

Self-image to be tested

It was all decorum and politeness at an election forum Sunday sponsored by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and SUCCESS, the United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society.

The comparative decorousness of the event – although interrupted at one point by an impassioned outburst related to the mistreatment of indigenous peoples – will likely be an anomaly as the neck-and-neck campaign proceeds. Desperate measures will likely be employed as Liberals and Conservatives battle for a majority – and as New Democrats and Greens spar in what seems destined to be a down-ticker race of its own.

And all of this is playing out against the potentially upending news that the People’s Party of Canada’s Maxime Bernier has been admitted to the national debates on Oct. 7 and 10 organized by the official Leaders’ Debate Commission.

The new party – started by the breakaway former Conservative from Quebec – has attracted a range of malcontents, including extremists of various sorts being involved in or peripheral to his party. While the four “mainstream” parties have all tread relatively lightly around super-charged racial issues, Bernier – and perhaps less predictably, his fellow 337 candidates across the country – seems prone to exploit and exacerbate racial divisions.

On this and many other issues that will form the meat and potatoes of the rest of the campaign, Canadians will now hear the perspective of Canada’s answer to the populism that has taken root in the United States, Europe and else-

where. The degree to which these ideas and Bernier’s rhetoric catches on will tell us much about our country and ourselves. Canadians have liked to imagine that we are immune to the phenomenon of xenophobia that seems to be gaining ground globally. But, then, we haven’t had, in recent history, a chance to vote for a party that represents such ideas.

One of the things that has been notable during the aftermath of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s recently revealed repeated donning of deeply problematic costumes, including blackface/brownface, is what seems like a divergence between the official voices and the unofficial voices.

Elected officials utter pieties about respect for diversity. Representatives of multicultural and anti-racism organizations speak of challenges and opportunities. Yet, in radio call-in programs and online comments – those voices of “ordinary” people – the responses seem quite different. Many complain that the blackface controversy is all a sideshow that diminishes focus on issues like the economy and the environment. Others suggest a tempest in a teapot or political correctness run amok.

In a few days, Canadians will get our first look at all the party leaders side by side, including Andrew Scheer and Jagmeet Singh, who remain somewhat unknown quantities, and Bernier, who will bring some genuinely outside-the-establishment perspectives to the debate. How far Bernier pushes the envelope – and how Canadians respond to his ideas – will tell us just how accurate our self-perception as an open, tolerant society really is. ■

When Afula road went quiet

VICTOR NEUMAN

*In this eight-part series, the author recounts his life in Israel around the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The events and people described are real but, for reasons of privacy, the names are fictitious.*

Part 2: The War Begins

Sometimes, war begins with a whimper and not a bang. It was Oct. 6, 1973. I was back on the kibbutz that I had been on with Suzanne, except Suzanne had never returned from Paris.

I was in the banana fields, working alone on the irrigation system, when I began to feel a strangeness in the air. At first, I couldn’t put my finger on what was different. I was alone – just me and my tractor – but that was nothing new. The bananas were not ready for harvesting, so no one else was supposed to be around. The pruning of new shoots was over with and the stripping of dead leaves had been done a couple of weeks before.

Not being able to determine what was bothering me in that moment, I went back to pondering the meaning of my life. I had been to Israel on a previous trip, spent a year or so on three different kibbutzim, done archeology in the Negev at a site called Tel Beersheva, worked on construction of a chemical pipeline near Arad, gone back to Canada to get my master’s in English literature, and now I was back in Israel, at the age of 28. I still had no clue as to what I wanted to do. Go back to Canada? Teach English at the University of British Columbia? Stay in Israel? Become a member of the kibbutz?

Skewing my thought process was my relationship with a kibbutz Sabra named Tamar. By all I hold dear, Tamar was the most beautiful creature I had ever laid eyes on. When I met her, I was gob-smacked and smitten. When I found out she kept an Uzi in her flat, I was gob-smacked, smitten – and careful. She had become an officer during her two years of military service. On her bookcase, there was a photo of her looking rather sternly at her platoon. They were standing stiffly at attention while she inspected their weapons. Definitely not a gal to be trifled with.

Complicating things more was the fact that Tamar was 26 and the first child born on the kibbutz after it was founded in 1949. She was the darling of the kibbutz and, at the same time, a big concern to every-

body. After all, she was already 26 and, by the standards of the day, she was on the cusp of becoming an elderly single. She had a problem common to many kibbutz youths. Who was there to get it on with? Our kibbutz, like many others, had what’s called a *beit yeladim* (children’s house). All babies that are weaned are taken and put in the children’s house; there, they are raised until they are of high school age. They visit with their parents frequently but, at the end of the day, they return to their communal home to sleep and live. The result is that they grow up feeling that their peers are like their brothers and sisters. Romantic feelings are hard to come by and their best chance of finding a partner is to match up with somebody from outside the kibbutz.

The kibbutzniks liked me. I worked hard. I had a university education. I always volunteered when extra work needed doing and I had applied for membership. Everybody was pulling for me and Tamar. I told my kibbutz friend Aaron that my dating Tamar was still a thing in its early stages. He was having none of it. To make his point more emphatic, he switched to English and called me by my kibbutz nickname, Kanadi. “No, no, no, Kanadi. You marry 26!” It was a romance in a goldfish bowl but I didn’t mind. She was good to me.

When my mind returned to what was happening in the banana fields, it hit me. The constant hum of traffic on the Afula road was missing. This road was a major corridor just below our fields and it was constantly abuzz with trucks, tractors and cars. Israelis called it the “Ruler Road.” As they put it, “It is straight as any school ruler and it even has a hole in the end – Afula.” (There was never much respect for the town of Afula.) But now the road was silent. I drove the tractor to the top of a hill to get a better look and was surprised to see the road deserted. Something was going on.

Suddenly, there was a horrific racket from above. A helicopter gunship roared overhead, heading straight up the Afula road at just above treetop level. It was so close I could see the barrels of guns bristling from every port on its side. In an-



The author was in the banana fields, working on the irrigation system, when the war started.

other second, it was gone. Then, a second gunship barreled through. Same height and same direction. I started to worry.

I hopped on my tractor and booted it back to the kibbutz. Same story all along the way. No traffic on the roads. Nobody working any of the fields. Nobody walking around. Just me. As I drove into the parking lot, the roads and walkways were deserted. It was as if a mysterious virus had devastated the earth and I was the only one left. I was starting to feel like I was living in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

Then, I heard voices coming from the dining hall, so I walked in that direction. When I entered, everyone was there. The voices had dropped off and now there was only one voice dominating. It was Gidon, our designated commander.

Gidon was a recent immigrant and a South African Jew. It never surprised me that he would be in charge of our defence. Every South African immigrant I met in Israel was trained in the military. Not by Israel but by South Africa. The British won the Boer War but the Afrikaners were running the show and they were determined to never let the blacks get the upper hand. It seemed that most South Africans knew one end of a gun from the other, even the many who were disgusted with the brutality of apartheid and had left the country. So, while most Jews immigrating to Israel were novices when it came to the art of war and had to be extensively trained, the South African Jews I met had come prepared.

Gidon’s voice wasn’t the loudest I’d ever heard but, in the hush of that room, it was loud enough. Thankfully, his Hebrew was as far along as mine and I understood everything he said: “... and there will be no

Know someone in this photo?

In a regular series, the *Jewish Independent* features a “mystery photo” from the Jewish Western Bulletin Collection at the Jewish Museum and Archives of British Columbia. If you know any of the people in this image or anything about the event depicted, contact the museum at 604-257-5199 or archives@jewishmuseum.ca. To find out who has been identified in the photo, visit jewishmuseum.ca/blog.



Two women dancing, 1965.

more swimming in the pool. The swimming pool is now our emergency drinking water supply. All tractors and vehicles are to be filled up with fuel and oil. All tractors and vehicles are to be scattered around the kibbutz and not parked in one place. The bomb shelters are no longer discothèques. The kids have to clear out all the records, strobe lights and disco stuff.

"Before the day is over, I want white lines painted on all the shelter pathways. We are blacking out the kibbutz and we have to be able to find our way to the shelters in the dark. No lights on after dark in the rooms unless there is black plastic taped to the windows. Patrols by the *shomer leila* [night guard] around the kibbutz perimeter are to be carried out seriously. I don't want to hear of any guards hanging out in the kitchen having food and coffee. They can pack their lunches and eat them as they do their rounds. No, we can't do the patrols. They'll just end up shooting one another. That is all. We are at war. Are we understanding? Then go do your jobs."

I looked across the room at Tamar. She looked

back and her expression was serious. We were at war. (Next Time: Dating, Israeli Style) ♫

**Victor Neuman** was born in the former Soviet Union, where his family sought refuge after fleeing Poland during the Second World War. The family immigrated to Canada in 1948 and Neuman grew up in the Greater Vancouver area. He attended the University of British Columbia and obtained a BA and MA with majors in English literature and creative writing. Between 1968 and 1974, he made two trips to Israel, one of which landed him on a kibbutz at the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Upon his return to Canada, he studied Survey Technology at BCIT and went on to a career of designing highways for the Province of British Columbia. When he retired, he reconnected with his roots in creative writing and began writing scripts for Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir concerts and articles for the Jewish Independent. Neuman and his wife, Tammy, live in southeast Vancouver and enjoy the company of friends, their extensive extended family and their four sons.

## FEDtalks from page 1

our community to take care of the earth by respecting people, land and Jewish tradition."

"Eating is an ethical act," Cooper said. By engaging community members "from seed to harvest," the organization reduces the stigma of receiving "donated" foods.

"It's not a handout," she said. People are involved in creating their own food sustainability.

Cooper's journey of exploration began during a trip in Nelson, B.C., a story she shared in an article the *Independent* ran in advance of the event. (See [jewishindependent.ca/b-c-inspires-activists-work](http://jewishindependent.ca/b-c-inspires-activists-work).)

Also at FEDtalks, Isaac "Bougie" Herzog – who chose to sit out not one but two Israeli elections this year – spoke about his role as head of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Herzog is Israel's former leader of the opposition and former head of the Labour party. In contextualizing his role as chairperson of the world's largest Jewish organization, an agency that has been central in creating and building the Jewish state, he spoke of continuing a family legacy.

His grandfather, Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog, who was the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, went on a rescue mission in 1946 to find hidden Jewish children in churches and monasteries throughout Europe, bringing thousands of them to Palestine. Herzog's father, Chaim, who went on to become president of Israel, served with the U.K. army, landed in Normandy, fought in the Battle of the Rhine and was among the first to enter the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Abba Eban, the legendary Israeli diplomat and statesman, was an uncle.

"I'm fulfilling the orders of my forbearers," said Herzog, who was introduced by Karen James, immediate past board chair of the Jewish Federation and a member of the board of the Jewish Agency. The *Independent* also interviewed Herzog in advance of his visit. (Read the story at [jewishindependent.ca/building-jewish-future](http://jewishindependent.ca/building-jewish-future).)

The most emotional presentation of the night came last. Dr. Gillian Presner recounted how she was invited to join the Federation movement's National Young Leadership Cabinet. When she was told the commitment was five years, she replied: "That's the rest of my life."

Presner was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2016, while pregnant with her third daughter. Nine days after the baby was born, she suffered a stroke.

Despite the challenges of raising a very young

family while enduring terminal brain cancer, she accepted the invitation to join the cabinet because, she said, "I refuse to die before I'm dead."

She added: "I am full of hope, but I am also a realist."

She understands that she needs to leave a legacy of vibrant memories to her daughters – the family took a trip to Israel together, certain it would be her only chance – but she also knows that her daughters will "have to learn about me by hearing about what Mommy did."

By continuing to devote herself to philanthropic causes, she is "showing my daughters what I truly value."

Ezra Shanken, chief executive officer of the Jewish Federation, closed the evening, noting "our most precious commodity we have here is our time."

Alex Cristall, chair of the board of Federation, welcomed the audience, acknowledging in particular 150 people in their 20s and 30s whose presence was made possible through a contribution by Jonathon and Karly Leipsic. Jonathon Leipsic is the annual campaign chair for the second consecutive year.

"It is a pleasure to have you," Cristall said. "We need you."

Jonathon Leipsic spoke of Theodor Herzl's dream of Jewish self-determination and noted: "Our generation has never known a generation without emancipated Jewish freedom."

He urged the audience to go to YouTube and find Chaim Herzog's speech to the United Nations in 1975 against the motion that equated Zionism with racism.

"It will send shivers down your spine," he said.

Members of Parliament Joyce Murray, Don Davies, Jody Wilson-Raybould, Randeep Sarai and Hedy Fry were in attendance, the latter of whom spoke from the podium and brought greetings from the prime minister. Also present were Selena Robinson, British Columbia's minister of municipal affairs and housing; George Heyman, minister of environment and climate change strategy; George Chow, minister of state for trade; and Anne Kang, member of the Legislative Assembly. Vancouver city councilors Melissa De Genova, Colleen Hardwick, Sarah Kirby-Yung and Pete Fry attended, as did the consuls general of France, Germany and the United States, and Vancouver Police Chief Adam Palmer.

O Canada and Hatikvah were sung by the King David High School Choir. ♫

# Obituary

## SHEILA AUSTIN (NÉE TOBAN)

We are deeply saddened to announce the death of Sheila Austin (née Toban) in Toronto on Sept. 10, 2019, at the age of 87, after a long life lived with generosity, empathy and respect for all people.

Sheila was born in Vancouver, B.C., on Aug. 11, 1932, the third of four daughters of Harry and Mona Toban. She earned a bachelor of social work from the University of British Columbia and then an MSW from Boston University before returning to Vancouver to practise as a psychiatric social worker.

She put her career aside to raise her three daughters, during which time she was an active volunteer, specializing in the development of school libraries. Later, she returned to social work, at Riverview and St. Vincent hospitals, making a difference in many lives.

In 1980, Sheila realized what had been a dream since listening to *Hawaii Calls* on the radio as a child, and moved to Honolulu for a decade, where she became a student of Hawaiian culture and language, in addition to continuing her social work practice. Eventually, she moved back to Vancouver to be closer to her aging father, and was honoured with the Woman of Valour award in 1997 for her service to the Jewish community. Her later years saw the blossoming of her astounding talents as a chocolate maker and cake decorator; her birthday cakes for her precious grandchildren were works of art.

Sheila was predeceased by her parents and her sisters Rosalie and Sandra. She leaves her sister Phyllis; her daughters Edie, Shari and Barbara (Trevor); her ex-husband Jack Austin; grandchildren Max, Annalisa, Gabriel and Isaac, Aaron and Sophie, and Daniel and Alexander; and many relatives and friends.

Our deepest gratitude to caregivers Karen, Yemme and the team at the Baycrest palliative care ward. Funeral services were held in Toronto. Donations in Sheila's memory may be made to Kids Help Phone or the charity of your choice. ♫





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**MONA  
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Oct. 6, 2019  
at 1:30 p.m.  
at the  
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1721 Willingdon Ave.  
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**DEATH ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**BEVERLY FREEMAN**  
SEPT. 21

