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*Rabbi Laura shows young Cheder and Gan pupils the new lightweight scroll; helpers had a chance to see how easy it is to lift. Fundraising is ongoing - please call the rabbi.*

## Shul with Something for Everyone

Have you noticed that since Rabbi Laura arrived there have been many new initiatives and/or reboots of previous BRS practices? Most of them are designed to make the shul more inclusive and welcoming, whether you're keen to participate in services but need a bit of coaching or a lighter-weight scroll; have had difficulty engaging with Judaism in the past or, due to distance or disability, have previously been unable to join in but – with new technology – can now read, study, sing and pray along; or you've wanted to be more active but just couldn't see a role for yourself.

Gatherings over bring-and-share meals now happen frequently, whether to explore a single topic or to give all who want it the chance to discuss ideas. Please watch out for dates and joining options in e-Light.

This issue focuses on people. We join synagogues for many reasons, it's said - study, prayer and meeting pretty well cover it – but why stay? It seems to be all about community, whatever that means to each of us. Maybe it's a sense of connection, belonging, finding a place to feel secure, but more than anything, this issue reminds us that BRS has always been a safe haven for people of all ages and backgrounds, who've wanted to create something together that's bigger than themselves to be shared with others. We hope you enjoy reading about those who have shaped our shul and the fantastic folk who now cherish it and devote themselves daily to making it as welcoming as it was in 1964 – or maybe even more so.

### This isn't called the Pesach edition for nothing you know!

First night seder is on **Wednesday 5 April** and second night – and our communal seder, led by Rabbi Laura – on **Thursday 6 April**.

Then we'll be counting the Omer all the way to **Shavuot on 25 May**. As usual, if you have a space at your seder table or you're looking for someone who has one, please let our lovely Administrator/Community Co-ordinator, Jennie, know and she will try to match you up: [admin@bromleyshul.org.uk](mailto:admin@bromleyshul.org.uk)

### AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO A PESACH MITZVAH

Communal Seder Co-ordinator Janvier would welcome some assistance beforehand, on the day and afterwards. If you can help her at any or all of those times to make this year really special, please contact her at [jndpalmer@gmail.com](mailto:jndpalmer@gmail.com)

# View from the Chair

*... and what a lot Michelle gets to see from her chair every day, never mind in a year!*

*Here she is (2nd left) with Vicki Ashmore, Judy Taylor and Heidi Small  
Could these be the four mothers we sing about at Seder every year?*



This time last year I was writing my View from the Chair introducing our new rabbi and looking forward to the future. What a year it has been! The year has flown by and I cannot believe how much has happened. The variety of events and the speed of development have been amazing. Remember, we only have a part-time rabbi, but Laura has put in more than a full-time amount of work for BRS. The number of people now involved and engaged has increased, and every month at Board meetings we have welcomed new members. Our community is growing despite having lost loved members in the past year.

## *Helping everyone in the community to flourish*

A lot of extra work is being put in to make sure our community is cared for and continues to flourish. In particular, I thank all the members who so generously give their time to carry out acts of loving kindness for other people, without seeking any recognition or thanks. This is what a Jewish community is all about; this is what BRS is about.

The 2023 AGM was on Zoom on 22 March and saw the Board saying goodbye and thank you to **Adrian Jackson, Joe Millis and Vicki Ashmore**. Although they have stepped down, they are all continuing their work for BRS in safeguarding, the Board of Deputies, Education and Music. We said hello and welcome to the Board to **Toby Allin, Sharon**

**Solomon, Greg Liebenhals and Linda de Lange**. **Heidi Small**, my valued vice chair, stepped down from that role but continues on the Board. She remains in her treasured role of leader of the Gan, and will be very busy in her new job at JP Morgan. Congratulations, Heidi!

## *Planning an exciting year in "the place to be"*

Our new vice chair is **Linda de Lange**, whom the majority of you know. She used to be our Cheder Head Teacher; she teaches Adult Education and has a wealth of Jewish and life experience. You will all have to put up with me as Chair for another year. In my fourth and last year as Chair I will be working closely with Linda, so when she takes over in March 2024 we will have a smooth transition. I look forward to this exciting year ahead.

BRS is certainly making its mark in Reform Judaism in the UK. The buzz that we are "the magnet for Jews in the south east" has been in the JC and heard throughout the country. Every time Rabbi Laura has been on Radio 4 or in other media she has been referred to as Rabbi of Bromley Reform Synagogue, so I think everyone else is just catching on to the fact that we all knew already: that BRS – and in the south east – is the place to be!

## *Investing in the future*

We have RSY-Netzer coming to host a **day camp at our synagogue on Tuesday 11 April**

**for all children in school years 1 to 6**. If you have not signed up there is still time: <https://rsy-netzer.org.uk/community-days/> There is also going to be a **Shabbaton sleepover** at the synagogue on **Friday 16 - Saturday 17 June**. This event is aimed at young people in southern communities in school years 4 to 6 and offers some leadership training for years 9 and 10, so watch out for more details to come. All these events give our young people a taste of RSY before they potentially join large events or camps. Last summer, a number of BRS children went on the RSY summer camp, but this year we already have a record-breaking 12 signed up. Thank you to the Donor Trust, which so generously provides funding to enable our young people to attend such events. This investment in our youth is an investment in our future. There is still time to sign up and funding available – just email me for details.

## *Chag Pesach Sameach*

As we celebrate Pesach, the festival marking the Israelites' liberation from Egypt over 2,000 years ago, I think about freedom and how lucky we in the UK are to have physical and spiritual freedom. Pesach is one of my favourite times of the year as this is when the community and family come together to remember who we are and why we are here.

**Michelle Brooks Evans**  
[chair@bromleyshul.org.uk](mailto:chair@bromleyshul.org.uk)

# Our Rabbi's Life-long Love Affair

**I HAVE BEEN IN LOVE WITH HER**  
since I was very young.

“She” is not a person, but a place.

She is 16 years older than me, and this year she's celebrating her 75th birthday.

When I was a child, my parents (zl,) taught me to love her. Frequently I was taken to visit her, to hike her different landscapes, to hear about her history and discover the tastes and smells of her present. My first clear memory was being in Jerusalem just after the Six Day War in 1967.

Getting to know her properly involved long, boiling-hot drives from one end of her to the other, in a car with no air conditioning, having to drink sickly sweet juices to avoid dehydration. I snorkelled in her sea in her most southern town (Eilat) when it didn't even have a traffic light, let alone a huge hotel zone. I learnt little snippets of her language which have since expanded and entered the deepest recesses of my soul. Her songs echoed through my childhood and through my heart.

I decided to deepen our relationship. I stayed with her for a year as an 18 year old. My world was turned upside down by the elation of the freedom coupled with a large dose of ideology. Our romance blossomed.

The more time we spent together, the deeper the connection and sense of belonging. Now it was a fully committed relationship. After university, for many years, I built my family in her capital city, the ironically named City of Peace. But, after wars and terrorism, she changed.



*Rabbi Laura reunited with her eldest, Tal, in Israel just after Purim*

I felt she had just been too intense for me at that time, unwilling or unable to change at the moment, too tumultuous, and the politics too divisive. I physically distanced myself from her but I'm still profoundly pulled towards her. I'm still in love. My journeys back and forth continue as our eldest child, Tal, chose to return there.

She's not an easy character.

She lives in a really difficult neighbourhood, with many neighbours who would love to evict her. But as she grows up, she has learnt that not all her neighbours are the same. She has learnt from them and some have learnt from her too and have even taken risks in their own homes to make a form of reconciliation with her. I have admired her when she has taken courageous steps to compromise with her neighbours, to retreat for the sake of better relations.

My object of love can be breathtakingly courageous, generous, visionary – sometimes I want to shout, “She's mine! She's good! I'm proud of her.” But sometimes I am frustrated, disappointed and profoundly saddened by her. When I first met her, she was only in her late teens – she could get away with youthful decisions. Now she is already older and I believe she could be

more mature, more self-critical and kinder. I wish she could gather up more strength and more courage and take the risks that an adult has to take, to move into the next stage of maturity, to look after all her citizens and her closest neighbours with equal care and respect.

Her name means to “struggle with God”, inviting us all to struggle with her and challenge her, especially now, as she seems to be heading towards her own shadow side and away from the light. Challenging those we love is a far more admirable form of love than just acquiescence.

For me, she has always been beautiful, charismatic and enticing. I know I will always be in love with her, in hope, in the deepest felt hope that she'll return to her core nature and the reasons she was created, with which I felt in love. She is Israel.

## **‘SHUT UP, I'M TALKING’**

No, not Rabbi Laura's words – how could you think such a thing? – but the title of the next book (by Canadian author Gregory Levey) due to be tackled by BRS Book Group. After a very interesting and wide-ranging discussion about the very short “Wandering Jew: The Search for Joseph Roth” in a hybrid meeting with almost equal numbers online and in the room, this book was chosen as the read for the meeting on **Thursday 4 May**, with Paul Auster's **New York Trilogy** following on **13 July**. Details of the how, where and when of joining in from Judy: [jwoolfe@ntlworld.com](mailto:jwoolfe@ntlworld.com).



# Shushan: Swagger. Sweetness. Strength



**Above:** everyone had a part to play in the success of the spiel

**Below:** The king picks a new wife



*it should be recorded in Shushan Chronicles that the following night's Megillah readers were no slouches either..*



Solo readers included **Barbara and Judy** (above) **Hadassah, Marilyn, Rob, Andreas, Michelle** (apologies if I've missed anyone, Ed) and our prize-winning baker was Janvier the Breadwinner, complete with rosette.

## A new BRS production for 5783

"Thanks to the incredible talents of our Purimspiel professional director, Nick Tanner, the script he and I worked on together became an incredible production and an enjoyable one for all ages," says "plotter" Frankie Gruzd.

Professional actor Tristan Shepherd brought a real Mancunian Gallagher swagger to Haman, and gave the crowd a cool contemporary villain to boo. Shepherd's Haman provided a lovely contrast to Sam Hyams' down-to-earth good guy Mordechai, while there were distinct echoes of Frankie Howerd in Robert Cohen's Ahashverosh. Amanda Penn played Esther as a mixture of super sweetness and super strength and, with fierce competition in the Persian beauty parade from pupils Aaron Russell, Dvir Kogman and Lilah Schutt, her character summed it up beautifully when she said they all should have won. I was fortunate to be cast as one of the plotters, along with Sonia Hyams. We enjoyed our brief roles, and Nick suggested afterwards that if there were a spin-off from the Purimspiel we'd definitely be in the running.

It wasn't just Noga Kogman's top that sparkled on stage, either. As our Vashti, she was a proud queen. Mariella Russell was no clown when it came to being our narrator, carrying the audience with her throughout, and with Roland Perrin and Maurice superbly providing incidental music and theme melodies for our characters, it was very joyous, boisterous and just fabulous.



Take a bow double acts Matthew and Linda, Rabbi Laura and David, as well as those who bravely appeared alone. The blur is not camera shake: both David and Laura were reading so fast nobody could keep up – not even them themselves. And we're told other brands of whisky are available. I think that's what Matthew said. Couldn't catch his words after the first few glasses, sorry, verses, but the meaning was clear.

# A JOYOUS TIME FOR ALL AT CHEDER

**There were so many joyous occasions and reasons to say together a shehecheyanu blessing this Aviv/Spring term, writes Head Teacher, *Frankie Gruz*d.**

As I write it's only a couple of days since our Chai School Purim Party morning, a session that saw unprecedented numbers of pupils, parents, members and guests join our Purim parade, make merry and share a potluck festive lunch or Seudah on a Sunday at shul.

It was a truly remarkable community event for a number of reasons. It was our first full spring term post social restrictions; families now attended together to celebrate, and we welcomed BRS members too. We were blessed with many guests from south London, who came in search of a Purim party for their young children; so there were also many new faces, masked or otherwise, who joined in our festivities. This was very much a whole-team effort, and our regular teachers and helpers rose admirably to the challenge of being entertainers, hosts, and catering leaders like Janvier Palmer and Noah Wilkins.

## ***Celebrating backwards***

The day started with a 'Backwards Assembly' with Shalom Chaverim the first of many songs. Having worn all her clothes back to front, Vicki Ashmore taught our wonderful children the songs they'd need to play their crowd parts in the Purimspiel (see page 4) and we finished with a lively and spirited parade. Vice Chair Heidi Small's huge shoe costume was perfect attire for her role as honorary Mayor of Shushan.

With the help of our dedicated parent volunteers, led by Sonia Hyams and Becky Schutt, our Shushan pot luck feast had arrived

from the kitchens of many and was laid out so all could fulfil the mitzvah of the Seudah. Ed the Baker, our special guest, helped us stage a Great Bromley Bake-Off with various Hamanstashen challenges. The Butler family took pride of place with their pastry-rolling and corner-pressing skills.

## ***Tribal banners but no divisions here***



The term started with our Yeladim picking up the end of the Joseph story in Genesis, with all the brothers together again. Gannies made their own tribal banners and hung them in the Garden Room for social centre guests to enjoy, while our older kittot looked at the issue of tribalism and identity, and when differences become hardened divisions.

## ***Foil yads at the ready!***

Pupils and parents were given a chance to get up close to our scrolls in a special session led by Rabbi Laura. The pupils were introduced to the newest littlest scroll and some of us were able to lift and show the scroll for the first time. Our kittot learned how to undress and dress a Sefer Torah and handle a Yad, and about Hagbah (scroll lifting) and Gellilah (dressing the Torah).

## ***Planting for Tu Bishvat***

Tu Bishvat saw the launch of our inat Ha-Yeladim (Children's Garden). Thanks to Jack Petchey Award winner Megan Frankel, BRS had some money to buy

gardening equipment. This put some major fun into this minor festival. This year we planted seeds and bulbs alongside our hopes for the future. It is hoped that these resources will provide further inspiration for outdoor activities linked to the Jewish calendar and festivals.



This term we also looked at **Halakha from a Progressive perspective** and wrestled in the classrooms with the topic of God. Everyone had lots of questions about God. Whether they believed, said they didn't believe or expressed doubts, they had questions about God, and Chai School created a space for this, led by pupils' own questions.

## **KEY DATES**

### **Kayitz/Summer Term**

**16 April:** Term starts, with **Yom HaShoah Service for whole of BRS**

**30 April:** No Session: Bank Holiday Weekend

**28 May:** **HALF TERM**

**14 June:** Various Kitah Trips

**25 June:** Sadeh Farm Trip

**2 July:** Gala Garden Morning

**9 July:** Team Training Session



# Nadia Gilman, in notes from her family ...

*This is heavily edited, as there is so much to say, but we hope it strikes chords with those who knew her and maybe gives an insight into how she became who she became. If you didn't know Nadia by name you must surely have enjoyed her glorious voice on High Holydays.*

"In a parallel universe," says Nadia's daughter Jane Ziegler, "mum would have lived a wholly different life, a rather conventional one, founded on a straightforward background, a safe life, a loving partner to share children, grandchildren and a love of music, a fulfilling job and a healthy tummy that would allow her to visit foreign places and eat

for that life that never left her."

"But due to the complexity of the circumstances she was born into, rooted in her Jewish heritage and Christian upbringing ...instead, mum set off on a journey of **questioning**, of **challenging** and **looking for answers**, of trying to understand, of finding her place, of finding self worth, of finding **acceptance** and love from herself for herself and from others. It was a life of extremes, a life to be battled with. It took courage to lead... **instability** of childhood connections to her birth parents, and the feelings of rejection involved... great love, unwavering support, from her adoptive parents ... mockery at school for being different, but also the warm welcome from **Church** community and friends...the steady, enjoyable job at British European Airways and then the decision to go to college, one that required **courage** because it meant leaving the **security**... love and then **rejection** in marriage. Mum said she married a good man but just the wrong man. But then there was the **joy** of children... the heavy **responsibility** of single parenthood and then the terrible **sadness** when we moved so far away, with the

**longing** for normal, everyday family life. But then there was the **intensity** of the times we had when we did get together, deep, **meaningful** times because they were not of the everyday... years alone, but in them the **freedom** to search for her **spiritual** home, which she found in the **Jewish** community in Bromley. There, too, was the space and time to live her passions and finally to find Bob, who was the right man.

"And who mum was was as **complex** as where she came from.

"She was a **passionate teacher** and a **fierce defender** of those who had no defence of their own, especially children and the elderly. She was fiercely **independent**, rarely asking for or wanting help for herself.... wholeheartedly Jewish but continued to feel gratitude for what the Church had given her and never wavered in her belief in **inter-faith dialogue** or in her great respect for the strengths and **wisdoms** of each religion... She was a lover of her **garden**, of her spring flowers and roses, of her shrubs, trees and the birds which visited her. And, of course, she was a lover of **music** from her young years to her last breath. She could never have imagined a life without it. It was a joy to be shared with friends, community and family and with stable, affectionate, lovely Bob. What an extraordinary life."

*Jane recalls times together with Nadia. Some elements ring bells.*

"Mum, what rich lives you and I have led... your face always lit up when you heard how much I adore my life. Ours was a relationship of such depth that we were able to reveal ourselves to each other with honesty. It was on occasion a heavy burden, but mostly one of joy... always make my heart sing. Let me start with the **driving lessons** you gave me to distract from the

sadness of a lost love, hiccupping down the road, tears of laughter rolling down our faces; Les Miserables and Miss Saigon on birthdays, my favourites of all the musicals we saw together; your doors open to so many of my friends and to my hubby Fritz... you always curious to learn more...

**hunts for shoes** in Mannheim, Christmases, birthdays and then grandchildren; the Grand Opening Party for my shop with you entertaining the many guests with songs from The **Sound of Music**.

"Oh, what fun we had in the **charity shops** with the thrilling search for treasure... the wardrobes filled with that **treasure**; yours - a blaze of colour with frilly blouses, big floral prints, glittery scarves, and mine - velvet, fur, sequins and chiffon, invariably black... my wedding was worthy of my dreams and your organising skills. It was a day of forget-me-nots and tulips, sequins and champagne, sunshine and conversations in the garden, ladies trying to look up Paul's kilt. And then there were the wonderful, wonderful **holidays**...Vienna, with the architecture, the cakes, the public toilets and its music...Venice with ice cream, gondola rides and walks along the canals, and the exquisite art... Rome, so full of everything, above all history. Our unforgettable Colosseum tour, our guide so enthusiastic, so in love with the amphitheatre.

"These memories and more are the music we made together. But I am greedy and longing for an encore. [Still,] I know you wanted our lives to be glorious and full of new adventures. So, the words I often heard you say, I now say to myself: "Stop moaning and just get on with it."

*Nadia was born on 29 November 1937 and died on 10 February 2023. There is more in her memory on p.12*

## Deaths

We are very sad to report three deaths in our community:

**Martha Rodin** at the age of 94, on 31 December. We extend sincere condolences to her children Barry and Lesley.

Founder member **Brenda Solts**, wife of Stanley and mother of Andrew and David, to whom we extend our sincere condolences, on 21 January.

**Nadia Gilman** mother of Paul and Jane, to whom we extend our sincere condolences, on 10 February.

## Bereavements

Sincere condolences to **Rhona Green** and family on the sad loss of her father, **Ivor Green**, on 19 January, and to

**John Posner** on the sad loss of his brother, **Charles**, who passed away on 13 February.

We wish all our mourners a long life and only happy memories.

### Welcome to New Members

**Mrs. Jacqueline Esther Aldridge** of Sydenham,  
**Miss Aurelie Michelle Stutz** of Lower Sydenham,  
**Mr. Michael Diamond** and family of Greenwich,  
**Mr. Jonathan Warshawsky** and **Miss Talia James** of Peckham  
**Miss Faith Kulaway** of Bromley and **Mr. Emmanuel Leslie Layward-Wells** of Blackheath.

We also welcome to our community **Steve Woosnam-Savage**, husband of Rhona Green;  
**Roger Russell**, husband of Mariella;  
and **Iva Diamond**, wife of Michael Diamond.

## B'nei Mitzvah



*Isaac Nana with his parents and Rabbi Laura at his bar mitzvah on 3 December*



*Above, Katie Hall with her parents and brother at her bat mitzvah and, below, Zac Bates Fisher at his adult bar mitzvah, on 10 and 17 December respectively*



*And, following in their footsteps...*

A hearty mazal tov to **Elijah Solomon** and his family on the occasion of his bar mitzvah, which he will celebrate on 15 April, Shabbat Shemini; to **Will Abrahams** and her family on the occasion of her bat mitzvah, which she will celebrate on 29 April, Shabbat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim, and to **Laurence Jones** and his family on the occasion of his adult bar mitzvah, which will take place on 20 May, Shabbat Bamidbar.

## Letters to the Editor

*From the children of Nadia Gilman:*

Dear all,  
Today [6 March Memorial service] was a lovely day, which in the circumstances seems so absurd. But it really was lovely because it was a day filled with so much love for mum. What a joy to see so many people wanting to celebrate her life. We now have faces in our minds to replace the names we've often heard in mum's stories about her friends at the synagogue. We are sorry there was not time to talk to you all.

Mum having the support of the community at the synagogue was of comfort to her. But it was also of comfort to us, for we were so far away from her for so many years.

It was lovely to know she was happy and in such good hands.

Mum's life was such a journey which she was determined to see through to the very end. But it was a journey which she could not have undertaken without help. For those who were not able to come to the memorial service, we do just want to pass on Mum's last words, word for word, for they were addressed to you all. "So enormously grateful for all the love and care. I couldn't have done it without it."

**Jane and Paul**

*...and from our member Elisabeth Meggitt, who is a GP:*

I thought this might be useful to promote at BRS a new NHS BRCA gene testing service for male and female Jews with one Jewish grandparent. I've signed myself up! NHS BRCA Screening – coming soon – Jnetics | Improving the prevention and management of Jewish genetic disorders in the UK. [jnetics.org](http://jnetics.org)

*Letters continue overleaf with one from Sabinah, a recent visitor to BRS*

# IN OUR COMMUNITY

Page contact:  
Bob Symonds:  
[comms@bromleyshul.org](mailto:comms@bromleyshul.org)

I have been meaning to write to thank everyone ... at the synagogue for welcoming me and my children at your prayers. I don't quite know how to express what I felt. I saw and read so many similarities in the way that Muslims and Jewish people glorify God and praise him. I saw the names of so many Prophets that I respect and love and try to be like in your books. The sound of the Rabbi, Laura I think, speaking Hebrew with a beautiful melody just made me feel so much at home as it felt similar to how we recite the Qur'an. I felt totally overwhelmed by our similarities and the question in my heart which was "why are so many people in the world so focussed on our differences when we have so many similarities to celebrate?"

This question resulted in tears. I couldn't stop the tears as I read on in the book I held in my hand and I continued to listen to the speech. I must apologise if I caused a distraction to anybody. Anyway, I am so grateful to be part of this community where we can stand together, pray together and enjoy each other.

Hallelujah....or, in Arabic,  
alhamdulillah

Thank you again,  
**Sabinah**

## Social Centre and Knit, Natter and Stitch Group

The Knit, Natter & Stitch group meet every month for our usual enjoyable session. We are continuing to provide the baby unit at the PRUH with knitted and sewn items; the most popular being cot covers and a wonderful selection of knitted animals. There was a "cross-over" between

the two groups in February when **Sue Entwistle**, a K&N regular, came to join us at the Social Centre with her partner Jon. We were wonder-fully entertained with a presentation entitled "*Page to Stage*" when we were told stories of the development and production of stage musicals, beautifully illustrated with well-known songs from Jon. They will certainly be invited back! Having had to cancel our Chanukah Party in December because of the weather, we could hardly believe it when the snow once again meant our old friends Tom and David were again prevented from coming to BRS. We'll keep trying to get them along – third time lucky maybe!

**The Knit, Natter & Stitch** group will next meet on **Sunday, 2 April** at Barbara's home and the **Social Centre** on **Wednesday 19 April** (10.30 am at the shul).

## Refua Shlema: Get well soon

... to all of our members who are unwell at this time. We wish you a speedy recovery. *If you learn of anyone who is unwell and would appreciate the shul's help, please contact*

***caring@bromleyshul.org.uk***



*The Social Centre celebrated two 90th birthdays on 18 February – those of Maureen Pearlstone and Valerie Holder*

## Remembering Brenda Solts

18 February 1937 – 21 January 2023



Brenda was born in 1937 to Alf Pront, a master tailor, and Cissie Pront, a milliner. They lived fairly comfortably in Stoke Newington until the war began and Alf enlisted as a firefighter, Cissie helping in the fire station. From a very young age Brenda loved movement and dancing and, at the age of five, she became Baby Brenda, part of a troupe that gave concerts to the firemen. All her life she loved dancing and was always the first on the floor, usually dragging her reluctant husband after her.

She was able to pass the then Eleven Plus examination. Although an average student in most subjects, music and the piano were always important to her. She was encouraged by her music teacher, who thought she could be a success as a performer. Unfortunately, her mother suffered a sudden illness, which caused her to have to stay away from school for many months. She continued her schoolwork at home, but was unable to take the GCE exams and she left school at 15 without any qualifications.

As her mother was unable to work due to her illness, Brenda decided she'd have to help with the family income and took a night course in shorthand and typing and general secretarial work and eventually got a job with Eros Studios in Wardour Street. This nurtured her life-long love of film and stage. **Cont. opposite**



When she was nineteen, Brenda was invited by a friend to go with her to a dance at Clapton Jewish Youth Club. She found the members friendly and welcoming, enjoyed the dancing and soon got into conversation with a young man called Stanley. They found they had many things in common, particularly a passion for collecting old-fashioned threepenny bits. Very soon they went on their first date to see 'Lady and the Tramp', a film which was always a large theme during their lives together. During their courtship Stanley was studying but when he qualified in 1958 it was time to get engaged and they married in 1960.

## *Helping to found the shul*

Because Stanley's office was in Lewisham, they realised that they would have to live in South London and moved first to Streatham and when, to their joy, David came along in 1964 and Stanley's office moved to Bromley, they moved to their first Bromley home. At the same time, they were invited to a gathering at the home of the late Dr. John Fry to investigate the feasibility of setting up a Reform Synagogue for the Bromley area. They became founder members and Brenda was very active in the Ladies Guild and the newly-formed Caring Community Committee, making many new friends. She also learned Braille under the tutorship of Edna Elliott and passed the RNIB Proficiency Examination. Her Certificate still hangs at home.

The family was completed in 1968 when they had Andy but Brenda was never one to sit still and just be at home. She opened a successful childrenswear shop in Streatham with her partner Rita and when, after a few years, they sold it, she took a course in Antique British Porcelain and Ceramics and bought and sold at fairs both locally and in London.

She also took a course in restoring china but this needed a kiln and she was a bit put out when she was told that she could not use the kitchen oven for that purpose.

## *Fans, Cows, Elvis and Spurs*

She loved everything that we would call Fine Arts. She was a volunteer for a Fine Arts Society and worked in the National Gallery, The Army Museum, Dulwich Gallery and Greenwich's Fan Museum. At Dulwich, she liked to show visitors the visitors' book signed by Monet and Van Gogh and she fell in love with Albert Kuyp's cows. She enjoyed opera and ballet, becoming a friend of The Royal Opera House so that she could get tickets for rehearsals up in the topmost tier of the balcony. A lot of time was spent watching plays and musicals on stage and in the cinema.

She and Stanley loved to travel. When the children were young they had a holiday home in Majorca, then sold it so they could buy an apartment in Sarasota, Florida. They only went there once a year, but it was a base where they could relax and from which to take tours all around America. On one tour to the Deep South, they visited Graceland, Elvis's house. Brenda is probably the only person ever to have played "Greensleeves" on Elvis's piano. They also tried to go to a different country in most years, as can be seen by the kitchen fridge magnets.

In 1984 they moved into what was then "the New House" in Scotts Lane and she continued her volunteer work, her yearly visit to Sarasota, her other holidays and interest in the arts. She enjoyed most sports, particularly football and tennis, and played tennis well into her late seventies. She supported Tottenham Hotspur and whenever their match was on TV the cry "*Come on you Spurs*" could

be heard throughout the house. Unfortunately, because of the pandemic and lockdown and the onset of Parkinson's, Brenda's latter years were much quieter, but she still wanted to keep in touch with friends and family and to know what was going on in the world. She was admitted to the Princess Royal Hospital on Boxing Day and died there peacefully and painlessly on 21 January to the devastation of her family and friends.

**Stanley Solts**

## *One more "double act"*



*Rabbi Laura and Judith French shared the Bimah on a Shabbat morning in March when Judith was spoke about her parents. She focuses on her late husband, Roger, on page 12.*

## *New Home : Good Wishes*

**Bob**, our community pages editor, does a great job, but he seems to have missed something important this time. After living for more than 61 years in Bromley South, he has moved to Beckenham. Let's all wish him the very best!

## *Community is about sharing*

As well as all the simchas already mentioned, the community was invited in recent months to mark big birthdays with Lew Britz and Matthew de Lange and the baby naming of Jasper, son of Sam and Eva and brother of Arthur. This had been delayed by Covid, so he was hardly a "baby". Matthew and Lew might well say the same about being 70 and 90. It was a delight to share the occasions with them and their families. Photos are on p 15.

# FORMING THE SHUL'S IDENTITY

## Named Rooms at BRS

Last year, Larry Shall explained a technique used by Moses to inspire the Israelites as they became a people: using stories that they could identify with to remind them who they were and where they'd come from, giving them a sense of shared history as a basis for their new community.

Here in Bromley, stories of how our community was formed and what gives it its unique identity are all around us: on the memorial wall; in items made or donated by individuals; and, spelled out on plaques beside framed photos, in the stories of people for whom some of our rooms are named.

**Pauline Jeffree** – what Pauline did for our community would fill pages! Most particularly, she was tireless in leading our Caring Community, taught in the cheder, ran the Knit and Natter group... the list goes on. But probably most of us remember most clearly her never-ending care and concern for others and her own modesty and dislike of attention despite considerable health and mobility challenges. Simply one of the most endearing and loving people most of us have met. She died in her 80s in 2021 and was one of the first to be buried in our own cemetery at Kemnal Park.

As you enter BRS, you see the education block named after our founder and first president, **Mervin Elliott**, a formidable character whom some of us feared but all respected. Mervin taught children, inspired adults and rejoiced in later years in his "special relationship" with Jonah, in whose book he found a new message for us every Yom Kippur.



*Mervin Elliott in 1969*

**Kittie Lancaster** was the grandmother of our long-time member Matthew de Lange. He wanted her name remembered in this synagogue, near to Lewisham, where she grew up and lived in the early 20C. Her father, a tailor in Deptford, dedicated the ner tamid (eternal light) for their synagogue in New Cross. Sadly, that building is now used for other purposes and the family's house no longer exists.

**Eva Byk**, who'd survived wartime peril as a child in Hungary, was for decades a fearless fighter for the cause of Soviet Jews. She moved generations of BRS cheder pupils with talks about her own youth, as well as, for years, taking groups from BRS to central London Yom Hashoah ceremonies before we developed our own service. She became BRS Chair and a vigorous advocate of the Social Centre. As a physiotherapist, she helped many members in very practical ways.

**Josef Hausmann**, a dedicated teacher who perished in the Holocaust, was the father of our late member **Gertrud Roberts**. A keen vegetarian cook, Gertrud helped to found the Social Centre and, even when virtually blind, encouraged others to try her recipes and share their own in books she got published at BRS,

while campaigning to establish a library in her father's memory.

*Current BRS families come from backgrounds just as varied, if not more so. Looking at our founding generation, how can we not recognise the strength of the fabric that's formed when so many strands come together? Welcome, all of you who've come to embrace our legacy.*

**Matthew de Lange/ Judi Sheffrin**



## Outside our four walls

*As well as finding strength within our community, BRS is enriched by working with the local Council of Christians and Jews and Bromley Three Faiths Group.*

**CCI's** January meeting, held at BRS, posed the question, "**Over the past five years, what have we learnt about each other and ourselves?**" Stephen Weil says:

Rev Bernhard Schunemann, of St. Stephen's, Dulwich, spoke about a ten-day seminar for Christian clergy and church leaders, at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem that offered new insights for himself and the other participants, several of whom were Black Church leaders, who brought their historical African experience to the discussions. The seminar made Bernhard aware of the very great variety of Jewish communities that were wiped out for ever in the Holocaust. He recommended these outstanding lectures:

A lecture on you tube by Dr Jesper Svartvik:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPDet5ajZSc&t=13s> and

The story of Dr Weksler in this blog: <https://boruachelohim.com/tag/jakub-weksler-waszkinel/>

*item cont. on next page*

# Learning about each other and working together

Bernhard was asked how what he and others had learned would be spread to communities at home. He responded that Holocaust Memorial Services were important in this work. This was apparent during HMD the following week.

## Co-existence and Trust

Robert Weaver, who has been actively involved with CCJ locally for 30 years, quoted the two main speakers at the recent CCJ AGM. Julie Siddiqi had spoken on “**small things necessary to build trust**”, and looking for “a wider space” to find common interest, while Ed Kessler gave the example of **Convivencia** in medieval Spain, the living together of Muslims, Christians and Jews.

*For further background:*

<https://togetherwethrive.co.uk/about>

<https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/people/dr-edward-kessler-mbe>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convivencia>

## Practical work together

BRS's Flora Spiegel spoke about **Bromley Three Faiths Group**, (B3FG) founded in 2016, involving Bromley churches, Bromley's mosque, Al-Emaan Centre in Keston, and Bromley Reform Synagogue. Its focus is primarily on **practical work**: refugee support including welcome packs (see next column, shared meals, and an annual peace walk. B3FG also hosts regular Zoom discussions about aspects of our shared Abrahamic faiths – all who are interested are very welcome to join in – and periodic in-person interfaith events such as visits to our various places of worship.

## Meditation

Gail Cotton introduced us to multid denominational meditation through the local group meeting weekly in St George's, Perry Vale.

Gail explained the Christian tradition of meditation, going back to John Cassian, active in Marseilles shortly after the year 400, and how this tradition had been restored in the mid-20C by a British-Irish priest, John Main, who recommended the use of the mantra “Mar-an-ath-a” (“Come Lord” in Aramaic). You can find out more at <https://wccm.org/>

## THREE FAITHS WORK IN ACTION



“One of the practical things B3FG does,” says Matthew de Lange, “is to provide provisions for refugee families when they arrive. In March we delivered 5 bags of shopping for each of 9 refugee families arriving in Lewisham from Afghanistan - food, toiletries and cleaning materials.

*The picture shows Linda with the mega-shop sorted into equal amounts for each family. And, yes, we did manage to get a small contribution to the cost from the Sainsbury's manager! The group also, of course, organises the ongoing collection for the Bromley Foodbank, appeals for which appear in e-Light every week.”*

Details of the collections for refugees and foodbank from Matthew: 07711 599488 and there's more about Bromley 3FG at <https://bromley3faithsgroup.org/>

One of the conclusions of the discussion was an interest in knowing more about local inter-denominational activity. One Christian participant asked how to understand more about Judaism by attending a local Synagogue service, and we were pleased to welcome him just a few weeks later at BRS. Similarly, after a B3FG meeting, a wonderful letter was received from one of the participants, which we reproduce in this issue with her permission. More about local CCJ from Hon Sec Stephen Weil at 020 8299 4141 / [stephenweil6@gmail.com](mailto:stephenweil6@gmail.com)

## Advocating for Jews

Joe Millis reflects on the past year at the Board of Deputies of British Jews. “It's been quite the mixed year [and] very difficult to see how any kind of consensus can emerge on a range of issues, from interfaith relations to Israel and everything in between.

I have been involved with others from the Progressive movement and many younger Deputies in trying to get the leadership to be a little more critical of the Netanyahu-Ben Gvir regime – or even just a bit more circumspect.

We had one success when the Board “utterly condemned” now-Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich for his contemptuous call to erase a West Bank Palestinian village. It went on to say that it hopes “that this and similar comments will be publicly repudiated by responsible voices in the governing coalition.” So far, no repudiation by responsible voices or otherwise, so one can hope that the Board will resist the temptation of engaging any minister or official in the Israeli government. One can but hope.

*Cont. on page 14*



# Remembering two wonderful music makers

and finding ways to help others stricken by the “brutal” condition that took them from us



Nadia Gilman in 2015

Nadia's son Paul began his reflections by quoting Rumi, the 13C Sufi poet who, he said, “Summed up mum's attitude to life better than I ever could.”

## The Guest House

*“This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the  
malice, meet them at the door  
laughing, and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.”*

He then spoke of Nadia's tenacity, “the middle name mum never had,” and her curiosity, which drove her learning but was latterly somewhat sated vicariously through him, Jane and the grandchildren, Francesca and Benedict. She really enjoyed a good chat, to the extent that her

daily routine included calls from him, Jane and Bob that were as wide ranging as their lives and interests and certainly never dull. Nadia took great pride in all their achievements but no credit for them. She was equally supportive and proud of each of them, he said.

Fairness, equality and a sense of injustice were at the core of her belief system. She didn't just bemoan matters; she welcomed them in and did something about them, being prepared to cross boundaries to put things right. Who could forget the six-choir fundraiser that she arranged for Orbis, the flying eye hospital? It involved choirs from churches, BRS and a school. She offered selfless support to so many people from so many spheres of her life, said Paul, and this, with her uncompromising love for others, grit, curiosity, unstinting generosity and enduring fairness were a guide to life that that he hoped to emulate.

*Nadia's nominated charities were Orbis, Medicins Sans Frontiers and St. Christopher's Hospice.*

## “A Concert For Roger” What was that all about?

**Judith Parks explains:** My wonderful husband Roger passed away on 29 January 2021, thirteen days after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He was 65 and still had so much to give to the world. He was a gifted singer, a warm-hearted friend and a loving and caring father to Joe and Joshua. I miss him painfully and I still can't believe he's gone. His family and friends came together recently in the beautiful Guild Church of St Katharine Cree in the City of London to celebrate a life of joyful music-making. Our programme included works by Rachmaninov and Dvorak

as well as a new piece for solo marimba written and performed by Joe in memory of his father.

Now, as a community, we are mourning the recent sudden loss of our lovely Nadia Gilman from the same terrible illness.

Pancreatic cancer is brutal. By the time we knew he had it, no treatment could have saved Roger. He'd had repeated blood tests over the previous weeks because something was clearly wrong, but nothing was ever picked up. Around 80% of pancreatic cancer patients are not diagnosed until the cancer is at an advanced stage. If you know someone with pancreatic cancer, then the likelihood is that you know someone who is dying from it, or has died.

**Research into pancreatic cancer has been underfunded for decades – it receives only 3% of the UK cancer research budget, three times less than what's spent on breast cancer.**

The charity Pancreatic Cancer UK aims to change this. Its Early Diagnosis Research Alliance is working to develop a simple test that doctors can use to diagnose people earlier and save lives. They are close to an exciting breakthrough: the first effective test to detect pancreatic cancer in the blood. Preliminary results show that the test is getting greater than 95% accuracy in early trials.

We are fundraising for Pancreatic Cancer UK's groundbreaking research because 24 people are still dying every day from pancreatic cancer, and 24 families torn apart with perhaps as little warning as we had. Please help us fund this vital work. You can donate at

<https://fundraise.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/fundraisers/judithparks/a-concert-for-roger>

*With heartfelt thanks to you all,*  
**Judith, Joe and Joshua Parks**

# Pesach-plus thoughts from Reform Judaism

*Rabbi Mark Goldsmith sees parallels between the Pesach Hagaddah and the High Holyday Machzor*

**"The Pesach Hagaddah,"** says Rabbi Goldsmith, "may be the most popular single book for Jews, so many homes have multiple copies. We can get very fond of our Hagaddot. They remind us of the specialness of Seder nights with family and friends. You may have a selection of them at home.

## **Pop-up sea parting**

"Maybe you have that classic children's Haggadah, first published in Berlin in 1933, with the pop-out pictures for children and the tab which you pulled to part the Red Sea. Your Seder may be based on our RJ Hagaddah, Haggateinu, published in 2014 ([www.reformjudaism.org.uk/publications/](http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/publications/)), which tells our Jewish story of liberation through plays that get everyone participating.

## **Wine stains of past times**

"One beautiful aspect of the Hagaddah is that this is a book that is designed to be used, not just treasured on a bookshelf. The wear of their use tells stories of Sedarim enjoyed, members of the family no longer with us who once handled them, and maybe the ways in which we have enhanced Pesach with extra readings tucked into their pages. I love the stains from the drops of wine that you can find on the page where the plagues are enumerated. I have a facsimile copy of the Barcelona Hagaddah originally made in 1340, and on the plague page, I am sure I can see the wine stains of centuries past!

## **Drama and meaning**

"The Hagaddah itself creates the drama of the festival and makes Pesach come to life. It passes on the values of freedom and the active liberation of oppressed

peoples as a duty to ourselves and our future generations. It links us to our previous generations, their struggles, and their triumphs, which enable us to live as free Jews today. It paints for us our picture of God as our partner in liberation and the continuation of our people. **Who knows One?** The Jews whose Hagaddot are with them year after year.

## **Study sources for the soul**

"Our Movement will soon be publishing **another book that every Jewish home should own.** This will be the ninth edition of **Days of Awe, our Machzor**, the prayer book for **Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.** It will create the drama and meaning of these special days every year. It will include **study material from an extraordinary diversity of sources** to enhance your soul's appreciation of the High Holydays. It will be very **clear** to use and **accessible** to those less familiar with Synagogue and Hebrew.

## **Contemporary and classic**

It will give the prayer choice throughout the Days of Awe through contemporary and classical passages alongside the traditional prayers. On these days when we consider our own behaviour and actions it will help bring us close to the concerns of today's world. It will be ready for us all to use for High Holydays 2024 with plenty of time to prepare. We Jews have been called the 'People of the Book' for many centuries. In truth, we are the people of the Jewish library who use our many books to start and fuel our Jewish journeys through life." **BRS is watching RJ's progress. We will obtain some copies as soon as possible.**



## **YOM HA'ATZMAUT Celebration at BRS**

Come and join us to mark Israel Independence Day on **TUESDAY 25 APRIL, 6.30 - 9pm**  
**6.30pm: Israeli food** in the Garden Room; **7 - 8pm** in person and on Zoom: **"The Ever Changing Situation on the Ground"** with Rabbi Michael Marmur (Board, Rabbis for Human Rights)  
**8 - 9pm: "Israel and Me"**, a discussion led by Rabbi Laura and Margaret Brearley. Please contact Jennie if you are coming in person, so we can cater accordingly, at [admin@bromleyshul.org.uk](mailto:admin@bromleyshul.org.uk)  
Zoom:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82829812684>  
Donation for food: £5

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## **Cheder's fun for everyone, not just children, at BRS!**

Earlier in this issue you read about the utter joy that is a Sunday morning in Bromley when Cheder and Gan are in full swing. If you'd like to get involved as a teacher or helper, on a regular basis or on special occasions, please contact the **Head Teacher, Frankie.** You'll also have seen that the parents help to run some of the fantastic – often food-based – events. **Hooray Cheder** can always do with more help. All the contact details are on page 14, overleaf.

## PESACH SAMEACH HAPPY PASSOVER



**BROMLEY REFORM SYNAGOGUE 28 Highland Road, BR1 4AD**  
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**Chair:** Michelle Brooks Evans ([chair@bromleyshul.org.uk](mailto:chair@bromleyshul.org.uk))

**Vice Presidents:** Hadassah Britz, Dianne Mathews,  
Sally Rosebery, Bob Symonds, David Zerihan

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY (in the event of a bereavement)**  
Janet Posner (07841 373309) or Stephen Weil (07764 475209)

### *More magical memories from recent months*

*Michelle mentions in her View from the Chair the number of young people representing BRS at RSY camps these days. Here is last December's cohort.*



### **Board of Deputies** *Joe Millis's reflection continued from p. 11*

... And one can but hope that there will be a little more democracy and accountability at the BoD, with proper debates and votes on policy. Currently, these are about as rare as a soup chicken's teeth.

One good point in the political arena is the fact that there now seem to be closer relations with the Labour party. Board President Marie van der Zyl (now OBE) gave a very good speech when the party was taken out of "special measures", imposed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission after the Corbyn years.

I have been trying to arrange a visit to Bromley, possibly in late June or July, by Marie, who is standing down next year, to hear our views and answer our questions on whether the Board can say it represents British Jews when there are so many diverse views and clashes of language and ideology.

I intend to stand down from this role at the end of the 3-year Board term in 2024. If you want to discuss with me what being a deputy entails, please don't hesitate to contact me through the BRS office.

**Please send contributions for Summer HighLight by 15 June 2023 to:**

**[comms@bromleyshul.org.uk](mailto:comms@bromleyshul.org.uk)** If you have an idea for a regular or one-off feature or a skill that you can bring to the production of HighLight or its online weekly companion, e-Light, please tell us at the same address.



# BRS Babies, Birthdays and Bonhomie

## *Just a few recent BRS celebrations*



Gannies\* marked two first birthdays (of Ella and Ayla) and a ninetieth, that of grandma Maureen (seated, far left). For the uninitiated, "Gannies" is not a typo but refers to those involved in the Gan, or kindergarten section of our Chai School ([cheder@bromleyshul.org.uk](mailto:cheder@bromleyshul.org.uk))



Meanwhile, Maureen's contemporary, **Lew** (above with daughters Ruth, Miriam, Naomi and Hannah and wife Hadassah) enjoyed a celebratory Kiddush with extended family and young **Matthew**, below, marked his 70th with three generations of de Langes - sons David and Sam, granddaughter Pearl and wife Linda.



*If you go down to the shul today... colourful characters you might meet: Clown Mariella Russell and "Auntie" Sue Bowyer, spotted at Purim and pre-Chanukah events*



**Jasper** (in green top), mentioned earlier is also part of a three-generation BRS family. He and his parents Sam and Eva and brother Arthur were joined by aunt Lucy, uncles Henry and Joe, great uncle Tony and grandmother Susan Oliver-Edwards.



**To organise a special Kiddush for a simcha, to remember somebody, or just to be sociable, please contact our wonderful Kiddush co-ordinator and cake-maker extraordinaire, Janvier, [jndpalmer@gmail.com](mailto:jndpalmer@gmail.com). She is currently seeking **helpers for the communal seder** as well as the regular kiddush rota. Do get in touch. It's rewarding, fun and **much appreciated**.**



  
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