TRIBUTE TO ISRAEL

for all its achievements
in the past 71 years
Israel is fortunate to have such a friend and ally as Canada

GALIT BARAM
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

Last month we celebrated Israel’s Independence Day, as well as 70 years of excellent bilateral relations between Canada and Israel. When thinking about foreign relations, the tendency is to see different countries as monolithic entities and such relations as a rigid system of national interests and international understandings. But the truth is that diplomatic relations are conducted not only through agreements, but also through an intricate system of personal connections and ties. This is the heart and soul of diplomacy, what actually brings people and countries closer together.

The relations between Canada and Israel are based on shared values, such as democracy, freedom of religion and equal rights for women, minorities and the LGBTQ community. Both societies are known for their diversity and multicultural influences. This solid foundation nourishes warm relations on the political level, and in economy and trade, and is reflected in close academic co-operation, cultural exchange and tourism. In addition, the vibrant Canadian Jewish community is deeply committed to strong Canada-Israel ties.

As is well known, Israel often finds itself in the centre of international attention. Israeli diplomats work tirelessly, to represent their country, provide information, support a wide range of initiatives and identify opportunities to expand bilateral co-operation. In some countries, this is an uphill battle, while in others, such as Canada, the sky is the limit.

In the film Operation Grandma, a beloved Israeli classic, one of the characters, a no-nonsense kibbutznik, explains his life philosophy: “You go full steam ahead, and slowly increase your speed.” Well, this is exactly what Israelis do. During the last couple of months, Israeli diplomats serving abroad have been extremely busy. Nothing unusual, considering the hectic pace of life in Israel.

President Reuven Rivlin arrived in Canada at the beginning of April on a state visit, and was received with open arms. A few days later, elections were held in Israel, and negotiations on the formation of a coalition government began. The situation on the Gaza border deteriorated and for a few difficult days the south of Israel was exposed to Hamas rocket attacks. Israel, like Jewish communities everywhere, watched with alarm the rise of anti-Semitism around the world, as well as the appalling terror attacks against houses of worship, including synagogues. And then, veering sharply in another direction, the entire country celebrated the Eurovision Song Contest, which was held last month in Tel Aviv.

This year, as every year, on Israel’s Remembrance Day (Yom ha-Zikaron), the Consulate General of Israel in Toronto and Western Canada organized an official ceremony, attended by a thousand people, many Israelis among them. This number was not unusual, because Israelis tend to seek their compatriots’ company on this day, this holiest-of-holy days on our national calendar. Great consideration was given to every detail, to honour the memory of our fallen soldiers and victims of terror.

Canadians participated in this ceremony as well, in an expression of respect and sympathy that we found deeply touching. Generally speaking, we Israelis do not tend to be generous with our praise, and one has to be attuned to the spoken word to catch the meaning. When members of bereaved families who attended the ceremony approached us and said, “You did well,” and “You got it right,” we sighed in relief.

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Independence Day (Yom ha-Atzmaut) followed, always an abrupt transformation from mourning to celebration. It brought with it a whirlwind of events, including flag-raising ceremonies and our annual reception. Many Canadian elected officials attended these events and made statements of support and friendship, reflecting the high level of bilateral relations between our countries, the open channels of communication and the mutual commitment to continue to bring our countries even closer together.

The UJA Federation’s Walk with Israel that flooded Bathurst Street in blue-and-white, amazed the mayors of Bat Yam, Sderot, Eilat and Eilot Region, who were invited by the Jewish Federation. As I was sitting with the mayors on the stage, waiting for the walk to begin, enjoying the sea of Canadian and Israeli flags, we were grateful to the many people who came to show their love and support.

As the community walked with Israel, we Israelis walked with the community; young and old, families with babies and toddlers, grandparents, teenagers, and everything in between, schools, student organizations, volunteers, rabbis and leaders. This event, which celebrates Canada-Israel relations as well as the unbreakable bond between Israel and the Canadian Jewish community, was overwhelming. Israel is fortunate indeed to have such a friend and ally as Canada by her side.

My hometown Ra’anana is known for its annual Yom ha-Atzmaut Folk Dance Parade. When I was a schoolgirl, the legendary choreographer Shalom Amar was our undisputed hot-tempered Lord of the Dance. In the long hours of rehearsal under the scorching sun he used to yell at us: “Yemenite step to the right! I said to the right! Lighter steps! What are you, a herd of elephants?”

On the Walk with Israel, I joined a circle of dancers and kept my Yemenite steps light, while peeping over my shoulder every now and then, in fear of seeing him standing there, brooding, a cigarette in hand. Judging by the high spirits on Bathurst Street that day, I think he would have been pleased.

Galit Baram is the consul general of Israel in Toronto and Western Canada.
The changing face of Israeli children’s literature

JENNIFER TZIVIA MACLEOD
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

The face of children’s literature in Israel is changing. To find out how, I spoke to three Israeli children’s authors to find out how today’s kids’ books are different from what they read growing up. Mirik Snir has published a hundred children’s books since 1982. Miri Leshem-Pelly, who published her first book in 1996, has become one of Israel’s foremost nature writers for children through her Professor Pitzponte (Tiny Nature-Professor) series, and Yannets Levi is best known for his Uncle Leo’s Adventures series, first published in 2007.

All three agree that children’s literature in Israel has always been very international. Growing up in the 1950s, Snir read books translated from Yiddish, including poems by Kadia Moldofsky, translations by Leah Goldberg, as well as new literature written by leading figures in the revival of the language like Avraham Shlonsky, Hayim Nachman Bialik, Nathan Alterman, along with Hebrew translations of foreign books, like one she remembers fondly which shared stories of children all over the world.

Still, a lack of specific children’s literature inspired Snir to use her background as a teacher and a mother of nine to create her own stories. “I never planned to be a writer,” she says. “I wrote what I saw was missing – high-interest easy books that helped kids teach themselves to read. Books with a small amount of text are like a ladder,” she says. “First you read it to the children, then they ‘read’ it, looking at the pictures, then they start to look at the words, trying to figure out the secret of reading.”

When Leshem-Pelly was growing up in the 1970s, there was more choice, both local and international. “I was a very enthusiastic reader,” she says. “One book I really remember is Bilbi [Pippi Longstocking]. When I was five, I dressed up as Bilbi for Purim.”

Local favourites included Nachum Guterman, whose In the Land of Lobengulu King of Zulu was based partly on the author’s adventures in Africa.

Like Snir and Leshem-Pelly, Levi also loved reading. “Books have been part of my life ever since I can remember.” He, too, grew up on Leah Goldberg, but also international favourites like German writer Erich Kästner. “The world of books in Israel is very open to foreign literature,” he says. “We’re a society of immigrants. People came to Israel with all kinds of languages; they brought their favourite books, then had them translated here in Israel.”

For Levi, perhaps the biggest change in Israel today is the explosion of comic books, including many North American imports like Captain Underpants.

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“Even Leah Goldberg used to write comics…but it wasn’t as popular as it is today. Today, comics have become a very essential part of what kids are reading in Israel,” says Levi, who admits that he’s collaborating with an illustrator on a new comic book project.

“It’s a dream of mine – to create something for comics – but I also feel that local readers are very open to it now.”

There are also many more kids’ books today, Levi says, partly since publishing is less expensive and partly due to competition between Israel’s two bookstore chains. “This has made books very, very cheap and more available for most families.” Overall, he sees this as good news. “If you talk to publishers around the world, they’ll say the children’s department is the most active, and the most successful.”

Yet with publishers dreaming of replicating the success of series like Harry Potter, they may be less willing to take risks on original writing. Snir believes there may be too many foreign books in Israeli bookstores. “It’s easier for publishers to translate the ones that have already succeeded somewhere, and I think local literature is less well-developed because of that. They have to take a chance if they want to publish a new Israeli book, and they’re not doing it as much as they once were.”

Leshem-Pelly agrees. “It’s definitely making life even harder for authors in Israel. It’s a small market, and I’ve heard publishers say ‘only 30 per cent of our titles are going to be original.’” There also isn’t much government support for original Israeli children’s literature. But one positive effect of the influx of foreign books is that local production standards have gone up, with better-quality paper and illustrations.

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Israeli children’s authors look to overseas markets

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“They need to compete,” she says. Perhaps because the local market is flooded with imports, many Israeli writers and illustrators now set their sights abroad. Snir’s book *When I First Held You*, translated into English, was sent to thousands of families across North America by the PJ Library program. Her Hebrew books are also used frequently in schools abroad. Levi, too, has been translated into eight languages, with a ninth – Turkish – coming soon. Still, he sees the U.S. market as the toughest nut to crack. “They have the smallest percentage of translated books,” he says.

Leshem-Pelly has begun creating picture books in English specifically for the U.S. market, including *Scribble and Author* (2016, Kane Miller Books) and *Penny and the Plain Piece of Paper* (forthcoming 2020, Penguin/Philomel). Many others would love to do the same. “Since I started publishing internationally, many authors now come to me asking for advice.”

Thanks to technology, Levi says, “it’s much easier to communicate with publishers and agents.” And though there may be cultural differences, Levi believes literature should overcome barriers. “Kids don’t choose where to be born; they don’t choose their identity, their nationality, their language. My books talk about things every kid loves, no matter where they’re from: finding treasure, flying with the clouds, reaching the land of chocolate, overcoming demons.”

— Mirik Snir

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Mazel Tov on your 71st!
Jon Medved: Getting investors in on the ground floor

PAUL LUNGEN
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Jon Medved was slated to be the keynote speaker at Israel Innovation Day at the Toronto Stock Exchange on May 23, but a last-minute family emergency in Jerusalem precluded his participation. Medved is the founder and CEO of OurCrowd, an equity crowdfunding vehicle, in which investors pool their resources to acquire a stake in high-tech startups, many of which are based in Israel. He spoke to The CJN from Jerusalem.

Tell me about your planned trip to Toronto. What was your goal?

We are quite committed to building a strong presence in Canada. That’s why we’ve set up an office in Toronto and we’re licensed to operate in Canada. We firmly believe that the relationship between Canada and Israel on the political level is wonderful. But on the business level, there’s work to be done.

Canada is not punching at its weight class in terms of investment in Israel. Surprisingly, other countries are beating you guys to the punch. In my opinion, we have a lot of work to do, both on the Israeli side and on the Canadian side, to make sure that the business relationship, especially as it relates to investment in tech, is as vibrant as our political, religious and personal ties.

What do you think is holding back Canadian investment in Israel? Is it security issues?

I think people are just not as familiar with it. Remember, in Canada, the big stuff has typically been resources and property. Canada doesn’t invest as much money in technology as Israel does. In the last year, there was about US$6.5 billion ($8.7 billion) invested in Israeli tech startups. In Canada, it’s a fraction of that. That’s despite the fact that Canada is a very wealthy country and a much bigger country than we are.

What we need to do is to make sure that people understand that the next big wave of money to be made will be in technology investments.

Tell me how and why you founded OurCrowd and what niche in the market were you trying to fill.

We founded OurCrowd about six years ago. The idea was to allow people to invest in Israeli startups the way they would buy a stock on the stock exchange.

It sounds easy to say, but it’s not easy to do, because these are typically much earlier stage companies than those that get listed in Toronto or in New York. Someone has to manage the process. Someone has to do the due diligence, select them, provide board seat guidance at the company and add value to the company. That’s what we do at OurCrowd. We have managed in the last six years to amass about $1 billion in commitments from investors from all over the world and what we do is we invest this money according to best venture capital practices.

We’re not just putting up a bunch of random companies for people to look at. We’re selecting them very carefully. About two per cent of the opportunities that we investigate get on our platform. Then we raise millions of dollars for each company in the form of a single company venture capital fund.

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OurCrowd gives you the ability to both choose an individual company and build your own portfolio, or also to invest in funds. We have 18 different funds that give you a ready-made portfolio, or an assembled-by-professionals portfolio, which gives you diversification of anywhere from 15 to 25 companies and, in one case, 50 different companies.

An individual can actually choose the company that he would like to invest in. If he is interested in cannabis, he gets to invest in a cannabis company. If he's interested in health care, he can invest in a health-care company.

So is the idea then to open this type of investment to a broader range of investors, to democratize the process?

Absolutely.

It's not just high net worth investors who can put their money into this, is it?

It is still high net worth investors. According to securities laws in Canada, the United States and in other countries, you have to be a qualified or sophisticated or an accredited investor and there are criteria that we follow in which you have to have a minimum annual income, or a set amount of assets.

To make the minimum $10,000 investment, you have to have a certain profile.

What are the benefits and the risks that Canadians investors should consider when putting money into OurCrowd?

OurCrowd? Everybody is reading about companies like Uber or Beyond Meat that are going public in New York, and you have wonderful companies in the cannabis area going public in Canada. People say, “This is great, but wouldn’t it be great to get in earlier?”

In other words, not Uber at $40 or $45 a share. What about the guys who got in for cents for a share? People get in early to these things. And that’s what we’re doing.

Today, companies wait so long before they go public. In other words, they became worth billions of dollars, whereas in the old days, 20 years ago, companies like Microsoft and Apple went public at less than a billion dollars of valuation. You could actually invest in the stock market and ride these things a long time. What we’re offering is the ability to get involved earlier, before they’re public. And that’s a big need in today’s market, especially for those who want to invest in Startup Nation.

And you can’t just pick up your phone and call Canaccord or CIBC and say, “Buy me an Israeli startup.” It doesn’t work that way.

They can give you a publicly listed company, but they can’t give you a startup. We can.

Is Israel still living up to its reputation as Startup Nation?

It’s more vibrant than ever. Last year, $6.5 billion was invested in Israeli startups. That’s up in the last five years from a little over $2 billion. It’s a dramatic growth. We’ve just been named the world’s most innovative country by the people who put together the World Economic Forum in Davos.

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It’s becoming rather remarkable. We have an annual conference we call the Our-Crowd Summit and it attracts investors from all over the world. This year, we had over 18,000 people register for the summit. Thousands of people showed up in Jerusalem from every part of the world. What we’re seeing is that today, it’s no longer just America, Canada or Australia, but it’s England, it’s all over Latin America. We had a delegation of 50 people from Mexico, over 50 from Colombia. People were coming from Africa, from all over Asia.

They all want to invest in Israel?

They all want to invest in Israel. Today, the world is hungry for innovation. People understand that the traditional businesses are not going to make it without integrating innovative concepts and technologies. It doesn’t matter if you’re a bank, a transportation company or you’re a farmer or you’re a doctor. Everybody’s business is being upended by this incredible technology transformation.

When you talk about what’s happening with artificial intelligence (AI), with what’s happening with robotics, with what’s happening with big data, with the cloud, the change is just beginning. Therefore, people are looking for help from the change agents. And the change agents are very interested in Israel. We are neck-and-neck with Silicon Valley. I just saw data about the 10 fastest-growing companies in terms of revenue and five of the 10 were founded by Israelis — in Silicon Valley! In Israel today, we have roughly 10 per cent of the world’s unicorns, companies that are worth $1 billion that are not yet publicly traded. We’re closing in on that number. It’s remarkable what’s going on in the country.

You mentioned investors coming to Israel from all over the world. Are they not put off by the politics of it, by the BDS movement?

BDS is a non-event. This is an event in Roger Waters’ deranged mind. In other words, there is no effect of BDS on the tech market at all. There are now over 450 multinational corporations that have set up design and research and development centres in Israel. Not one of them has pulled out because of BDS.

I had one of the three largest hedge fund managers in the world over at my house for dinner, together with a famous member of parliament. And the member of parliament asked the hedge fund manager, who is really legendary and everybody knows him, “What do you think of this BDS stuff?”

And the hedge fund manager looked across the table and said, “What’s BDS?”

“You know, boycott, divestment and sanctions.”

He said, “I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.”

He had never heard the acronym. This is something that Jews are sensitive to and worried about, for good reason, especially because it affects people on college campuses, but right now in business, it’s not about a boycott, it’s a “buy-cott.” People want to be engaged with Israel. Israel’s technology is world class.

Continued on next page.
What proportion of your investments are in Israel versus other countries?

Seventy per cent are in Israel. Thirty per cent are around the world. We’re very proud of the fact that we’re doing this from Israel. We’re building a worldwide network of not only investors, but of entrepreneurs and companies. It’s really cool that a company like Beyond Meat, which has the most outstanding IPO on Wall Street, includes an Israeli investor. That a company like Uber that goes public, they bought one of our companies called JUMP which is an American company, but which we invested in as an Israeli investor, and we’re participating.

So individuals can come to our site, they can choose to invest in Israeli companies, they can choose to invest in American companies. We have a Chinese unicorn, which is called Klook, which is a leading travel company in the world. OurCrowd is invested alongside Goldman Sachs and Sequoia Capital, the guys who backed Google and Apple. That’s cool that we’re doing it in a very blue-and-white fashion from Israel, but doing it by building a worldwide network of investors to invest not just in Israel, but global investors who will invest in companies all over the world.

Who are innovating on a platform, which is headquartered in Jerusalem.

When you increase your presence in Canada, are you looking for Jewish investors or a broader range of investors?

A much broader range. We’re far beyond focusing on the Jewish community. I’m Jewish. Israel is a Jewish nation. We’re definitely committed to building ties with the Jewish world, but this is no longer a Jews-only thing – far from it.

There’s more money coming into our platform from non-Jews today than is coming in from Jews. We have a lot of money flowing from Asia and most people there are not Jewish. It’s cool. When you go to the summit, you’ll see a complete rainbow of colours and faces and languages. It’s almost biblical. This is what Israel is supposed to be about. It’s not supposed to be an insular country constantly under attack and constantly defending itself. We’re supposed to be changing the world for the better. In Hebrew, we call ourselves a light to the nations. This is an extraordinary moment in Israel’s history, when we are indeed a light unto the nations, where people are coming to us and saying, “Show us the way.”

You see this is happening with world leaders who are meeting with their Israeli counterparts. They don’t want to talk politics. They want to talk about innovation, whether it’s German Chancellor Angela Merkel, or Narendra Modi from India, or Jair Bolsonaro from Brazil. When they come here and you listen to the press conferences and announcements, it seems as though these are tech missions, because the whole nature of the discussion has changed to technology and what Israel can do for the nations of the world.

What are the sectors in Israel that excite you the most?

We’re extremely excited about mobility, because in Israel, the biggest exit recently was a company called Mobileye. It was bought by Intel for $15 billion and it leads the world in collision avoidance systems.

Continued on page 12
Best wishes to Israel on this momentous milestone. May peace and tranquility be yours, now and always.

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**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10**

Today, there are 500 startups in Israel invested in mobility and we have invested in dozens of them. We have a fund we invest in called Maniv, which is a mobility portfolio.

We have a fund called Qure, which is a digital health portfolio.

We’re very keen on digital health. As the world realizes your mobile device is perhaps your most important medical device, Israel will be a world leader. We’ve been digitizing our images for decades, literally, and these medical records and this big data is now meeting Israeli medical expertise in software and artificial intelligence, to unlock a whole range of very interesting digital health things.

**I understand that OurCrowd is involved in investments in the cannabis area.**

We have a cannabis fund and several cannabis companies.

Israel has dozens of very exciting and dynamic cannabis startups. They’re focused on medical, on delivery, on quality control and a whole host of issues. I’ve noticed there’s a lot of interest by Israeli companies in accessing Canadian capital markets for cannabis, because you guys lead the world in that. I think you’ll see a huge number of partnerships.

**What other areas interest OurCrowd?**

The biggest area is artificial intelligence. AI is just extraordinarily important. Israel today is duking it out with China for the number 2 spot in terms of artificial intelligence startups.

According to Forbes, less than a year ago, China had 380 startups and Israel had 360. Those are numbers that are already old. I think they’ve gone up considerably in the last several months.

We have AI startups that deal with auto-related technology, particularly as it applies to the medical field. We have a company named MeMed Diagnostics, which is coming up with an almost instantaneous test for whether what you’re sick with is a viral or bacterial infection, using big data and machine learning.

We have companies like MedAware, which refer to self-driving cars? Yes, we have a company called Ride Vision, which is using AI and computer vision on motorcycles. What Mobility does for the car, this does for the two-wheelers.

According to the data we have, motorcycle riders are 28 times more likely to be engaged in a fatality than a car driver, so they need this stuff desperately.

One other area where I’ve heard that Israel is a leader is in nanotechnology, particularly as it applies to the medical field. Is that an area you’re looking at?

In the medical area, we have a company called Insightec that is using focused ultrasound to mitigate the effects of Parkinson’s tremors. It’s an incision-less surgery that uses an MRI-guided focused ultrasound.

We have a company called AlphaTAU, which is in clinical trials now for a new radiation therapy, using alpha particles to blow the living daylights out of solid cancerous tumours.

We have a company named MedAware, using AI and big data to change weather prediction in a fundamental way.

There is a ton of AI in the automotive area. Even in sports. It’s quite remarkable.

**You’ve mentioned automotive. Does that refer to self-driving cars?**

We have a company we’re funding called Ride Vision, which is using AI and computer vision on motorcycles. What Mobility does for the car, this does for the two-wheelers.

According to the data we have, motorcycle riders are 28 times more likely to be engaged in a fatality than a car driver, so they need this stuff desperately.

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We have a company named MeMed Diagnostics, which is coming up with an almost instantaneous test for whether what you’re sick with is a viral or bacterial infection, using big data and machine learning.

We have companies like MedAware, which is using machine learning to prevent prescription errors.

A nano technology example is a company called HIL Applied Medical, which is using nano targets that are laser excited, to create proton beams. That’s a mouthful.

It turns out there is a therapy called proton beam therapy. Typically, you have to generate these proton beams with huge accelerators that take up a city block and have thick walls and costs hundreds of millions of dollars. This company, on a desktop, is creating nano targets that are excited by a high-power desktop laser, and these nano targets create the proton beams.

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*This interview has been edited and condensed for style and clarity.*
Israelis from all over the country celebrated Yom ha-Atzmaut, the state’s 71st birthday, on May 9.

FLASH90 PHOTOS
TORONTO CELEBRATES

Israel’s 71

Photos from UJA’s Walk With Israel

IMAGES COURTESY OF UJA FEDERATION OF GREATER TORONTO AND CJN STAFF
Early in the morning, after breakfast but before they started on their 20-kilometre military-style march, the 18 Canadians sojourning in the Negev Desert engaged in some team-building exercises modeled on those used by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

They’d gather in a circle surrounding one of their companions, who’d cross his arms over his chest like an ancient Egyptian pharaoh, close his eyes, and fall back. Every time, someone would catch him, making sure he never hit the ground.

The IDF employs this exercise to make sure members of armed units can always count on each other. It tells you beyond “tourist-friendly Israel,” Rabbi Flanzreich said. “You’ll never be abandoned in your weakness,” said Rabbi Aaron Flanzreich, spiritual leader of Beth Sholom Synagogue in Toronto, who is also an IDF veteran and who organized the march.

Rabbi Flanzreich, along with 17 other Toronto men, five Israeli soldiers associated with Brothers for Life, a peer to peer charity for wounded soldiers, plus a handful of guides, engaged in the team-building exercise during a recent mission to Israel that replicated the Masa Kumta beret march of graduating soldiers.

The Canadian version of the march tallied 65 kilometres and was held from April 7-12, starting near Arad and ending at Masada.

For IDF recruits, the Masa Kumta marks the end of basic training and the awarding of a beret indicating membership in a particular IDF unit.

Going on a gruelling march, carrying heavy backpacks and sometimes carrying weighted stretchers, just like IDF soldiers do, creates a unique understanding of the hardships experienced by soldiers and a better appreciation of the sacrifices they make to protect Israel, Rabbi Flanzreich said.

“It’s a powerful moment for the participants.”

Working in conjunction with Brothers for Life in Israel, Rabbi Flanzreich organized the trip, which had the additional benefit of raising money for the synagogue’s social programs and the Israeli charity.

Altogether, $500,000 was raised, split evenly between the two organizations.

The beret march also provided participants – men ranging in age from 38-58 – with an Israel experience that goes beyond “tourist-friendly Israel,” Rabbi Flanzreich said.

The country’s historical and religious sites, the restaurants and beaches enjoyed by everyone, are accessible only because soldiers are on duty to protect the state from its enemies, he said.

In addition to bringing that connection into stark relief for the participants, the 18 men also bonded closely with the IDF veterans, many of whom suffer from PTSD, he said.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
Rabbi Flanzreich got the idea for the unique mission to Israel because of his own experiences as a young recruit who finished the march as part of the Givati Brigade.

“The experience of the group in the desert together doing the march recreates this foundational experience,” he said. “It was a powerful moment for the participants.”

The three-day adventure was difficult, he said. The Negev has received lots of rain this year, loosening rocks and making the ground difficult to walk without rolling your ankle.

Many of the participants suffered ankle sprains, knee problems and blisters. Three of them were hospitalized with various ailments, including one who had blisters so bad Rabbi Flanzreich said he’d never seen before.

In addition to the daily march, the participants received small arms training with (unloaded) M-16 rifles as well as briefings in combat tactics.

They subsisted on military rations for lunch, they carried large quantities of water and they slept at night under the stars. Nevertheless, it wasn’t all roughing it. A support van brought along portable washrooms and showers, and at night chefs prepared meals comparable to what you’d find in high-end hotels, Rabbi Flanzreich said.

Near the end of the first day’s march, with base camp in sight, their leader, Shaul Wolfson, who had served as a commander in a counter-terrorism unit, asked the guys how they felt. Great they responded. It turned out that was the wrong answer—if their goal was to get to camp, unload their packs and take a rest.

Wolfson added two kilometres to the march and when the guys finally finished, they were spent. Why did he do it? The IDF believes that even if you think you’ve had enough, you always have more to give, Rabbi Flanzreich said.

The three-day event culminated in a march up the snake path to the top of Masada, where participants received their red graduation berets, representing the Canadian flag and resembling the ones given to paratroop units.

Despite the difficulties and the grind, the participants loved the experience. It went so well, you can expect him to repeat it again in two years, Rabbi Flanzreich said. It’s not for everybody though. You’ve got to be fit, willing to endure hardships, and raise $15,000 beside the US$6,000 cost of the venture.

But in the end, it creates memories and friendships that last a lifetime, Rabbi Flanzreich said.
Volunteering in Israel with Sar-El Canada

CHARLEEN GLAUN
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

At last I was on the plane and winging my way to Israel. Was this really happening to me? I had waited so long for this day to come to fruition and here I was, after 32 years, finally returning.

Arriving at Ben-Gurion Airport, I realized this was not the Israel I had left in 1986, but a thriving technological wonder. I marvelled at the new airport with its beautiful Jerusalem stone façade, the tall palm trees slightly moving in the cool fresh air, and then saw the sign welcoming visitors in English and in Hebrew. It felt so good to be back.

I proceeded to walk toward the security check-in, all the while bursting with pride at this little country that, against all odds, survives and excels at what she does. I had already told myself that, when posed with questions from security, I would reply in English, even though I am fluent in Hebrew, and would not volunteer any information unless asked for it. I was ready.

The first question was, “What is the purpose of your trip?”

“I’m coming on Sar-El,” I replied. “What is Sar-El?” the security person asked. “Volunteers for Israel,” I said, a little surprised that he did not know. I waited for some reaction from him, but there was silence. I was bursting to tell anyone who would be willing to listen that I had made this journey after being away for so long. This was a big deal for me. All my previous negotiating with myself went by the wayside and I blurted out, “I’ve been away for 32 years and this is my first trip back.”

Again there was silence. Now what? Was I in trouble?

He then looked up and said, “What took you so long? Welcome back!”

That was that, I was free to enter Israel. I smiled and said to myself, “This is going to be the best adventure of my life. Thank you, God, for getting me here safely.”

Once I had my luggage, I proceeded to find the sunglasses stand where volunteers for Sar-El typically meet. Pam Lazarus, an expat from the United States who had made aliyah 17 years ago, is the person who runs Sar-El in Israel. The organization was founded in 1987 by Gen. Aharon Davidi. Volunteers from all corners of the globe come to join Sar-El for periods of between one to three weeks. Qualifications include love for Israel, being of sound mind, physically fit, and able to carry your own luggage, as many buildings do not have elevators. You do not have to be Jewish.

Volunteers typically register with a Sar-El office in their area (there are offices in major cities worldwide). The cost of registration is $100 and volunteers have to pay for the flight. Volunteers must also have a clean bill of health from their doctor before being accepted into the program.

Continued on next page
While on the base, each person is assigned a room, which they will typically share with one or more persons, and is given three meals a day. Some bases will even organize a free day trip to somewhere of interest. It is a very fulfilling and economical way of experiencing a little of Israel.

Once you are on the army base, you are there until Thursday afternoon (when it clears for Shabbat) until Sunday morning, when the work week begins again.

I was assigned to a medical supply base near Tel Aviv. This base does not have soldiers on it but rather reservists and full-time employees. (There are other bases in the surrounding area, but we were not permitted access to these.)

Upon arriving at the base I was given my army uniform. (Yes you get to wear a uniform). The correct size of uniform is not high on the priority list, as I discovered. I spent the next three weeks in a very roomy pair of unflattering army pants which I held up with an army belt (this was pretty safe as long as I was vigilant when bending down, when the belt would slip just a little too much), a short- or long-sleeve T-shirt (I wore khaki ones to complete the look), a long-sleeve khaki shirt, and an army jacket. I felt so proud wearing this uniform.

Then it was time to see where I was going to live for the next little while. My roommate was an older woman in her late 60s from the U.S., who had made aliyah a few years earlier with her husband (her daughters were already living in Israel), and who had decided to come on Sar-El for just a week. I had the good fortune for the remainder of my stay to have the room to myself.

Volunteers are instructed to bring their own sheets, while blankets are provided by the base. I chose to take a lightweight sleeping bag, which proved to be very comfortable and warm. All rooms have an air-conditioning/heating system and basic storage units. Women are housed on the upper level of a two-storey building. Both floors were supplied with a washing machine. I later found out this is quite a luxury and not the norm; dryers are not common in Israel. There were three shower stalls delivering hot water at all times. I was at the Hilton of army bases.

A typical day begins with breakfast at 7:15 a.m. It was a standard European breakfast: tomatoes, cucumbers, sometimes cornflakes, yogurt (milk seemed to be scarce), cheeses, bread, and olives. A good start to the day. At 7:45 we meet up with our 19-year-old madrichot (most of the time we had two) in the courtyard close to the dining hall for the raising of the flag and the singing of the national anthem, and then we get news from within Israel and abroad, depending on which countries we are from. Thank goodness for the Internet.

Then it is off to work until midday, when we make our way to the dining hall for lunch. (I should add that on every army base there is a synagogue.)

This base is the main military medical base in Israel and also the primary depot. Thus, every 18 months medical military units drop off complete medical supplies. They then pick up new and replenished supplies for the next 18 months, which are divided between bases. Medical supplies with expiry dates of between six-18 months are used first in hospitals and emergency rooms, while supplies with a six-month expiry date are used for training purposes and donations to third-world countries. Medical kits are made up for many applications, such as atomic and biological chemical kits, combat doctors, and combat medics.

I had a great boss, Israel, a first-generation Sabra, whose family had emigrated from Buchara in Uzbekistan (part of the former Soviet Union). He was patient and explained exactly how to do things. There were times when we were waiting for supplies to be delivered, which afforded us the opportunity to sit down and learn about one another – where we were from, our lives in our own countries, and to hear about Israel’s life in Israel.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22
The Reform Movement of Canada
Wishes Israel a Very Happy 71st Anniversary

Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem;
May those who love you be at peace.
Psalm 122:6

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He never stopped thanking us for our service, as did many Israelis I met when off the base. They are so grateful for the service the volunteers provide on Sar-El. This, in turn, is so gratifying for us, knowing that we are making a difference by giving back just a little to the country. I must say it was an even better feeling when medical backpacks were returned to us with medical supplies unused!

Despite being a country on a constant war-footing, the zest for life is just unbelievable. I noticed this in Tel Aviv, where I spent my weekends. The bustling traffic, people sitting at coffee shops and in restaurants, shopping at the Carmel Market, youngsters speeding down busy main intersections on the new fad, the electric scooter, hip-looking men and women walking along Tel Aviv’s beautiful promenade with all breeds of dogs, people on the beach laughing and listening to music, picnickers on the lawn with little children frolicking nearby and buskers entertaining the passing throng of people. What a beautiful, perfect picture it painted in an imperfect world.

The workday on the base ends at 4 p.m., when you are free to do whatever you like within its confines. You are not at liberty to leave the base other than at the end of the workweek. Dinners on the base are eaten early. Thereafter, the madrichot plan interesting discussion groups or movies. By 9 p.m. most people are ready for bed.

On weekends we can go anywhere as long as we are at the main train station in Tel Aviv on Sunday morning at 9:30, when we are picked up and taken back to the base. Volunteers have to pay for their off-base accommodation, but there is a hostel in Tel Aviv specifically for Sar-El volunteers. Accommodation and meals are free. This is a great alternative for those who come to Israel on a tight budget. It is not fancy, but it is a place to stay central to the hub of Tel Aviv and the beach.

During my trip I was extremely fortunate to spend some time with Rabbi Ayala Miron, rabbi of the B’Vat Ha’Ayin congregation in Rosh Ha’ayin. Rabbi Miron had visited my synagogue some time ago, where I had the privilege of talking to her and informing her of my impending trip. Rabbi Miron and I arranged to meet on one of my free weekends. She picked me up from my hostel and we drove to the service in Rosh Ha’ayin. There we met up with two Reform congregations (one from Boston, the other from Washington) that were also visiting Israel.

The evening spent with Rabbi Miron and these two groups was memorable. Her love of Judaism is wonderful and I felt so blessed to have been part of the evening. I was asked to share a bit about my reason for being in Israel. What an honour that was! (A few of my fellow volunteers told me they were a little envious of what I was about to experience at Congregation B’Vat Ha’Ayin.)

Three weeks went by in a flash and soon it was time to pack up and return to my life in Toronto. I looked for any reason that would delay my return and enable me to stay in Israel, but as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. But it doesn’t have to end here – and it won’t. I will return to Israel. In fact, I am already looking at dates on my calendar.

I would highly recommend Sar-El for anyone who loves Israel, is on a tight budget, and has some spare time to do something so worthwhile. Israel will welcome you with open arms and she will thank you. sarelcanada.org
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The upscale Israeli food craze

BARBARA SILVERSTEIN
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

Israeli-style food has become one of the hottest cuisines on the planet and can now be found in many major cities worldwide.

Israeli cuisine is a melting pot of eastern European, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern food that is evolving. Some restaurateurs have expanded the range of the traditional foods – reinterpreting familiar dishes by incorporating new ingredients or infusing them with new flavours.

Many of these restaurants have become hip and upscale eateries that are garnering great reviews for their food and ambiance.

In the United States, Michael Solomonov, an Israeli-American chef and restaurateur, has won six James Beard Foundation Awards, which are the culinary equivalent to the Academy Awards. In 2017, he was the outstanding Israeli Cooking award. In 2018, he was the best cookbook, Jerusalem.

Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi, a Palestinian from east Jerusalem, are the “two chefs that put Israeli cooking on the map,” Stern said. The two expats met in London and teamed up in 2012 to co-author the best-selling cookbook, Jerusalem.

Stern said Israeli cuisine is characterized by the extensive use of exotic Middle Eastern spice rubs, such as za’atar, a herbal blend of sumac, thyme and sesame seeds; hawaij, a Yemenite blend of turmeric, cumin and black pepper; and baharat, a rub made of cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, cardamom, cumin and coriander.

The flavour of the dishes are also enhanced by condiments like z’houg, a spicy Yemenite pesto-like dressing, and sauces made from tahini (sesame seed paste).

The healthy orientation of Israeli food may also explain its wide appeal, Stern said, pointing out that many of the dishes are plant-based and make use of fresh produce.

Indeed, vegetables like eggplant and cauliflower have been elevated from side-dish status to main courses. For instance, the cauliflower entree – a whole roasted cauliflower dressed with tahini, herbs and pomegranate seeds – is one of the most talked about dishes at Fat Pasha, a popular upscale Israeli-style restaurant in Toronto.

In fact, this spring, Fat Pasha’s owners, Anthony Rose and Rob Wilder, converted Bar Bagonia, their French restaurant, into a Middle Eastern one.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26
Happy 71st Anniversary Israel!

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We should all view ourselves as if the world were held in balance and any single act of goodness could tip the scales. That is the essence of Israel, the person, the nation and the idea.

We stand in awe and support of our modern day miracle - Israel

Israeli cuisine

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

The new eatery, Fet Zun, offers a range of Middle Eastern fare, with an emphasis on small plates and sharing.

Parallel, another trendy Israeli restaurant in downtown Toronto, is creating a lot of buzz, especially among millennials. Jackson Davis, Parallel’s head chef, described the ambiance as “industrial chic.” He said reservations are advisable on weekends, especially during the summer, as the patio is a big draw.

The menu at Parallel’s is similar to that of Fat Pasha.

Pappardelle with Rose Harissa, Black Olives and Capers

(Adapted from Ottolenghi Simple by Yotam Ottolenghi)

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
- 3 tsp rose harissa
- 14 oz cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/2 cup pitted Kalamata olives, torn in half
- 2 tbsp baby capers
- salt
- 3/4 cup plus 2 tbsp water
- 2 tbsp parsley, roughly chopped
- 1/2 cup Greek-style yogurt

Put the oil into a large sauté pan with a lid and place over medium-high heat. Once hot, add the onion and fry for 8 minutes, stirring every once in a while, until it becomes soft and caramelized. Add the harissa, tomatoes, olives, capers, and 1/2 tsp salt and continue to fry for 3-4 minutes, stirring frequently until the tomatoes start to break down. Add the water and stir to mix it in thoroughly.

Once this mixture boils, decrease the heat to medium-low. Cover the pan, and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove the lid and continue to cook for 4-5 minutes, until the sauce is thick and rich. Stir in 1/2 cup of the parsley and set aside.

Meanwhile, fill a large pot with plenty of salted water and place over high heat. Once boiling, add the pappardelle and cook according to the package instructions, until it is al dente. Drain well.

Return the pasta to the pot along with the harissa sauce. Add 1/8 tsp of salt and mix well. Divide the mixture among 4 shallow bowls. Serve hot, with a spoonful of yogurt and a final sprinkle of parsley.

Tahini Ice Cream

(Adapted from The Palomar Cookbook by Layo Paskin and Tomer Amedi)

- 2 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1/2 cup egg yolks
- 1/2 cup date syrup
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/2 cups tahini paste

Put the cream in a saucepan and bring to a simmer. Place the eggs in a bowl and whisk. Add 1/3 of the cream while whisking and continue whisking. Add the date syrup and honey and continue whisking. Add the tahini paste and whisk until it’s incorporated.

Transfer the mixture to a freezer-proof container with a lid. Freeze overnight. Makes 8 servings.

The ice cream can be kept in the freezer up to 3 months.

Onions In Bourbon

(Adapted from The Palomar Cookbook by Layo Paskin and Tomer Amedi)

- 3 large red onions cut into 3/4-inch rounds
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp fresh thyme leaves
- 1/4 cup vegetable stock or water
- 5 tbsp bourbon
- 1/4 cup date syrup
- 2 tbsp butter, cut into cubes

Preheat the oven to 375 F.

Arrange the onion rounds in a single layer on a large baking sheet.

Season the onions with salt and pepper. Mix the stock or water and the bourbon. Spoon 2 or 3 tsp of this liquid over each round. Drizzle date syrup over the onions and then place a small cube of butter on each onion round.

Cover the onions with foil. Bake for 20 minutes. Remove the foil and bake another 10 minutes. The onions will be caramelized and can be served as a side dish or garnish.
Wishing Israel a very happy 71st birthday

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