconic creation was informed both by minstrelsy and a Black elevator operator at Houghton Mifflin, his onetime publisher. Elsewhere in Seuss' oeuvre, the racism is overt, playing into common, xenophobic tropes of the time.

“Black and African characters in his books are often depicted as monkeys and apes, while Asian characters are said to be ‘helpers that all wear their eyes at a slant’ from ‘countries no one can spell,’” teacher and parent Charis Granger-Mbugua wrote in a Feb. 28 [column](#) for the Atlanta Journal Constitution, citing the beautifully illustrated, if nonessential and certainly offensive, “If I Ran the Zoo.”

“Seuss also wrote racist propaganda against Japanese during World War II,” Granger-Mbugua noted.

He certainly did, and he kept the trend going with his editorial cartoons. You can imagine what his renderings of General Hideki Tojo and Japanese Americans in internment camps looked like. Or look them up. I won't be linking them here.

This all adds up to a troubling legacy in need of disclaimers – if not the relegation of certain books in Seuss' canon to the “do not read” pile. Remarkably, we may not have to, at least for some of them.

In an extraordinary step Tuesday, after this article was first published, Dr. Seuss Enterprises, the stewards of the author's books and characters, announced that six titles, including “If I Ran the Zoo,” “McElligot's Pool” and “And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street” would no longer be published.

“Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr. Seuss

Enterprise's catalog represents and supports all communities and families,” a statement from the company said.

But does taking these books out of print undo their harm? No. The works continue to pose a problem for Seuss' standing as a sage of nursery school principles, but they don't negate him at his best.

While there's little to commend in the violent and twisted morality of Roald Dahl, the most recent beloved children's author to [face a reckoning](#), Seuss still offers wonderful values when carefully curated. (I should note, there's no small privilege in being able to overlook the offending titles, but it's a winnowing the culture regularly perform when it comes to old – and not so old – art.)

“A person's a person, no matter how small” is a mantra we must all accept, even if Seuss failed it in his own ways. The parable of the Star-Bellied Sneetches, inspired by Seuss' (apparently late) [disdain for antisemitism](#), still has much to say about prejudice. “The Lorax” is a lovely if heavy-handed environmental homily. And elsewhere Seuss warns children, in animal terms divorced from race, against being vain or envious (“Gertrude McFuzz”) or prideful (“The Big Brag”). Even though Seuss never had children himself – he didn't much like them, or people in general, for that matter – he nonetheless instilled in several generations a moral compass that, for the most part, points true north.

While writing this, I am thinking of my 14 month-old niece, whose world is brimming with diverse picture books about dim sum, Malala Yousafzai and the Hindu festival of Holi. She's being raised to appreciate and understand other cultures, to see them not as foreign, but a part of the human tapestry. Clearly, Dr. Seuss had work to do in this department.

But my niece will probably inherit our own tattered edition of “Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories,” its spine split, its pea-green luster still intact. When she's old enough to understand the main story's connection to Hitler's *Anschluss* – or perhaps the fate of another, tower-inclined strong man – perhaps we can teach her about Seuss' racist offerings and tell her why they were pulled from publication.

With any luck, having read Seuss' other stories, she'll already know.

–

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

Culture

Meet the Orthodox therapist who says watching 'Bridgerton' could improve your sex life

By Irene Katz Connelly

If you visit Dr. Bat Sheva Marcus's [Instagram](#), which you absolutely should, you will find many informative videos.

Videos about the challenges of having sex while breastfeeding. Videos explaining the various causes of pain during intercourse. Videos about the items you should include in your "sex basket." [Options, among others, include "a vibrator" and "a bigger vibrator."]

Some videos show Marcus, a 59-year-old Modern Orthodox sex therapist, perched on an examining table in her office. Some unfold in the backyard of her home in the Bronx's Riverdale neighborhood. All share a signature conversational style that I recognized from our Zoom interview – briskly clinical yet also quippy, almost conspiratorial. There are few people in this world who can make you feel completely at ease while explaining that fantasizing about your contractor is a productive endeavor. Marcus is one of them.

Which is good, because that's her job.

Even as the American imagination grows more and more risqué, we like to pretend that good sex, in Marcus's words, "just happens." We're squeamish when it comes to the difficulties women face in achieving a fulfilling sex life, no matter how ubiquitous those difficulties are. [Almost 75% of women may [experience sexual pain](#) at some point in their lives.] The founder of [Maze Women's Sexual Health](#), Marcus helps women resolve all manner of physiological and psychological problems with their sex lives, and she wants us all to be a lot more honest and a lot less embarrassed about what's going on in our bedrooms.

Marcus has gained acclaim for [treating Haredi women](#) and [pushing for better sex education](#) in Orthodox Jewish communities, including her own. But she wants her method to be accessible to a broad swath of women – religious or secular, young or old.



That's why she makes the Instagram videos, and that's why she wrote "Sex Points," a self-help book forthcoming in March that aims to demystify the most common problems women experience in their sexual relationships, from pelvic floor pain to waning libido.

I reached Marcus at her home just ahead of Purim, as she was preparing for a scaled-back version of her family's normal festivities. [She [dressed up as her own book](#).] We talked about quarantine routines, the misconceptions that prompted her forthcoming book, and the many benefits of hula-hooping. The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What's the most unexpected part about being a sex therapist during the pandemic?

I think the fact that people were pretty quick to come back and say, "I need to deal with my sex life." I thought people would be most concerned about "How am I going to get my work done?" Or, "How am I not going to kill my children?" Although that may tie into the sex part. There's something about a national emergency that puts people's stress levels very high and magnifies whatever tendencies you have to cope with stress.

Tell me what your daily routine is like.

I am exercising way more. Walking like a maniac. If I don't get out and get sun, even if it's 12 degrees out, I get really, really depressed. I also decided to develop some new skills, so I took up hula-hooping. At first, I couldn't even keep it up for two seconds. It was really discouraging – I kept putting it aside and picking it back up. There were so many days I thought I would never get better. But now I can hula hoop pretty confidently. Maybe you're gonna laugh at this, but I feel like one of the things I need to stay sensitive to, with my patients, is that sense of "It's so frustrating, and I don't know if it'll get better." Learning new things helps me with that.

I'm also spending a lot more time on social media. My agent said I had to get on Instagram, because of my book. I said, "I'm too old," but I got on and I love it. I call myself Instagrandma. It's a different way of thinking, but it's so creative.

Are you a food poster?

No, I'm a sex poster. I post about sex and movement. That might be hula hooping, or pulling out my tap shoes. I'm all about us being able to access the pleasure of being alive. And I do a ton about sex education, trying to do it in a lighthearted way – like talking about "Bridgerton."

Really, "Bridgerton?"

I cannot tell you how many people DM-ed me that. "Bridgerton" turned them on. It's eye candy in every sense of the word: The clothes were beautiful, the flowers were magnificent, the guys were hot. You could tell it was women producing it. The scene that made me jump off the sofa was the first time the two leads had sex and he said, "Use your hands." I was so happy to see that, because I spend half my life normalizing to women that they're not going to have an orgasm through intercourse and that using their hands is acceptable. I can say it forever, but until they

say it on TV....

I'm sort of surprised you liked "Bridgerton" so much, because your work is all about de-mystifying sex and pleasure, whereas on the show great sex seems to happen magically – with no education whatsoever.

I love it as erotica. Women wrote to me and said, "I got so turned on. I got my husband to watch it with me." And I'm like, "Yay! Take that back to your relationship." I would hate it if "Bridgerton" was taken seriously in any way. We have gotten really bad at separating fantasy from reality, and that's really tying our hands as sexual beings. Our fantasies are great, and we should revel in them. But that show is just a fantasy.

Why did you decide to write "Sex Points?"

It came out of the fact that we were using an approach no one else seemed to be using. Women need to hear that their sex life isn't a binary problem to be solved. Women have to realize that their sex lives are an amalgam of many problems, that their sex life is constantly shifting. You need to pay attention to your sex life if you want it to keep you in good stead. All of those were messages people were not getting. I tried really really hard to take pretty complicated information and boil it down to something girlfriend-y.

In the first chapter, you write that you reject an approach focused on emotional intimacy and communication. Why is that approach so common, and why don't you think it makes sense?

The medical community is very used to being able to see or identify a concrete problem. If they don't see it, rather than saying "I don't know," they immediately assume it must be psychological.

That's a problem for women. Not only do you have pain, but you feel like it's all in your head. If you talk to women with pelvic pain, it's some crazy number of doctors they have to see, doctors who tell them to relax and have a glass of wine, until someone diagnoses them. You could spend a year talking about your vagina not being ready to have sex and there could really, truly, be a problem with the muscles.

You're known in part for your work with Haredi women. Do you expect they will read this book?

It was not written for Jewish Orthodox women in particular. But the book is definitely geared towards women in monogamous long-term relationships. It

addresses problems faced by a lot of women who are in loving relationships but starting to feel like their desire is in the toilet. I do think that might make it more palatable for traditional women – as a community, we really value long-term monogamous relationships.

You've been pushing for better sex education in the Orthodox world for years. How has the landscape changed in the course of your career?

It has so grown. When I started, there was almost nobody out there. Now, I would say once a week someone's in touch with me saying they want to become a sex therapist in the Orthodox community.

What changes would you like to see in the future?

For me, the big message is to stop thinking that sexual pain is all psychological. Accept the fact that there are medical components and psychological components. That would be the next thing people need to think about.

That message seems just as relevant in the secular world as the Orthodox one.

People are always saying to me that in the Orthodox community there's so much shame and guilt. That's true, but you also see so much shame and guilt in the secular community. At least for religious women, you have something to hang it on – "I was raised this way." We're a very Victorian society, and as much as we're drenched with stylized images of sex, no one's actually talking, having real conversations about sex.

What's the most important thing you want people to learn from "Sex Points?"

We think of sex lives as happening between the age of 23 and 30. The common word on the street is that sex is for young people. That just makes me super sad. What I want people to hear is that if you take care of your sex life, it can last you well into your 80s.

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Culture

Is Disney's 'WandaVision' a story of intergenerational Holocaust trauma?

By Malkah Bressler

Set against a candied nostalgic concoction of the great American sitcom, "WandaVision" on Disney+ is a story of trauma, upheaval and loss. This should come as no surprise considering the origins of the show's protagonist, the Marvel superhero Wanda Maximoff, also known as the Scarlet Witch. Wanda, along with her twin brother Pietro, survived the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and were orphaned at a young age. And in a recent battle to save the world, Pietro and Wanda's lover, Vision, died before her eyes. "WandaVision" picks up a few weeks after the death of Vision and examines Wanda's grief within the world of the ever-peppy sitcom.

The aftermath of Wanda's loss makes for a compelling bit of storytelling. But "WandaVision" is singular because of the particular type of traumas she has experienced. Although Marvel has changed Wanda's backstory and parentage more than once, Wanda's family – either partially Jewish or fully Romani – survived the Holocaust. [\[She has been the daughter of Auschwitz survivors, Max – X-Men's Magneto – and Magda Eisenhardt, and in the current incarnation, she is the daughter of Romani parents.\]](#) When parents and grandparents experience deeply traumatic and life-altering events like genocides, famines and wars, their children and grandchildren often experience psychological distress and changes to their genetic makeup that alter how their genes function. Scientists call it intergenerational trauma.

Researchers agree that people with this trauma do not all experience it in the same way. While some descendants are driven to make the world a better place, others act immorally. But, most scientists agree that people who live with intergenerational trauma experience high levels of stress, anxiety and PTSD. In [one study](#), scientists asked, "Are children of Holocaust survivors more likely to respond differently to a car accident than those who are not the children



Courtesy of Marvel Studios

of survivors?" Researchers found that children of Holocaust survivors are three times more likely to respond to trauma by getting PTSD just like their parents.

Wanda Maximoff is not just reacting to the trauma of having lost two people she loved. Instead, Wanda's trauma is layered. All of her reactions are colored by what lies underneath: the intergenerational trauma she inherited from her mother and father.

Creating a world where the outsider feels welcome

After losing a brother and a partner, Wanda fully enters into the realm of PTSD. In the opening scene of the first episode of "WandaVision," Wanda and Vision are oblivious; so deeply scarred, they have forgotten the traumatic events that brought them to Westview, New Jersey. They are even unaware that they have superpowers until the end of the first episode. Instead, the couple stands cluelessly inside a prototypical suburban home, an homage to the 1960s hit, "The Dick Van Dyke Show." Subsequent episodes mimic different

iterations of the great American sitcom from “Bewitched” to “The Brady Bunch,” “Family Ties” and “Modern Family.”

While viewers are in the dark during the first few episodes, the fourth leaves little in question. The world of sitcom bliss is engineered by Wanda who, in an escape from her overwhelming grief, has created a bubble around the town of Westview, New Jersey. Within the bubble, Wanda controls the minds and bodies of the town's residents, using her telekinetic powers to bend everyone to her will. Grief is powerful, and Wanda creates her idealized life: a beautiful house in the suburbs, a loving husband, two healthy children, and problems that are solved in less than 30 minutes.

Like many who suffer from intergenerational trauma, Wanda wants to control the world she lives in.

According to some psychiatrists, people who suffer from this trauma strive to create an environment in which nothing surprising or bad occurs. For Wanda (brought up amidst socio-political upheaval) that ideal world is the all-American family depicted in sitcoms. The nuclear family is whole, people do not die, and problems are solved quickly. But Wanda's PTSD can be triggered, causing her playacting to break. When she is reminded of her trauma, the veneer of amnesia slips away, and she becomes uncontrollably angry and violent. In one instance, she forcibly ejects Monica Rambeau, an ally, from the bubble, and when threatened by a government agent, Tyler Hayward, she extends the bubble to encompass the threat, Hayward's armed troops.

In fact, the sitcom format offers multiple foils for Wanda. By casting herself as the star of her own show, Wanda forcibly inserts herself into a world where she fits in – or better put, she *creates* a world where she fits in. The name of the show cannot be lost on viewers. It is “WandaVision” – the name of herself and her partner, but also her vision of perfection.

Wanda creates the world of “WandaVision” as a refuge, a place where she can pass as Wanda Maximoff. Although Wanda and Vision first try to hide their superhuman powers (Vision quite literally changes his appearance to look human), the pair ultimately give up, realizing that no matter what they do, they fit in. Some children and grandchildren of survivors feel unable to “pass” and struggle to feel like they belong.

Wanda and the grandchildren of survivors

“WandaVision” coincides with a pivotal moment in Jewish history. More than half a century after the Holocaust, many survivors are gone, and their grandchildren are taxed with carrying the message: Never again. In fact, studies suggest that it is the grandchildren who experience and exhibit the symptoms of intergenerational trauma because their grandparents have bequeathed upon them their stories of survival and loss. Watching the first Romani (and possibly Jewish) female superhero is also watching her experience a version of what so many children and grandchildren of survivors experience every day.

Recently, the recall of intergenerational trauma enveloped the descendants of Holocaust survivors. In the days following the January 6th insurrection on the Capitol, many grandchildren took to Twitter expressing a desire to seek out a hiding place, withdraw money and ensure that passports were up to date. As the tweets started to collect, a wave of recognition bounced across the Twitter-verse with comments like “I thought I was the only one who did that!” and “Hello from London, same here!” Despite the pain the riot caused, there was a brief moment of recognition and of comfort. Impulses that had once seemed strange and isolating were actually part of a transcontinental pattern of the modern Jewish experience.

“WandaVision” offers a similar touchpoint of connection and identification.

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