The Walter Kaufmann Story
The Exile Who Invented All-India Radio’s Signature Tune

Rest in Peace, Uncle Jackie
Personal Reflection on the Passing of Lt Gen JFR Jacob
Asian Jewish Life is a celebration of the diversity of the Jewish experience in Asia as well as of Asian Jewry.

We publish a quarterly print magazine that is also available online that seeks to:

- Connect the separate pockets of Jewish life throughout the region by creating a contemporary creative outlet to share thoughts, ideas and promote unity through memoirs, poetry, short fiction, historical pieces, book and film reviews, viewpoint articles, artist profiles, photography and graphic art.
- Help preserve the long history that Jewish life has imprinted on the region.
- Break down common stereotypes about where Jews hail from or what we look like.
- Build bridges with local communities by sharing our celebration of Jewish life in the region with the aim of leading to a broader understanding of the richness of the Jewish tradition and culture.
- Help other Jewish non-profit organizations with a regional focus to grow along with us.
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Dear Readers:

Welcome to the 17th issue of Asian Jewish Life. As I write this letter I am preparing to attend the World Jewish Congress Plenary in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Living in the Far East, Jews find themselves somewhat ‘off the radar’ and a bit disconnected from the major arteries of Jewish life. I am excited for yet another opportunity to help better connect our communities with the greater Jewish world and also for the chance to share with them some of the unique contributions that Jews have made in our region.

In this issue, we will take a general tour of the region touching on Shanghai, Hong Kong, Japan and India. As it happens, many of the stories touch on World War II, but the experience of Jews in the region was very different from those in Europe.

As promised, we have featured a piece that focuses on Jews who sought refuge in India during the Holocaust. Dr. Shalva Weil brings us The Walter Kaufmann Story- The Exile Who Invented All-India Radio’s Signature Tune.

Also out of India, Navras Jaat Afreedi brings us The Jews of Bollywood-How Jews Established the World’s Largest Film Industry. It is a wonderfully detailed account of the Jewish contribution to the industry. The piece is enhanced by incredible photographic postcards from Stephanie Comfort’s extensive collection.

But the story that absolutely has to be told in this issue is that of the passing of India’s Lt Gen JFR Jacob. While the story predominated Indian and Jewish media in the days that followed his death, it was a Facebook post that touched me. When someone in the public eye, in this case a decorated Indian war hero, it is somewhat easy to dissociate them from their private life. Jael Silliman, an academic, author and friend, posted a simple message along with her links to various media articles, “Rest in Peace, Uncle Jackie”. A very special thank you to Jael for sharing her personal story in Rest in Peace, Uncle Jackie - Personal Reflection on the Passing of Lt Gen JFR Jacob.

The Cover Art is the work of talented Israeli, Bene Israel artist Michael Kolet. Thank you to Nissim Moses for introducing us to Michael Kolet’s art and for your continuous efforts to preserve and promote Bene Israel culture.

We have also included Autobiography of Magen Abraham Synagogue, Ahmedabad. This beautiful poem, by Edward Rubens, is an emotional look at the significance of the Magen Abraham Synagogue. Magen Abraham, built in 1934, is the only synagogue in Ahmedabad, India.

Moving from India and into China, we have two Writer’s Desk pieces that perfectly compliment one another. Faith Beckerman Goldman shares her husband’s story of a boyhood spent as a refugee in Shanghai in A Journey of a Thousand Miles - The Start of My Shanghai Bob’s Story. In presenting the story of her quest to tell her late husband Robert Goldman’s story, she references his friendship with Fredy Seidel. We have also chosen to feature Fredy Seidel’s first person account of those tumultuous years in Journey to the Other Side of the World. Fredy Seidel’s forthcoming memoir, Shanghai, Before and After the Fall - Caught Between Two Chairs, will be published late summer or early fall 2016 by iUniverse.

And on the topic of memoir, our author interview features Tracy Slater, author of the beautifully written memoir The Good Shufu. The interview, On Writing, Love and Judaism in Japan, was conducted by Melissa Uchiyama whose own touching and intimate piece was featured in Issue 16.

Book Reviews have been contributed by Susan Blumberg-Kason. No Wasted Words is a unique look at two very different Jewish experiences in China.

And lastly, we present A Look at Hong Kong’s Military Cemeteries - An Effort to Record Lost Jewish History. I contributed to this research along with Howard Elias, Marc Ellison and Alistaire Hayman. This is by no means a complete history. It is part of an ongoing collaborative effort to remember and record our community’s unique history.

As always, thank you for reading. Hoping you find much joy in the month of Adar.

Erica Lyons
Editor-in-Chief
Michael Kolet was born in Nasik, Maharashtra, India in 1948. Tragically, his mother passed away just after his birth. He was cared for by his father’s sister, his Aunt Abigail.

From the age of six he was taught drawing by his father who was an accomplished artist in his own rights. At the age of eleven he won an award for his drawing of a picture using Rangoli (colored powder) in a School Art/ Drawing Competition. The subject of his piece was Moshe Dayan.

When he was just thirteen, the family was struck by another tragedy. His father was killed in a traffic accident and he and his two sisters were left orphaned. Fortunately, his aunt continued to care and look after them. The family then moved to Bombay and Michael continued his education at the Sir Eli Kadoorie School in Mazagon, Bombay. Upon completion of his schooling, he studied at the Ort Polytechnic in Bombay to become a Mechanic, Lathe & Milling Machine Operator and he further trained as a draughtsman. He immigrated to Israel in 1974.

His love for art was never far from his heart. Having worked in Ramle in a prison in a technical position, his creative talent was recognised and he was soon asked to be an instructor for creative art and aesthetic decoration in the jail service. He was later employed in a civilian position for the IDF as an instructor in the arts.

His body of work is reflective of his transcultural identity and his sense of place. It explores a number of complex and diverse themes and demonstrates his willingness to employ a wide variety of artistic techniques. Michael has displayed his paintings at several exhibitions in Israel.
Mental Thought Process & Consequences
The S.S. Scharnhorst slowly entered Shanghai Harbour while many of the passengers stood on deck watching their approach into the harbor. The smell and sight of human refuse in the river was overwhelming.

Further down the Yangtse towards land hundreds of sampans (little sail boats) crowded in on the Scharnhorst with their crews yelling up to the passengers in a language the passengers did not understand. The boats seemed to house entire families, children, babies, grandparents, husband and wife, with either the husband or wife doing the rowing. When the physically, emotionally and spiritually reduced Seidel family arrived in Shanghai, together with approximately some 800 fellow passengers they entered a new world.

What will the future bring, what will life be like here? Finally, when the ship docked near the Kumping Road dock and the gangplanks were secured the passengers oozed out of the ship onto the teeming pier. Cranes were slowly lowered from the pier into the ship’s
cargo holds to retrieve the passenger’s luggage and to unload them on to the pier.

Busy hands carried stretchers with people on them down the gangplanks and loaded a handful of sick passengers into ambulances and just drove off with them. No body knew where they were being taken. Maybe they were the lucky ones!

Local relief organizations which had been apparently quickly organized to meet the onslaught of refugees met the immigrant passengers at the pier. Indian men with their big turbans tried to put some order into the chaos, but to little avail. If there were any government authorities at the pier, they were certainly not visible and consequently nobody bothered to check the immigrants for visas and passports. As it turned out the Indian men with the turbans were the local police men.

Even though they were welcomed by fellow Jews who were just one step ahead of them the immigrés were pushed and shoved around and yelled at and finally packed onto waiting lorries and carted off to who knew where. Totally unprepared, or certainly ill-prepared for the subtropical, arid climate, many of the refugees were wearing what in Germany was considered to be their summer clothes, but were too heavy here in the sub tropics. They didn’t know what to expect, so they brought along what was considered good, “strong” [read: “heavy”] clothes. But the sun was beating down on them so strong, that some of the elderly fainted from sun stroke right here on the pier or in the trucks.

Now reality set in. Up to now, as long as they still had enjoyed the German way of life, German culture, German food, German manners, German language, German service and German movies. After all, they were Germans. This was the only culture they had! Only two weeks before, my mother saw her favorite German actress Zarah Leander, the deep throated Swedish born sultry singer, here on board in the movie “Zu Neuen Ufern” (poorly translated as “New Beginnings”).

The stewards on board gave them some fresh fruit and tried to prepare them for what to expect. “Don’t eat anything that isn’t boiled! Don’t drink water unless it is boiled! Be careful! Watch out for mosquitoes! Put on some suntan lotion! Watch out for Tze tze flies! Watch for any flies! Make sure to cover all your food!” Whatever the warnings were, they weren’t enough and they didn’t stop!

On the pier hundreds of voices were competing for attention, drowning out each other, shouting, screaming and yelling. When that didn’t help they started pushing, shoving, grabbing suitcases. But the Jewish organizers warned them not to entrust their belongings to anybody and to maintain a close watch on their belongings. This was China, not Germany! Strangers would help pack the belongings onto the trucks. It was a madhouse. They saw chaos like they had never seen before. The pier was teaming with a sea of human ants dressed in ragged clothes standing among their rickshaws vying for the business of the new immigrants who were dressed in fur coats and/or other heavy winter clothes. It was organized confusion! Passengers were looking for their luggage. Coolies were moving the luggage and trying to take it to their rickshaws to take the passengers to their destinations. In fact, the coolies were competing with the trucks/lorries brought to the dock by the local refugee population which was now trying to help the new arrivals. In some cases, already familiar with the meager circumstances in Shanghai, some of the earlier arrivals tried themselves to make a few German Marks or US Dollars. The pushing and shoving, the competing for the luggage, didn’t want to end. Then came the calls: “A through D on Truck Number One”, “E through I Truck Number Two” and so on. My parents’ name was Seidel, my grandmother’s name was Neumann. Two different trucks!

Well, at least the passengers were among their own kind which at least wouldn’t hurt them because they were Jewish, as rough as the welcome may have been. In fact my parents were welcomed by my father’s sister and in-laws who had
managed to get to Shanghai on an earlier boat.

The truck my parents were on snaked its way through the busy, hustle-bustle Shanghai traffic to the “Embankment Building.” At the Embankment Building (“Embankment”) the trucks unloaded their cargo. The passengers were led inside a reception hall where they were offered some water. The luggage which the refugees had brought with them was left in an open air holding area.

Here things were organized a little better, less chaotic, except there was no sign of my grandmother. Not to worry, my parents were told, my grandmother would be safe in another camp. Signs, in German, were posted pointing the arrivals to their intake section. Men were now being separated from their wives and sent to their respective sleeping dormitories. The women were also sent to their respective sleeping dormitories, with their own bathroom accommodations. There must have been hundreds, if not thousands of prayers reaching out to G’d for help and improved conditions that night and all the nights hereafter.

Conditions at the Embankment were deplorable, but everybody was nevertheless thankful to be out of Germany and not to be persecuted, to be able to walk freely in the streets and not to worry about the proverbial “knock on the door” which would be a signal that the “authorities” would haul somebody off to some prison, or worse, some concentration camp, just because they were of the Jewish faith. Here, everybody was in the same boat. But if reality set in at the pier, reality also now turned into shock. The sleeping accommodations were military cots, quickly set up to accommodate the onslaught of hundreds of people every week. Conditions were getting from bad to worse. On the ship families at least had their own cabins.

Here thirty to fifty people had to sleep together in one dormitory hall. The cots were makeshift, military style which had quickly been hammered together. So sturdy were these cots that the first day my brother Horst sat down on his cot it collapsed!

Privacy and space figuratively went down the drain in the community bathrooms. For middle class people who all basically came from normal, comfortable apartments in Germany this was a very painful and sudden adjustment. Undressing themselves in front of others, carrying out their most private functions without privacy, almost publicly in slum-like conditions was embarrassing. Never before in their sheltered lives in Germany did they encounter conditions similar to this. What could be worse?

At night married couples were separated from each other, only during the day did they get a chance to spend time with each other, commiserating about the conditions. But credit has to be given to the aid groups who within extremely short notice found places to accommodate the thousands of new arrivals, good or bad. They tried their darnedest just to find a place large enough to handle such an influx of people! As is, conditions in China were just not what they might have been in Europe under the same circumstances, no matter what. How many tears must have been wept that first night? How many questions about the future, about the existence of G’d, must have been pondered that night and subsequent nights at the Embankment Building. If indeed there was a G’d, then why did G’d not help them? Why did G’d place them in these conditions? Did G’d not care about them? Who could they cry to? Who would protect them?

Meals were taken in one large canteen, in which the refugees all lined up with a small tin pot and were served the entre du jour. The food was about as good as the accommodations!
But after breakfast, with little else to do, my parents with Horst in tow stepped outside to get a whiff of fresh air. “Fresh air” was an overstatement. The building was near the Garden Bridge, at a junction of the Wangpo and Yangtse Rivers. The stench from the rivers was worse than when they first smelled it on the deck of the Scharnhorst the day before entering Shanghai. Now the smell was mixed with pollution from some of the mechanized vehicles. They also got a closer look at city life, Shanghai style.

Horst remembers the family being overwhelmed by the different kinds and number of vehicles. They started counting: trucks, buses, bicycles, trams, cars, rickshaws, pedicabs, wheel barrels, flatbeds. All of these vehicles seemed to converge and bottleneck on the Garden Bridge, which was one of only two links between Hongkew and the British Concession. What was amazing to them, something they had never seen before, was a human pulling another human in a rickshaw, and especially up a hill, pulling out their guts, and then going downhill and trying hard to stop the rickshaw from rolling out of control. Equally never experienced before was the enormous number of beggars, especially on the Garden Bridge, trying to hustle some handouts by helping the coolies and pushing the rickshaws from the back uphill and then hanging on to them to break the ride when the rickshaws were going downhill. Since this was the age before globalization and sensitivity training, it seems almost a sign of the times, wherever there were still very strong class systems, especially in foreign colonies, that nobody thought of lightening the load for the coolie by getting out of the rickshaws while the poor coolies had to pull the rickshaws uphill almost tearing out their hearts!

The Garden Bridge was what we would describe as the “track”, when using the expression “the other side of the track”.

It was the demarcation line between poor Hongkew and the wealthy other parts of Shanghai, the International Concessions. So it made a lot of sense that the poor gathered here to hustle for a few cents, straggling women nursing babies from their empty breasts, invalids displaying the stumps of their limbs or other wounds and the children pushing and hanging on to the rickshaws. It took a lot of self control for my parents not to break down crying when seeing such misery. Even after World War I when conditions in Germany were at their worst they had not encountered misery and poverty at such a low level.

And the hodge-podge of different people and nationalities, not all refugees, but Indian Sikh policeman, Japanese soldiers, Chinese coolies, British Civilians, Russian civilians and, of course, the German refugees created a true Babel. Compared to some of the beggars they were still relatively fortunate. But how could anybody survive, working in this heat?

The thought of how to survive in this anthill must have crossed a thousand minds more than once, day in, day out. Maybe they should have stayed in Germany? After all, things weren’t quite as bad as here! In Germany, at least they had decent housing, decent food. Maybe. But, like it or not, they had little choice now. They too, were now some of the ants.

My parents had been told that my grandmother, due to the fact that she was a single elderly woman, was taken to a different camp, the Ward Road Heim. Since my parents didn’t want to spend the little money they had on tramfare, they decided to walk the approximately three miles each way. What a walk! What a revelation! They got to see Shanghai in three hours in a way that no tourist guidebooks would ever describe it!
My parents were living in the Hongkew side of the bridge as was my grandmothe-
er. But clearly they could see that on the other side of the Garden Bridge there was a different Shanghai. Coming back from the more elegant foreign concessions to Hongkew was tantamount to going from heaven to hell.

Since living in the United States I have learned, that when you ask an American how they like something, anything, some written material, some painting, some clothes, anything; if they do not like the item, they very diplomatically say: “Oh, it is very “interesting”. So, I will try to be diplomatic and American and facetiously say that their walk through the poor section of Shanghai, HongKew was "very, very interesting”.

First and foremost they discovered the exact source of the stench. People were not only defecating directly into the gutters, they were also emptying their wooden buckets of human refuse into the gutters, hoping that eventually a swish of water would come down the road and take their refuse away, possibly into the gullies. There at least you would no longer see it. Once or twice they also ran into the “sanitationman”, the person who had a large wheelbarrow into which he would empty the pots of refuse, take them to the river and dump the contents of the wheelbarrow into the river. Anybody that would go swimming would eventually meet some familiar “friends”.

Many Chinese, but especially the children, would wear a long jacket and a pair of pants. The reason the jacket was long was to cover the slit in the back of the pants. And the slit was for the purpose of convenience when defecating. If a person needed to defecate, they just sat down and did their business.

Another source of the stench was the cooking being carried out in the open and in the streets. Housewives cooked meals on little charcoal ovens which had to constantly be fanned to keep the fire alive. But there were also plenty of street vendors cooking food loaded with oil and selling this food in the streets. One thing was for sure, none of these vendors ever had any food inspections! They wouldn’t pass them by the longest stretch of the imagination.

Finally, occasionally there were dead bodies just lying in the streets, including babies wrapped in newspaper. Now the warnings they had been given by the stewards on the Scharnhorst started to make sense. Compared to what they had seen that day, the conditions at the Embankment were the height of luxury!

As it turned out these experiences were not unique to my parents only. Sooner or later, every refugee in Shanghai got to know the “beautiful air of Shanghai”! And to see the squalor in which the citizens of Shanghai, the native citizens, bless them, not the new arrivals, lived in, made the new arrivals once again grateful to G’d, for all the good He had bestowed on them. So it seems that in life everything is relative, depending on your perspective.

As they got closer to their destination, perhaps two hundred yards from it, not even, they stumbled upon a wrought iron gate with a Star of David in a circle on top of the gate. They couldn’t believe their eyes. What? A Jewish Star adorning two iron gates. Here in this far flung part of the world? And as they looked closer at the cement columns anchoring the gates they saw Hebrew writing. What a sight for sore eyes! A synagogue? Could it be? No! Not in this part of the world! But there it was. Yes, a synagogue in this part of the world! For a moment they stood in disbelief. Then tears started to roll down my mother’s cheeks. G’d had not forsaken them. There were Jews here! My parents embraced and hugged each other. For a moment they breathed a sigh of relief. G’d had not abandoned them, after all. Dealing with reality had overwhelmed them. The thousands of new images their brains had to process over the last few days made them forget everything, who they were, and why they were here. Now they remembered who they were and why they were here. G’d showed them that He had not forgotten them. Yes, G’d was here with them.

Fredy Seidel’s forthcoming memoir, Shanghai, Before and After the Fall—Caught Between Two Chairs, will be published late summer or early fall 2016 by iUniverse.

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An open letter to Delhi’s sons and daughters—

To all my sons and daughters,

I am 93 now, a retired Army Lieutenant General, perhaps, still wearing the old world on my sleeves on the last legs of life. I never married. I have no family. With me, the last trace of my bloodline will forever be washed away from the face of India and this earth. I have no son or daughter. But when I think of it, I see my son and daughter in every young face of this country. You are all my sons and daughters. And hence this letter, I write to you. While I am proud to be a Jew, I am an Indian through and through. And I ask you all, to make India your prime identity.

Army life has taught me the importance of duty. Stand tall, resolve to serve the nation and never waver. Our duty is to serve. You need to do what you feel is right, and strive and seek and find and conquer. This is the only way to be true to your own self.

What worries me most is the swarming poor of our nation. The privileged youth of India should take ownership of the situation. I talk to the young of this nation. You are far better trained and far more professional than my generation. Sound economic and strategic planning will bring about the required change. Usher in your nation.

Sons, respect women. I don’t understand how crime against women can happen. I have no answers to them. I can only appeal to those willing to lend an ear.

I am finished now. But you are only beginning. Begin with a difference. If I had married, I would have wanted my son or daughter to be an Army man! Army life is clean, disciplined, and has purpose. Think about this career option, too, but also bear in mind, Army life is not just song, dance and a glass of scotch. Let me tell you, my favourite drink is water!

Over and out!
Gen Jacob
Rest in Peace, Uncle Jackie
Personal Reflection on the Passing of Lt Gen JFR Jacob

On 13 January 2016, Lieutenant General JFR Jacob passed away at the age of 92 in Delhi. Living as I do in Calcutta, I was unable to get to Delhi in time for my granduncle Jackie’s funeral. I eagerly read all the eulogies in the press and online, and was heartened by how tributes poured in from India and abroad. His military service to the nation, his governorship of Goa and Punjab, and his impeccable character were widely acclaimed. Most of India’s political leaders, across party lines, noted his service to the country and were lavish in their praise of his accomplishments and the decisive role he played in the subcontinent.

President Pranab Mukherjee stated: “His distinguished services to the nation and the Indian Army shall always be remembered.” Prime Minister Modi eulogized: “RIP, Lt Gen JFR Jacob. India will always remain grateful to him for his impeccable service to the nation at the most critical moments.” Sonia Gandhi’s tribute was: “A brave son of India, his role in the Bangladesh War has a special place in the war history of the world.”

Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina wrote: “The nation with profound respect would remember his contribution to our Liberation War.” Israel’s Ambassador to India Daniel Carmon averred: “A proud son of the Jewish community of India...supporter of India-Israel relations...he shall forever be remembered as a human bridge between two peoples.”

Uncle Jackie lived an extraordinary life. When I last visited him in Delhi a few months ago, he was frail but still mentally alert as he sat down with me for a cup of tea in his small apartment filled with his life-long collection of art, carpets, and antiques. He had sent greetings via email for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and I had called to wish him the same. Up until just two years ago, he had been travelling around India and the world to deliver lectures, meet with family and friends, and receive awards. His suffering was brief, and that is a blessing.

What was particularly poignant was that my uncle’s passing did not just mark the death of a family member but the end of an era – that of the Baghdadi Jews who had made an important mark on Asia. Today, most of these Jews of my diasporic community that once extended from Basra to Shanghai no longer live in the Asian port cities whose destinies they helped to shape. There are some 19 Jews left in Calcutta, and Bombay, too, has just a handful of Bagdhadis. Even in cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong, there are mostly Jews who have come from the West for business opportunities; very few Baghdadis remain.

On 20 January, I attended a memorial service held at the Judah Hyam synagogue in Delhi. It was a much more intimate space than the funeral that had been held a week earlier, where ministers, ambassadors, and the top brass of all the armed services had come to pay their respects. His friends and colleagues spoke of their memories of him and we read some of his favorite psalms.

Lt General P R Shankar, Director General (Artillery) spoke of how General Jacob was a legend in his unit. He mentioned how Jake, as he called him, was best known for the war strategy he deployed and the deft way in which he transformed a ceasefire into an unconditional public surrender, thus averting further humanitarian crises. Bangladesh’s independence was guaranteed, and this changed the course of the subcontinent’s history. Uncle Jackie recounted his role...
in this war in his controversial book, Surrender at Dacca.

Israel’s Ambassador to India Daniel Carmon told us that he had come straight from the airport to the synagogue. He had just accompanied Foreign Secretary Sushma Swaraj on a trip to Israel to prepare for Prime Minister Modi’s upcoming visit. He said that at each official meeting with Israel’s political leaders, General Jacob’s contributions were hailed and condolences were conveyed. Ambassador Carmon spoke of how Uncle Jackie had played a critical role in building the relationship between India and Israel. I then learned that he had founded the Commonwealth Jewish Council and that he is much admired in Israel. His uniform hangs in the Yad LaShiryon, the Armored Corps Memorial Site and Museum at Latrun. The Israeli paratrooper Motta Gur, whose forces had captured the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, had written Uncle Jackie a letter. It stated, “...Your performance is, without a doubt, one of the best in modern warfare.”

I then recalled how, at sixteen, I had visited Uncle Jackie at his official residence as Head of Eastern Command in Calcutta. I innocently headed towards his bedroom and study to greet him and had barely opened the door when I was commanded sternly to get right back to the living room. The walls of that sprawling and banned room were covered with detailed maps of Bangladesh bearing the names of small mofussil towns, ponds, and rivers and studded with pins, flags, and other notations. It was his war room.

Growing up we always knew that Uncle Jackie was a proud Jew, but he never proclaimed his religion – he did not think it was necessary for any Indian do so. He identified as being Indian through and through. I remember how we all laughed to learn that it was only after the war in Bangladesh that people learned about his Jewish identity. Radio Pakistan peevishly insinuated that India had picked a Jew to negotiate the surrender in a bid to humiliate an Islamic nation.

Mrs. Sondhi spoke of his other achievements and read from an article where her late husband Mr. ML Sondhi, a formidable intellectual, parliamentarian, and diplomat had proposed Uncle Jackie for Vice President of India (2002): “Today, Dr. Kalam is the man of destiny and it will be widely hoped that India under his presidency will be less prone to conflict. For the vice-presidency, I would suggest that Governor JFR Jacob of Punjab can also become a man of destiny and would be credible to not only the Indian public but also the world to Governor Jacob won the surrender of the Pakistani forces in Dhaka by his superiority of strategic maneuver and later showed his skill at political conflict management in Goa in his gubernatorial assignment. His record in Punjab, in the context of the attendant political strife in the State, has been outstanding. Observers have commented favorably on his ability to structure politics in an information age. His strategic and foreign policy analyses at several intellectual forums have been marked by his acute understanding of how Indian power can contribute to a more stable regional system and a more cohesive international order...”

Until the very end, Uncle Jackie was focused on the building of a secure and militarily strong India. He was writing and worrying about the Chinese breach of the Line of Control into his nineties. He was a voracious reader, kept up-to-date with political events, and enjoyed pronouncing his opinion on current world affairs. I knew it was best to simply listen and never to try voicing my opinion.

Ezekiel Isaac Malekar, Honorary Secretary of the Judah Hyam Synagogue, spoke of the tremendous service Uncle Jackie had provided as its President. I knew that he had also been very instrumental in getting Calcutta’s synagogues registered as national monuments. He

General Jacob with a friend, Jayesh Mathur
had encouraged Ezekiel in his inter-faith efforts and secured funds as needed for the Judah Hyam synagogue. Ezekiel recalled how the General would shoot off a two-line request for support to his friends and colleagues and the necessary funds would arrive. I chuckled, as I had been the recipient of similar instructions and knew I could never say no to Uncle Jackie. He commanded respect and expected results.

Several others spoke of the many charities he supported and the way in which he took it upon himself to ensure that those less fortunate could have their needs met. I knew of the unstinting care he gave to all those who worked for him and how solicitous he was of their welfare. After the recent Nepal earthquakes, he was involved in rebuilding the homes of the Nepali men who worked for him. Whenever he visited our home in Calcutta for dinner, where he would ask for traditional Iraqi Jewish food, he would walk into the kitchen to see what was cooking and taste each of the dishes and give his stamp of approval to our Muslim cook. He always made sure that his driver and accompanying staff were well cared for.

I knew of Uncle Jackie’s love of nature, his enjoyment of fishing, and the work he had done to save forests from the mining industries. He often spoke to me of the beauty of the Himalayas and his fishing trips to Bhutan. Upon his retirement, he bought a house in Kalimpong that he later sold.

A few friends at the memorial mentioned his love of poetry, his knowledge of the arts, and his amazing collection of Indian and Chinese paintings and antiques. Uncle Jackie accompanied me when I bought my first silk carpet back in 1980. He showed me how to assess a carpet and to tell real silk from weaves that mixed silk and synthetic fibers. On his many visits to New York, he would call with the enthusiasm of a child to tell me of an art find he had made in a thrift shop or of a great deal he made in the purchase of a Japanese woodcut.

When I was barely nine years old, we all spent a month at Flag Staff House in Devlali, when he was a Brigadier. His home worked with clockwork precision. We were summoned to meals with a brass gong and sat at an immaculately laid table replete with silver cutlery, crystal, and napery. It was the first time we kids had ever been treated to four course meals that were so elegantly served. The house was filled with Chinese vases, ornate furniture, and many sculptures. As we were a family of five boisterous and playful children, we were irreverent of what we called Mr. Ming, Ting, and all the little Pings! He was in trepidation of our knocking down some of his precious artifacts as we chased each other around the house. He would point to Lulu, his golden retriever, who knew she must weave carefully between the antiques, and ask us to emulate her example. Needless to say, we did not heed his instructions.

At the end of the service, a few of us walked over to the cemetery as Ezekiel read prayers over Uncle Jackie’s grave. I left Delhi thinking about his splendid life. He had been a great Indian patriot, a brilliant strategist, a diplomat, a proud Jew, an outstanding administrator, a lover of the arts and a knowledgeable art collector of discrimination, and – above all – a man of the utmost moral integrity. RIP, Uncle Jackie. 🕉
The Walter Kaufmann Story

The Exile Who Invented All-India Radio’s Signature Tune
In March 1995, I was honoured to be invited by the Max Mueller Bhavan in New Delhi to a symposium entitled “Central European Jewish Emigration to India 1933-1945”. The proceedings of this symposium were published afterwards in a book edited by Profs. Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voigt and entitled “Jewish Exiles in India 1933-1945”. I myself lectured on the way Indian Jews received the European Jewish refugees in India after they had fled from the Holocaust. To the best of my knowledge, I was the only Jew at the meeting.

The symposium opened my eyes to a whole new facet of India, a country which acted as a haven for Jewish emigres and refugees fleeing the terrible happenings in Europe. Facism had pushed some exiles to India prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. Others came straight to India disheveled and wretched from the concentration camps of Dachau and Auschwitz.

One of the ‘lucky’ ones was the internationally renowned composer and musician Walter Kaufmann. He had correctly assessed the political situation in Europe, and, drawn to the music of the East, he found a refuge in India, where he resided from 1934-1946.

Kaufmann was a Czech national born in 1907 in Karlsbad, today Karlovy Vary. His father, Julius Kaufmann, was Jewish and his mother had converted to Judaism from Christianity when they married. Julius died near the Czech border after they fled Karlsbad under the Nazis, and when his mother returned to the city after the Second World War, her house was confiscated since it belonged officially to a German.

Wandering through the streets of Karlovy Vary only a couple of months ago, I still found the city inspiring. I attended a stunning concert in a church with a seven-storey organ and listened to some of the best renditions I know of classical music. In the pre-Nazi years, Karlovy Vary must have been a musical paradise. Walter Kaufmann first learned music from his famous uncle Moritz Kaufmann, who was deported from Prague to Theresienstadt and from there to the Treblinka concentration camp, where he died in 1943.

From 1927 to 1933, Walter conducted summer seasons of opera in Berlin, Karlsbad, and Eger, Bohemia. In 1934, his thesis on Gustav Mahler was accepted by the German University in Prague, but when Kaufmann discovered that his supervisor, Prof. Gustav Becking, was the leader of the local Nazi youth group, he wrote to him that he could not accept the doctorate. In Kaufmann’s autobiography based on memoirs recorded in 1934 -but written up in the 1970’s when he was a Professor of Musicology at Indiana University, Bloomington- he wrote: “I carried this letter to the post office, went to the biggest travel agent and bought myself a ticket to Bombay with the money I had received for the operetta (which he had composed)...” On an impulse, Kaufmann set sail on the Conte Verde from Venice and arrived in Bombay a week later, where he stayed with a friend till he found independent lodgings. He was joined by his first wife from Prague, Gerty Herrmann, the niece of Franz Kafka’s, who was a French teacher.

Once in India, Kaufmann sold his return ticket when he discovered that Indian music would take him some time to learn, and he needed the money. Either way, as Facism took hold of Europe, he could not return and stayed on in India for 12 years until after the Second World War. India saved not only his life but that of his wife as well. They had one daughter, Katherina.

Unlike other exiles in India, Kaufmann showed remarkable flexibility in adapting to the new culture. In 1935, he received the position of Director of European Music of All India Radio (AIR) in Bombay, for which he received a mediocre salary. In 1936, he composed the famous signature tune for All India Radio heard by billions of people all over the world. Kaufmann also founded the Bombay Chamber Music Society, which performed every Thursday at the Willingdon Gymkhana. He formed a string quartet in which he played the viola, and a trio in which he played the piano, with Edigio Verga on the cello, and Mehli Mehta, the father of Maestro Zubin Mehta, on the violin.

Kaufmann was clearly a musical genius and his works display extreme musical versatility. According to Agata Schindler, with whom I corresponded briefly and who has carried out extensive research into this brilliant artist, at first Kaufmann found Indian music “alien and incomprehensible.” However, he soon became familiar with it. As he wrote in his Autobiography: “As I knew that this music was created by people with..."
heart and intellect, one could assume that many, in fact millions would be appreciating or in fact loving this music...I concluded that the fault was all mine and the right way would be to undertake a study tour to the place of its origin.” He managed to grasp Indian systems of musical composition and combine them with Western music. He went on to study other types of Eastern music, including Tibetan, Afghani, Kashmiri and Chinese music. His output and scholarship were amazing.

Early on, he wrote an opera called “Anasuya” for the inauguration of the All India Radio channel, which made its debut in 1939. The theme was European, but the story was transposed to a mythical Maratha state.

Kaufmann also worked in the film industry, cooperating with Mohan Bhavani for Bhavani Films and for Information Films of India. He wrote scores for operas, orchestral music, ballets, chamber music works and films. His compositions include Ten String Quartets, Three Piano Trios, Indian Piano Concerto, Six Indian Miniatures and Navaratnam. A list of his scores can be found in Music East and West: Essays in Honour of Walter Kaufmann (edited by Thomas Noblitt). His books include: The Ragas of North India, The Ragas of South India: A Catalogue of Scalar Material and Musical Notations of the Orient: Notational Systems of Continental, East, South and Central Asia.

In 1939 Kaufmann arranged for his Czech friend Willy Haas to join him in Bombay. Haas left Europe for India on the Conte Rosse and, upon arrival in Bombay, received a position as a script writer with Bhavani Films. Haas collaborated with Kaufmann on two operas and several film scripts until he left for Europe in 1947.

Kaufmann left India in 1946. He spent a year in England, where he was a guest conductor at the BBC in London, and a composer and conductor at Arthur Rank Films. In 1947, he was named Head of the Piano Department and Professor of Piano and Composition at the Halifax Conservatory of Music, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. From 1948 to 1957, Kaufmann was the Musical Director and Conductor of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Here he remarried, after his marriage to Gerty had dissolved. He also tried living in Israel. In 1957, Kaufmann moved permanently to the United States with his second wife Freda. He joined the School of Music faculty at Indiana University in Bloomington as Professor of Music in the department of Musicology, where he taught till 1977. He died in the United States in 1984.

Despite his prolific and scholarly works, and his personal ties with the intellectuals of the era, such as Albert Einstein, Franz Kafka and Max Brod, Kaufmann is sometimes forgotten in the context of Indian Jewry or European Jews who resided in India.

In 1995, at the New Delhi symposium on Jewish Exiles in India organized by Dr. Georg Lechner of the Max Mueller Bhavan, the New Delhi Philharmonic Orchestra, performed an unknown piece called Madras Express by Walter Kaufmann. Apparently, Kaufmann had spent a few months in Madras absorbing the music and the sounds there. Interestingly, the Delhi Philharmonic was founded by a Bene Israel Indian Jew Ezra Kolet, who was the President of the Synagogue in New Delhi when I was conducting fieldwork among the Bene Israel in India in the 1980's. Kaufmann’s composition astounded me with its rich and exotic tone. At the Delhi symposium, the participants were also treated to a rendition of the famous AIR signature tune, which is still broadcast to this day as the opening sequence of all AIR RADIO stations in India, and represents the symbol of India for millions of people.
I, Magen Abraham Synagogue, am today 81 years old; Residing in Gentile surroundings, I’ve always been gentle but bold. The Fire Temple in front, a Mosque nearby, the CNI Church behind, Have by no means influenced or transformed my mind.

I’ve weathered all seasons: heavy rains, bitter cold and intense heat, And even seen my members come to me in amazing feat; Violent storms, torrential rains, the devastating 2001 earthquake, All these I have survived and stood erect for people’s sake.

In my early years, I saw the young and the old, The rich and the poor, the meek and the bold, Steeped in solemn service in praise of the Living God, With fear in their hearts, yearning for the blessings of the Lord.

My house would be packed on Sabbaths and every Festival day; Elders with long beards and prayer books in their hands; From the Bimah, the Hazan would melodiously chant away, While tiny tots frolicked fearlessly in lovely little bands.

Time passed by and the numbers steadily reduced, as the call of the Holy Land magically beckoned and induced the many brethren who finally decided to emigrate, For some it was too early, for some others too late.

Now, the attendance in my house has turned so thin, It looks deserted, without many of the kith and kin. At times, getting a minyan becomes difficult; Reading the kaddish is therefore omitted as a result.
But lo, I have endured all and everything, 
and grown in strength by spreading my protective wings, 
With a spacious room for visitors, a pavilion alongside, 
and a treasure of books to provide an unerring guide.

My house is now the centre for studying the Torah and Hebrew, 
where the young and the old assemble, not just a few.
In a remarkable development few had heard of before, 
May Hashem bless their efforts and lead them to the fore.

Very few, in fact, a ‘remnant’ are my members you see, 
but the spirit, the intensity, the passion is their key.
May they continue to receive the blessings of Hashem, 
The Holy One, blessed be forever His Glorious Name.

Today, I mourn the dead and weep for those who have left; 
Today I am anxious and worried of the uncertain future.
Tomorrow, when the Messiah comes and takes away one and all; 
I’ll surely be despaired, yet glorify the Mighty One’s call.

Then all will be gone from here, yet I’m sure I’ll stand. 
In the years ahead rapt in silence and their sweet memories, 
With the strength of my love, but without a helping hand.
Even if I weep and shed tears in boundless quantities.

Sure, I’ll tarry and hope to see my members again, 
In the Messianic kingdom devoid of fear and pain, 
When the Lord Himself will be amid one and all, 
Rejoicing triumphantly over every enemy’s fall.

This poem originally appeared in Kol India. It has been reprinted with permission from the poet and the editor.
The Jews of Bollywood

How Jews Established the World’s Largest Film Industry
his is the story of the rise and fall of Jews in the world’s largest film industry. Bollywood produces a thousand films annually, three times more than Hollywood does, in twenty different languages, which are seen by three billion people across the world.

Few realise that Jews played as important a role in Bollywood as they did in Hollywood, even if the roles differed in nature. Almost all of India’s earliest female stars were Jewish. The introduction of sound brought an abrupt end to many of their film careers for they were incapable of delivering dialogues in Indian languages as they had never mastered any. The few who were quick to learn survived.

Surprisingly of all the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the second most populous country of the world, these earliest female stars of India came from a minority within India’s smallest religious minority, the Jews, whose proportion is not more than 0.0004 per cent in its total population. The Baghdadis (as the Jews who came from a number of Middle Eastern countries and not just from the city of Baghdad came to be called in India), were one of the three Jewish communities in India and they were among those communities in India that completely Anglicised themselves in every respect. The only other numerically and commercially mentionable minority that did so was the Parsi (Zoroastrian) community, but its women were not the first to be bold enough to act in films, braving all the risks involved to their reputation and otherwise at a time when even the prostitutes shied away from acting in films. The initiative was taken by the Baghdadi Jewish women, highly Westernised in their lifestyle and outlook. Hence, they did not have the reservations when it came to indulgence in performing arts that women from other communities in India had, including the other Jewish communities, the Bene Israel and the Cochini (residents in India for a much longer period of time than the Baghdadis), had. By doing so they paved the way for women from respectable families from other communities to follow suit.

Though Arabian in their culture, the Baghdadi Jews completely Anglicised themselves and adopted English as their language. With a few exceptions, the Baghdadis identified themselves as far as possible with the rulers, the British, and not the ruled, the Indians, as it was disadvantageous, they believed, to identify with the Indians and moreover there was no Indian citizenship as such. They felt that as Jews from another, albeit Asian, country they could remain distinct and escape the worst aspects of the British-Indian relationship. Benefiting from the British policy of favouring small minorities whose numbers did not threaten them, they soon emerged as intermediaries between the British colonial masters and their Indian subjects. They even competed with another migrant community, the Armenian, to get recognised as European by the British. When they lost the competition to the Armenians they blamed their Jewishness for it and felt that Armenians has succeeded only because they were Christian.

The first star of Indian cinema was Sulochana (nee Ruby Myers, 1907-83). The extent of her fame is well illustrated by the fact she was also used to promote Khadi, the Indian handspun and hand-woven cloth. A hugely popular dance of Sulochana’s from the film Madhuri was added to a short film on Mahatma Gandhi inaugurating a Khadi exhibition, which also happened to be India’s first talkie venture.

Ironically, when Sulochana’s home company Imperial launched the first genuine talkie film Alam Ara in 1931, it was not she, but her rival Zubeida who was chosen to play the female lead, because of her command over Hindi. But the indomitable Sulochana acquired such proficiency in Hindi in just a year’s time as to make an ego-affirming comeback with the record-breaking talkie version of Madhuri. She once again reclaimed her positive distinction as the highest paid star of India cinema. She owned the sleekest of cars (Chevrolet 1935); and had one of the biggest heroes, D. Billimoria, as her lover. Her strong fan base empowered her to dictate terms to Imperial and ensure that between 1933 and 1939 she worked exclusively with her handsome Zoroastrian paramour.

Their love affair spanned the decades of the 1920s and 30s. With it ended their film careers too. She left Imperial only to find no outside offer, which landed her up in a grave economic crisis. The roles, though, kept diminishing, leading her to bankruptcy. She died a lonely death. The original glamour queen of Indian cinema, Sulochana was once famous for drawing a salary larger than that of the Governor of Bombay.

Pramila nee Esther Victoria Abraham (1911-2006), a film star of the silent era, was chosen the first Miss India in 1947 (the pageant was not organized by The Times of India Group then, as it is now). Born in a Baghdadi Jewish family of Kolkata, she won six art diplomas from London in the course of a brilliant academic career and became the headmistress of Talmud Torah Jewish Boys’ School, and it was a casual visit...
to the Imperial Studios in 1935 to watch a shooting, that brought her into films. Besides, her sister Sophie, known as Romilla, and her cousin Rose, were already in the film industry. During the course of this acting career, she married the famous star of those years, Kumar, a Rudolph Valentino kind of figure. Together, they produced many films under the banner of “Silver Films”. She was also a costume and jewellery designer and a consultant for set designs.

Nadira (nee Farhat or Florence Ezekiel) (1932-2006) was spotted by the wife of the famous film director Mehboob Khan, a Muslim, when she was sheltering from a thunderstorm in a building. He cast her in the lead role of his technicolor extravaganza, Aan (1952), India’s first film in colour. Nadira, who had seen only two films and had never been photographed. Her mother, who wanted Nadira to settle down and marry a nice boy, was dismayed. Despite her pathetic financial condition, it was only after a great deal of persuasion that her mother agreed to a contract with Mehboob Khan, according to which Nadira was to be paid Rs. 1,200 per month, an unheard of amount in those days.

Aan proved to be a major hit and her debut performance in the film won her rave reviews. Nadira was surrounded by a coterie of male admirers. While Mehboob Khan flirted with her, an Urdu poet Naqshab won her over with his couplets; and Nadira ended up marrying him and infuriating her mother.

Nadira starred in Naqshab’s productions, Nagma and Raftaar (1955), but she felt exploited as she was forced to promote the films by posing for sexy posters, and on the other hand to observe purdah (Islamic seclusion). Naqshab even insisted that she cancel her three-year contract with Mehboob Khan; and on top of it all he announced that they were not married. Disgusted, Nadira walked out, leaving behind all her earnings.

Her foreign features and thin figure, which was quite unlike the buxom heroines patronized by film fans, made it difficult for her to resume her career. Fortunately, she landed up a vamp's role in Raj Kapoor’s Shri 420 (1955).

The role required her to hold a smouldering cigarette in one hand and a glass of whisky in the other. The film’s great success made it her
landmark style; and it was followed by negative roles in films which won her great accolades. Few could portray vindictiveness and malice with Nadira’s panache. She brought great style to the portrayal of the quintessential Westernised vamp of Hindi films. Her role as a Christian mother in Julie (1975), was a landmark performance, which fetched her fifteen awards. She also appeared in a few English films, notably the Merchant Ivory films The Guru (1969) and Cotton Mary (1999). She was well paid for her efforts and was one of the first Indian actors to own a Rolls Royce. Nadira passed away in a hospital in Mumbai on 9th February 2006 at the age of 73, suffering from a paralytic stroke combined with a heart attack.

Pearl Padamsee (1931-2000), was a distinguished actress of theatre and films. She added a new dimension to Indian theatre in general and Mumbai in particular, and presented the audience with many a notable actor and play. Her Rise and Fall of Arturo Ui is considered a milestone in Indian theatre. She emerged as a prominent face of cross-over cinema and worked in many national and international film projects, in both Hindi and English, in a film career spanning over four decades. Some of her significant English language films are West is West (1987), Such a Long Journey (1998), and Kama Sutra (1996). She had adopted her Khoja Muslim husband, Alyque Padamsee’s surname.

Interestingly, of the few men among all the Baghdadis prominently active in Indian cinema, at the time, was the noted documentary film-maker, Ezra Mir (1903-1993), who came to be recognized as the father of Indian animation. He was born as Edwin Myers in Kolkata (formerly called Calcutta). He adopted the name Ezra Mir because he felt that his real name did not sound Indian. Mir started making documentaries in 1941 after being inspired by the March of Time newsreels. He worked for the Film Advisory Board (1940-41); Information Films of India (1942-46); India Film Enterprises (1949-51); and the Films Division, where he was Chief Producer (1956-61). During his five year tenure, the Films Division produced over 400 documentaries. He also worked as Producer-in-Charge for the Children’s Film Society of India (1962-64) from 1941 till his retirement from the Films Division in 1961. He was responsible, in various capacities, for over seven hundred documentaries. He was the first president of the Indian Documentary...
Producers’ Association (1956). Ezra Mir directed Pamposh, the first Indian colour film processed completely in India, using Gevacolour stock. The first Indian film to have an English version – Nur Jehan, was directed by Ezra Mir. He was awarded the Padma Shri, India’s fourth highest civilian award, in 1970 for his great contribution to Indian cinema.

There were many from the Bene Israel community, mostly men, who later joined the Baghdadis in films, not only as actors, but also in other capacities. The person to whom goes the credit for writing the screenplay of India’s first full length talkie, Alam Ara (1931), was the Bene Israel playwright Joseph David Penkar. A theatre manager of the third decade of the twentieth century, he was also the author of plays in Marathi and Urdu. Today, three of his plays – Queen Esther, The Maccabeen Warriors and Prince Ansalom – are archived in Israel.

Alam Ara was a huge success. Tickets were sold for twenty times the admission rate as crowds thronged to see the first talkie venture of Indian cinema. After Alam Ara, he joined its production house, the Imperial Film Company, as a playwright and also got involved with film-producing, directing and music composing. Other screenplays followed to which he also composed the scores. Joseph David died in 1942.

A well-known Jewish film actor was David Abraham (1908-81). Abraham was awarded the Padma Shri award, for his roles as a character actor and for his promotion of Indian sports. He started his film career in 1941 and went on to act in over 110 films. He worked with India’s best film-makers ever, like the Academy Award winner and recipient of Dada Saheb Phalke Award, Satyajeeet Ray. He is best known for his portrayal of John Chacha in the 1954 hit Boot Polish.

One of the most prominent film-journalists, cine-personality-biographers and film-historians of India was a Bene Israel, Bunny Reuben (1926-2007). He also produced a film and was the Director of Publicity to the most famous film-makers of India. In the 1970s, when Steven Spielberg decided to shoot portions of his sci-fi adventure Close Encounters of the Third Kind in India, he signed Bunny Reuben as the Director of Publicity, the best name in the field. Reuben started his film-journalistic career in the 1940s with his contributions to the film-weekly Movie Times. Reuben went on to become a full-time film-journalist with the leading National Standard, now known as The Indian Express. From the National Standard, he moved on to Bharat Jyoti, the Sunday edition of the Free Press Journal. Reuben later joined India’s foremost film-magazine Filmfare, a publication of The Times of India Group.
But in the 1950s Reuben left *Filmfare* to pursue his dream of producing a film, because *Filmfare*’s policy did not permit a journalist to pursue any other occupation. *Aashiq* (Lover), the film he produced and for which he wrote, was not a commercial success, as the subject of the film was well before its time, of a man torn between his family and his muse. Reuben finally returned to film-journalism by joining a new film-magazine *Star & Style*. He rose to become its editor in 1969 and continued to work in that capacity until 1974. In 1975, Reuben became the founding-editor of the magazine *Cine-Blitz*, and within a year brought its circulation to 100,000, at par with other established magazines of the day. Reuben also established himself as a definitive biographer of film-personalities. In 1990, Reuben was honoured with the Twentieth Century Cine-goers Award for “excellence in film-journalism”, and in 1994 the Sahyog Foundation Award for the Best Film Journalist was conferred upon him.

Considering the remarkable contributions of Jews to Indian cinema, it is surprising that it produced only six films with Jewish characters, with only two of them with Indian Jewish characters, viz., producer Siddharth and actors, Kunal and Aditya, sons of Salome Aaron, *Eve’s Weekly Miss India* (1973). In recent years there have been some attempts to bring the Jewish contributions to Indian cinema in limelight. Australia’s Deakin University’s Associate Professor Danny Ben-Moshe is in the process of producing a documentary film on the subject, titled, *Shalom Bollywood*, while Kenneth X. Robbins recently held an exhibition titled, “Baghdadis and the Bene Israel in Bollywood and Beyond: Indian Jews in the Movies” at the Leon Levy Gallery in the US and is currently editing a book on the subject.

Coming from mixed marriages, they are Jewish only according to the Jewish law (Halacha), as they are all born of Jewish mothers. They are the famous actor and film screenplay writer Haider Ali, son of the first Miss India (1947), Pramila nee Esther Victoria Abraham, and the famous trio of Roy Kapur brothers, viz., producer Siddharth and actors, Kunal and Aditya, sons of Salome Aaron, *Eve’s Weekly Miss India* (1973). In recent years there have been some attempts to bring the Jewish contributions to Indian cinema in limelight. Australia’s Deakin University’s Associate Professor Danny Ben-Moshe is in the process of producing a documentary film on the subject, titled, *Shalom Bollywood*, while Kenneth X. Robbins recently held an exhibition titled, “Baghdadis and the Bene Israel in Bollywood and Beyond: Indian Jews in the Movies” at the Leon Levy Gallery in the US and is currently editing a book on the subject.

The author, Dr. Navras Jaat Aafreedi is an Indo-Judaic Studies Scholar, working as Assistant Professor of History at Gautam Buddha University, Greater NOIDA (India). He is also the Executive Director of the Youth Outreach Programme of the Society for Social Regeneration & Equity, an NGO dedicated to the promotion of interfaith amity by bringing the minority contributions to India into the limelight. He can be reached at aafreedi@gmail.com.

A very special thank you to Stephanie Comfort for her permission to include these images in *AJL*. Stephanie has been collecting postcards of Jewish life, synagogues and towns from around the world for many years. Tour her incredible 15,000+ Jewish postcard collection at http://jewishpostcardcollection.com. It is truly remarkable.

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**Feature**

by Navras Jaat Aafreedi

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Reuben wrote a series of articles on all the great stars he had personally known since the early 1950s for the daily newspaper *The Asian Age*.

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The Daily, now defunct, and wrote regularly for *Sunday Free Journal, Sakal, Kesari, Maharashtra Herald*, and many others. From 2004 to 2005,
A Journey of a Thousand Miles

The Start of My Shanghai Bob’s Story

Kindergarten class photo in Shanghai, Robert is circled in the top row
It is said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Robert Goldman’s last step and breathe were at the age of 54 in 1994. At that time, I wasn’t sure I would ever breathe or step again, but I made a vow to share the story of my Robert, my late husband, with the encouragement of family and friends. But what started out as a vow to tell Robert’s story—one of more than 18,000 Jews who called Shanghai home during the 1940’s and 50’s—evolved into an unexpected and rewarding journey of self-exploration. Developing Slow Boat From and To China, a work that is part family memoir and part historical narrative, has led me, someone with no formal training on research, from Shanghailander groups to online forums to hallowed research halls and ultimately to the streets of Shanghai to walk in my husband’s footsteps. My experiences have given me a deeper insight into the many Jewish lives impacted worldwide by the Holocaust shared by my late partner Harry Fischman who was a Holocaust survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. And while this isn’t the story I am telling here, Harry Fischman was to be my 2nd B’Sheret. This is the story of my Shanghai Bob.

I realized that drive and chutzpah are key to shepherding a project of this magnitude. This legacy is for my children, Sam and Naomi, who were just beginning to understand their father as they reached young adulthood. In the stories I have shared with young and old, I continue to marvel more than ever about my Shanghai Bob and the thousands of survivors who shared the Shanghai experience with him.

We must stop a moment and go back to 1945. I was 2 ½ years old living in Connecticut, the war was in full escalation, and my parents were still on food rations. I was born premature and continued to be underweight and fussy.

With my Mom’s precious 2 rations, she bought a beautiful large sweet potato. It was baked in the oven until the skin was crispy. Upon slicing this potato, my Mom donned it with oleo and then a cinnamon topping. Just talking about it now, I am hungry. But not then. My physical actions said no. My Mother’s comment, like many others of that generation, was “Don’t you know there are children starving in China?” Little did we know then that my husband-to-be Robert Goldman was one of those boys starving in China. I was later to learn, that there were very strict food allotments for those living in the Hongkou Ghetto. Robert recalled one time when he got his one sweet potato, ate it fast because he was hungry and didn’t want anyone to steal it. He snuck around to another line, took someone else’s hand, and went to the head guard. Food rations were very much in effect and there were written checklists to see who got what. His name had already been crossed off and then he got his face slapped. Robert never ate another sweet potato after the war. Why—because he didn’t have to. At 2 and ½, all I knew was that I wasn’t going to eat that potato in any way, shape, or form. That event happened in the spring of 1945.

During my years in high school, from 1956 to 1960, my exposure to and awareness of personal stories about the Holocaust in Europe was limited. The story of Asia was much more obscure. What I learned came from World History books. Information was limited. While there were facts and dates and enemy lines given, there were certainly no firsthand accounts scattered among the dates. No one in our family ever talked about the atrocities of war. No one we knew was in that part of the war. It was too awful to talk about or to believe so it was hidden.

Fast forward to the spring of 1965. My friend from college, Jim, decided he should play matchmaker. Jim was stationed with the U.S. Army in Germany. He spoke many languages, had security clearance working as a petroleum analyst, and had a bunkmate with similar interests. Jim wrote “I have a friend here that could use some mail from a nice Connecticut girl. May I give him your address?” I was in my last year of undergraduate school awaiting acceptance to Physical Therapy School outside of Pittsburgh, Pa. The last thing I had on my mind was writing to a stranger. However I said yes. In the 1960’s it was very common to write to soldiers as a gesture of good will. The first letter came by airmail. It was beautifully scripted on thin parchment paper. The first sentence was “Dear Faith. My name is Robert Goldman. I am 5’10” tall, have black wavy hair, hazel eyes, and, by the way, I was born and raised in Shanghai, China 1940-1958.” The rest of the wording of the two page letter was a blur to me after reading that. I had hardly been out of Connecticut and here was a young man who circled half the globe two times before the age of 25. He and I wrote for eight months across the 4,000 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. Slowly there developed a bond of friendship, understanding, confidence, and trust. He and I opened about our past. His was most interesting to me and we soon made plans to meet in person once he was discharged from the Army. That date materialized in December of 1965 at my parent’s home. The exact details of that 12 hour date is imbedded in my head. Slowly there developed a bond of friendship, understanding, confidence, and trust.
Chinese, a few pictures of his small family in China, and several classmates photos with names on the back stayed in Robert’s briefcase at home in the closet. When Steven Spielberg’s movie *Empire of the Sun* came out in 1988, Robert’s flood gates of emotions opened up throughout the entire movie. Though the boy featured in the film was British and interned in a separate camp in Shanghai, that boy was Robert. We wrote to the author of the book James Ballard to ask if he would consider doing a sequel to his true story. In his own handwriting Mr. Ballard wrote that his past was so painful that he could not emotionally visit that lifetime again. We were so proud to have at least received a personal letter back from England.

Over the next few years, Robert painstakingly wrote 27 pages about his family’s background and his daily life in Shanghai. You would think he could have written 3 books in the time he scripted those 27 pages but 27 it was. Because of the active recording of his life until about age eight, I felt I had permission to write about the rest of those 10 years in Shanghai in the 3rd person. I’ve almost completed enough research, interviews, reading, and travels to fill in the missing pieces of Robert’s life. During our 27 years of marriage, he shared much with us but not enough. In 1990, I gave him a ‘this is your life’ 50th surprise birthday and, via tape recordings, writings, and personal comments from far away guests, his cherished story and legacy was told. Thank goodness I had the wherewithal to have had the two hour presentation videotaped. And in an incredible stroke of compassion, Steven Spielberg gave me a signed poster of the *Empire of the Sun* when I told him that Robert had passed away with most of his memories.

One of the most significant as well as emotional times in my life was traveling to Shanghai with the Rickshaw Reunion Group. This group is made up of first generation Shanghailanders who were in Shanghai between 1937 until the end of the War. I had been to and presented at several reunions in the United States over the years and felt very comfortable. My son Sam, who was serving in the U.S. Army in South Korea, and Robert’s childhood friend Fredy Seidel* traveled with me. I also hired a translator/photographer who spoke Shanghainese. A freelance writer, Adam Minter, who was working in Shanghai helped me map out our adventure. As we walked down King Chow Road to find Robert’s home at #146, my heart sank as many of the homes were in partial or full stages of demolition. “Breathe,” I was told when it was revealed that his home for 10 years remained untouched! The little lady who had been Robert’s neighbour and caretaker for 10 years was home. She and her family had moved into the Goldman home from 1958 and
remained there until shortly after our visit. We went back the next day and were greeted by the rest of Ye Cuier’s family, and the neighbors who had also been there 46 years earlier. Sadly, two weeks later her home was demolished to make way for high rise buildings. Our timing was indeed fortuitous.

While there are so many narratives that detail the plight of the Jews in Shanghai, the fact that Robert’s family stayed on in Shanghai through 1958 makes his story somewhat extraordinary. There were of course others that did as well, but conventional wisdom has led most people to believe that all the Jews ‘vanished’ from Shanghai as soon as the war was through. This is far from the truth. The story of those years following the war and their emigration and resettlement elsewhere is a story in and of itself. Though I have interviewed in person a total of seven of Robert’s classmates and friends that stayed on in Shanghai through 1958, there are about ten others that I have not been able to find. Those seven gave me incredible snippets of their lives there: stories of food, playing hooky from school, playing soccer in the alleys and stamp collecting. They put emotions to words. I want his story to be known. I have shared photos in the Igud Yotsei Sin Newsletter, Points East from The Sino-Judaic Institute, and Professor Pan Guang’s books. On the wall of Exhibit Hall #3 at the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum hangs an exhibit with Robert’s life portrayed including a picture of his friends.

I’ll leave you with a quote by Elie Wiesel, “Memory is Everything. It is a passion no less powerful or pervasive than love. It is the ability to live in more than one world, to prevent the past from fading, and to call upon the future to illuminate it.”

*An excerpt from Fredy Seidel’s memoir is also published in this issue of Asian Jewish Life.

** Incidentally, I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Elie Wiesel about 20 years ago. Both Harry Fischman and Professor Wiesel lived in the same town of Sighet, Romania. They were taken to Auschwitz at the same time, lost all of their family, were in the Buchenwald Camp through Liberation on April 11, 1945, and went to the same French Orphanage for 3 years until coming to the USA in 1948.  

ASIAN JEWISH LIFE

AJL is looking for potential editorial contributions with Jewish content and Asian flavor that focus on Jewish art, cultural events, non-fiction, history, diversity, education, spirituality, politics, Israel and literature. Original poetry, photography, book reviews and fiction are also welcome. AJL will generally not accept previously published work.

For more information, please contact us at submissions@asianjewishlife.org
On Writing, Love and Judaism in Japan

Interview with Tracy Slater
Melissa Uchiyama, an American residing in Japan, grabbed a chance to meet with author and fellow American, Tracy Slater. Tracy is the author of The Good Shufu: Finding Love, Self and Home on the Far Side of the World, (G.P. Putnam’s Sons). The National Geographic Traveler issue named the book a “great new read”. She is also the founder of Four Stories, an award-winning literary series bridging Greater Boston’s nightlife and arts community and Tokyo’s, too! They met, along with Tracy’s young daughter, over iced coffee and the luxury of found time.

In The Good Shufu, readers learn of Tracy’s inner workings, experiences, and revelatory surprises as she moves from liberal, well-planned, girl-about-town in Boston, to a woman navigating a completely foreign landscape and social construct, both in the day-to-day, and in her budding relationship with Toru, the man with whom she negotiates many decisions and moments that shape her identity and the life they create together.

Melissa Uchiyama: Congratulations, Tracy, for all of the warmth and momentum your book is gathering. You write about some overarching themes—being a Foreigner here in Japan, experiencing fertility issues, eventually becoming a mother, but is there one overall theme this book captures/explores?

Tracy Slater: We can rigorously, perfectly plan our life. But sometimes, as I found, when that plan goes awry, against our best efforts, we end up in a place that is better for us than what we would have figured or planned.

MU: Isn’t that indicative of culture shock, too? The cues and behaviors that would normally work quite successfully no longer apply in the new culture. You truly cannot plan.

Using the four named stages of culture shock as chapter markers seems to be a powerful tool which helps to ground the reader not only in time, but to the emotional and conceptional development of the story.

The dialogue especially seems well-remembered, perhaps written verbatim. How much were you journaling then? How much of these details and conversations did you entrust to your memory?

TS: I know there are a lot of opinions and viewpoints about how truthful memoir is and how truthful it should be. I try to make everything in the book as close to as I remembered and experienced it. The little funny English things that Toru said, those I wrote down at the time. When I could, I checked the accuracy with other people who were in the scenes... there were a couple of minor scenes that I had happening more closely together. Just for narrative consistency, I tried to make the memoir as close to the actual experience as I could.

MU: It really reads quite authentically. Did writing this change how you
TS: I’ve noticed myself sometimes narrating things as they happen and I feel very mixed about that. I’m excited about working on another book project, but in another way, it bugs me. I don’t want to be narrating my life; I want to be living my life, especially with my daughter. Is it worth it to be splitting off, on one hand, narrating, and on another hand, experiencing it? You never get back your kids’ childhood.

MU: I wonder how it was to take a very personal man, in a personal family, in a very personal culture where people just aren’t usually invited in and people meet out, and uncover all of the feelings and nuances of language, out to the world, in memoir. You also have your own family in Boston, and you reveal a lot about them. Were there surprises or discoveries?

TS: Writing about Toru for publication was easier than I thought it might be. He didn’t actually read the whole book. He’d spend two seconds reading, and then say, “Okay, you read it to me,” I’d spend about ten seconds reading to him, and then he’d say, “Okay, it’s fine.” I made sure I read him all of the parts he might be sensitive about and he was fine with almost all of it. Writing about his father was a little more sensitive for him. I felt mixed about never having read it to Toru’s father. He was dying while I was writing the book. He knew that I was a writer and that I wrote some things...

MU: Is it okay to share if you think overall, it honors the person? Or is it okay to be truthful because the truth is the truth?

TS: My family is very generous, but if they could choose, they’d be happy to not have another writer in the family. I’m not willing to ruin a relationship with someone I love over a book.

MU: That’s something your daughter will see (when she is older and reads your work), your fairness in presenting this culture, your family, and any potential divides. Maybe that changes the way you write, too, having a child? There is continuance. There is, also, the question of how much do we disclose about our children.

You’ll be a lot more public when it comes out in Japanese! You’ll interview on NHK and be famous at your daughter’s preschool! How exciting to be at this launching place, knowing that the Japanese translation is right around the corner, and The Good Shufu has already been so well-received.

TS: My publisher did a superb job of getting it in the right hands. My editor also helped me tremendously. See, my training was academic, but I did not want to write academically; I wanted to write a book that was enjoyable, a book in which a reader would get caught up. That is my very favorite quality of reading, but my academic background and ability was not going to help me. I’m not trained as a creative writer. My
editor pointed out where it was too much of an explanation, and not enough of a narrative. This is what changed in the various drafts of the book—creating a book that would appeal to people who weren’t looking for an academic read. I hope that some readers feel there are some parts that are thoughtful, while also enjoying a story to get caught up in.

MU: It sounds like you are doing that. Kirkus Review says, “The book truly finds its legs when the couple reunites in America, as Slater chronicles how she began to acclimate to Toru’s country... The author certainly makes the telling of it work.” It sure sounds like you grew as a writer in moving the story forward. What is another way in which writing TGS helped you grow as a writer?

TS: I love reading writing where there is nothing extra. There’s no extra language, no extra description, and it’s still so evocative. That’s such a balance to me and a way to honor the power of language and to play with the imagination. When I began writing about this experience, I didn’t even know that was something I liked about writing. I could have pointed to books that did this, but I would not have known how to articulate this. It’s something I try to move towards in this book and I still have a way to go. This book gave me an opportunity in which to practice. That’s not something you’re trained as an academic to do.

MU: I feel like it’s in every culture, and certain writers are really known for this, but I feel like Japan is really good at cutting off what is not needed, like in ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, knowing the essence of something, but getting it down to bare bones, it’s most beautiful, simplest essence.

TS: That is something beautiful about Japanese esthetics. That very sense and style put into words.

MU: In moving away from home, one misses out on family, misses out on them being with your daughter, all of the things we have pain over, holidays, the sense of community as a writer, as a thinker, etc. What, in terms of your Jewish community and writerly culture, have you gained in terms of community in being here?

TS: I have a number of friends here who are writers and they are so important to me. These friends are foreigners but they are also writers. It is so nice to have something that I can have in common with people in any part of the world. There’s a way in which the writing community is much smaller, obviously, than in Boston, but because it’s smaller, it’s a little bit more intimate and that’s nice. Meeting you, say, is so exciting. It’s so nice to know someone is a writer, but there are so many writers in Boston, it doesn’t make that person special. That is one nice thing.

Also important for me to remember, there’s so much that is hard about being away from a literary community. It’s so easy to say, “Gosh, think of all the things I could be doing in Boston right now—the literary festivals, this and that, but I also think I might not have the publishing career that I have now. I don’t think I would have gotten published, frankly, if I did not have the Japan experience. It’s important for me to remember that... I owe Japan! It’s so easy to say, “Oh if I were doing something different, things would be... Oh, if I were in the US, this would be better...

My editor requested, “Can you add something about Japan being [your] home?” No, because it’s not my home. Toru my home, but Japan’s not my home. I’ll never feel like Japan’s my home. “How do I honor that and also honor what she was getting at, which was a sense of closure,” I wondered.

MU: It’s exciting that your daughter will have both. Hopefully she will have both places that feel like home.

TS: Right. I feel like being in Japan has deepened my Judaism. Being here has strengthened my connection to my Jewish identity, has given me a desire to practice my religion in a way I never planned. Now, I’m not going to go out and join an Orthodox shul, but I definitely want to celebrate the Jewish holidays in our home; that is almost entirely, if not entirely, due to being in Japan.

MU: Do you have any funny stories of making a Shabbat or Chanukah or using a makeshift Japanese ingredient because you didn’t have what you needed?

TS: I did, before my daughter, Toru’s father always wanted me to make Jewish food. Toru asked for the Jewish meatballs! Also, we ended up going out to Chinese food on Christmas. We go out to Chinese food every year on Christmas because that’s what we do in America.

MU: You know what works well? Grinding fresh wasabi as horseradish on Passover.

TS: Ooh, I love horseradish!

MU: It’s not the pink Manischewitz, but it’s good. ☺️

Melissa Uchiyama lives in Tokyo with her husband and two children. She has contributed to a number of blogs, books and publications. To read more of her work, visit her blog at http://melibelleintokyo.com/.
Inside Hong Kong’s Ohel Leah Synagogue is a white marble plaque that bears the words “Roll of Honour: In Memory of those members of the Jewish Community who lost their lives in the defence of Hong Kong 1941 -1945”. Those memorialised were all members of the permanent Jewish community of Hong Kong and they served along with many other members of the community. The years 1941-1945 makes reference to the time period beginning with Battle of Hong Kong, from 8–25 December 1941, through the end of Japanese occupation on 16 September 1945, the date of the formal acceptance of the Japanese surrender. The attack on Hong Kong was coordinated with the broad offensive across the Pacific and Southeast Asia on 7 December 1941 (Honolulu time), referred to as “A Date Which Will Live in Infamy” by US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

For those with an interest in the battle for the defence of Hong Kong, Tony Banham’s book Not the Slightest Chance - The Defence of Hong Kong 1941 is highly recommended. This meticulously researched book details the causalities hour by hour and reveals great insight into many unknown parts of Hong Kong history. Even with this account, details of the period have been lost and much of the history will likely remain obscure, namely biographical information about many of the brave men and women who lost their lives defending the Mainland and the outlying islands of Hong Kong. After a number of intense battles, the Governor of Hong Kong surrendered on 25 December 1941.

The work to fill in the gaps in the historical record is ongoing. The Jewish community of Hong Kong, in large part through the efforts of the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong, has made efforts to record some of this lesser known history. The community has maintained its own Jewish cemetery, in Happy Valley, since 1857 and a number of those who died during this period were buried there. This cemetery, incidentally, is still in use by the Jewish community.

This however is by no means the whole story. There are a small number of identifiably Jewish graves elsewhere in the city, in particular in the Military
Cemetery in Stanley as well as the Sai Wan War Cemetery. There is also a single known Jewish decedent listed on the memorial in Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong commemorating civilian war deaths.

Both of the cemeteries, the Military Cemetery in Stanley and in Sai Wan, are located on Hong Kong Island. Most of the Jewish graves in these cemeteries are of British soldiers (or members of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force) killed in the defense of Hong Kong; others died while interned in prisoner of war or civilian camps.

Also of note, Sallie Gubbay, mistakenly referred to as Sarah, Isaac L. Goldenberg and Leo Weill, all commemorated on the plaque in Ohel Leah Synagogue were buried in the Hong Kong Jewish community’s cemetery in Happy Valley.

**The Stanley Military Cemetery**

The Stanley Military Cemetery is located near St. Stephen’s Beach in Stanley, Hong Kong in the southern part of Hong Kong Island. The Village of Stanley itself played an important part in the history of this time period as one of the last battlefields of the defence. The cemetery, one of two military cemeteries of the early colonial era, was closed in the 1860s and then was re-opened during the Second World War. During the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, Stanley Prison, which sits next to the cemetery was used as a Prisoner of War and Civilian Internment Camp.

The cemetery was used during the war for those executed by the Japanese or those who died while being held as prisoners of war. After the war, the cemetery was extended for the re-burial of those who fell during the fighting in 1941 or who died during the occupation. The cemetery contains some 700 graves, and is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Five of the graves have been identified as being for Jewish persons; they are not together, as there is no “Jewish Quarter” in this cemetery. The headstones are generally very simple, and little is known about most of those they commemorate.

1. **Leontine Ellis**

Leontine Ellis was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force (“HKVDC”). She was working as a nurse. Her two sisters were also members of the Nursing Detachment (ND) of HKVDC. She died on 17 August 1942 at the age of 48. Her name is included on the Honour Roll in Ohel Leah Synagogue.
2. Samuel Gerzo

Samuel Daniel Gerzo was a gunner with the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC). He died on 25 December 1941 at the age of 37, which incidentally was the day of the surrender to the Japanese. According to Not the Slightest Chance - The Defence of Hong Kong, he was killed along with Harry Millington and was originally buried at St Stephen’s College.

He was the son of Daniel and Riva Gerzo. Records indicated that Samuel Gerzo was Romanian by birth. His wife was Ida Gerzo and they lived in Kowloon. According to the Hong Kong Daily Press, his wife Ida completed the 96 hours of hospital training for qualification to work with the Auxiliary Nursing Service (ANS) on 30 October 1940.

He is included on the Honour Roll in Ohel Leah Synagogue.

3. Herbert Alexander Samuel

He was a Gunner with the HKVDC. He died on 25 December 1941 at the age of 29. He was the son of Abraham and Ottalie Samuel. His death is also commemorated on the Roll of Honour in Ohel Leah.

4. Samuel Liborwich

He was a Private with the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. He died on 18 December 1941 at the age of 25.

5. Hymie Greenberg

He was a Signalman with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. He was killed in battle in Wan Chai during the siege of Hong Kong and died on Friday, 19 December 1941. Hymie was from Spedden in Alberta, Canada and was the son of Sonia Jampolsky and was the adopted son of step-father Moses Jampolsky.

6. Essie Greenberg

Listed on one grave is the name Essie Jean Greenburg and a date of death on 12 March 1942, aged 46. She was the wife of Walter William Greenburg. There is no definitive proof that she was Jewish. The claim remains unfounded. The marker itself is a simple boundary marker without a Magen David.

There are two discrepancies with the information on her grave. The first is the spelling of her name. The grave reads Greenberg while the War Commission lists her name as Greenburg. There is slightly more information available on Essie Greenburg as there are records for Liquor Licence applications for the Chardhaven Hotel, on Nathan Road, in which Essie is listed as the Hotel Keeper. Based on adverts in newspapers in 1939 and 1940, she also attempted to sell the premise pre-war and cited ill-health as her reason for doing so.

There is a further discrepancy with respect to the date of her death and her age at the time of death. Again, the grave marker indicates that she was 48 years old at her death on 12 March 1942. The CWGC records list her as 51 years old at her death on 12 March 1943.

Until her death, she was, like other civilians from allied nations, imprisoned at Stanley Internment Camp.

The Sai Wan War Cemetery and Memorial

In addition to those buried Stanley, there are also Jewish graves in the Sai Wan War Cemetery which is in the northeast of Hong Kong Island. It is on Cape Collinson Road, between Tai Tam Road and Lin Shing Road; the nearest
The MTR station is Chai Wan.

The Sai Wan War cemetery is the largest in Hong Kong maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), and contains 1517 graves. Originally, all the graves were said to have been marked by crosses; only after the CWGC took over responsibility in 1953 were they replaced by tombstones, which included the Star of David for the Jewish graves.

The remains of prisoners of war that had been deported from Hong Kong to Taiwan during the war, and who died in Taiwan, are also buried here. None of these were Jewish as far as we know, but the search for information is ongoing.

At the entrance to the cemetery stands the Sai Wan Memorial, bearing the names of 2,074 Hong Kong casualties of the Second World War whose places of burial are unknown. The cemetery was built in 1946, when most of the remains were reburied there. The names of 228 Canadians who died in the defence of Hong Kong are also listed on the Sai Wan Bay Memorial.

The cemetery and memorial were designed by Colin St. Clair Oakes, who also designed the Stanley Military Cemetery, and several military cemeteries in Southeast Asia, including those in Singapore and Thailand. Four of the graves have been identified as being for Jewish persons; they are not together, as with the Stanley Military Cemetery. The headstones are generally very simple, and again, little is known about most of those they commemorate. There are additional Jewish fallen soldiers identified on the Memorial whose bodies weren’t recovered.

A stained glass window in Garnethill Synagogue, in Glasgow, commemorates his life and the lives of the others who died in World War II. In the early 1940s, his parents ran a hotel in Glasgow called Ginsburg’s.

Etched in his tombstone are the words: “In memory of our beloved son Leonard. Never to be forgotten.”

The Jewish servicemen buried in Sai Wan Ho in the cemetery are:

1. Jack Rich

Jack Rich was a Sergeant with the First Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. He died on 25 December 1941 at the age of 24. His parents were Abraham and Leah Rickman.

2. Leonard Ginsburg/Winter

Leonard Ginsburg served in the army under the name Leonard Winter. He was a Lance Corporal in the First Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. His parents were Samuel and Bessie Ginsburg of Newlands, Glasgow. He died at the age of 21 on 25 December 1941, the day Hong Kong surrendered to the Japanese. The time of his death was approximately 7:45am while attacking Japanese forces based in bungalows in Stanley.

A stained glass window in Garnethill Synagogue, in Glasgow, commemorates his life and the lives of the others who died in World War II. In the early 1940s, his parents ran a hotel in Glasgow called Ginsburg’s.

Etched in his tombstone are the words: “In memory of our beloved son Leonard. Never to be forgotten.”

3. Robert Macklin

He was a Sergeant with the Army Educational Corps. He died on 22 December 1942, at the age of 33.

He was born in 1909 in Winnipeg, Canada, the son of Morris and Sarah Macklin, and raised in Montreal. In 1930 he was a bank clerk in New York City, but soon thereafter left for England and joined the British Army; he was stationed in Hong Kong from 1935.
He married Ursula Carroll (known as “Girlie”) of Knaphill in Surrey, in 1937, and they had a red-headed daughter Bonita (“Bonnie”) who was born in Hong Kong on 6 July 1941. He initially joined a Scottish regiment, but later became an instructor with the Army Education Corps, working in the Office of the Hong Kong Chief Censor - perhaps because his parents were both Russian born, and so he had useful language skills.

After the surrender to the Japanese forces in 1941, he was interned at Sham Shui Po Prisoner of War Camp. He died there of dysentery. His tomb bears the inscription: “Memories of you will ever be green. Girlie”

His widow and daughter were repatriated in September 1943.

2. David Morris Schrage

Rifleman David Morris Schrage is one of 30 members of the Royal Rifles of Canada, Royal Canadian Infantry Corps who are commemorated on a panel of the Sai Wan Memorial. He was one of 1,975 Canadian soldiers who left Vancouver on 27 October 1941 aboard the TSS Awatea, a passenger liner from New Zealand that had been converted into a troop transport. The soldiers were bound for Hong Kong to defend the British Colony in the event of an invasion by the Japanese. Rifleman Schrage died of a heart attack on 31 October 1941 and was buried at sea. His name is included on the Memorial.

3. Vivian Benjamin

Vivian Benjamin was the daughter of Silas and Rachel Benjamin. She was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. She died at Bowen Road Hospital on Friday, 21 September 1945 at the age of 52.

Her parents lived in Wembley Park, London.

Her name appears on Column 34 of the Sai Wan memorial. She is also listed on the plaque in Hong Kong’s Ohel Leah Synagogue.

4. Bernard Cohen

Bernard Cohen died on Wednesday, 24 December 1941 at the age of 27. He was the son of Morres and Ennie Cohen. He was a member of the Middlesex Regiment, 1st Battalion. His parents lived in Willesden, London though according to the 1941 Hong Kong jurors’ list, a Maurice Cohen was resident at the Hong Kong Hotel. This could possibly have been his father, but this is speculative at best.

4. Sidney Freeman

Sidney Freeman was a Sergeant with the Royal Artillery 80th Anti-tank Regiment. He died on 26 December 1943 at the age of 39. He was the son of Max and Katie Eliza Freeman of Swansea.

**Sai Wan Bay Memorial**

Those identified as Jewish and listed on the Sai Wan Memorial are:

1. Max Berger

Private Max Berger of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps died on 19 December 1941 during the defence of Hong Kong. He was the son of Morris and Regina Berger, of Sarnia in Ontario, Canada. He was active in Canadian Young Judea.

4. Vivian Benjamin

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1. Max Berger

Private Max Berger of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps died on 19 December 1941 during the defence of Hong Kong. He was the son of Morris and Regina Berger, of Sarnia in Ontario, Canada. He was active in Canadian Young Judea.
5. Frank Elliot

Frank Elliot died on Monday, 22 December 1941 at the age of 28. He was the son of Julian S. and Katie Abraham. He was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, R.A.S.C. His parents lived in Notting Hill, London. According to the 1941 jurors’ list, he was a clerk at S. J. David & Co.

6. Reginald Goldman

Reginald Goldman died on Thursday, 18 December 1941. He was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. His mother lived in Greenhithe, Kent.

7. Rudolph Hoselitz

Rudolph Hoselitz died on Sunday, 21 December 1941. He was a doctor and a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps.

8. Harry Bernard Joseph

Harry Bernard Joseph was in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, R.A.S.C. He died on Monday, 22 December 1941. According to the 1941 Hong Kong jurors’ list, he was a broker with Joseph & Co., living at 43A Conduit Road. His mother lived in San Francisco.

9. Borris Lipkovosky

Borris Lipkovosky was a gunner with the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, 1st Ballalion. He was previously a member of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. His parents lived in Shanghai. He died on Thursday, 25 December 1941.

Pok Fu Lam Memorial

David Kossick

David Kossick was a civilian casualty. He died on 19 December 1942 at the age of 46 as a result of enemy action. He was an engineer and ship surveyor in the Government Marine Surveyor’s Office.

He was listed as a member of Hong Kong’s Ohel Leah Synagogue in 1936.

The quest for new information is ongoing and the effort is collaborative. For many of these servicemen and women we have but a scintilla of information. This list is by no means exhaustive. There is also an ongoing effort to expand this list in order to ensure that it is as thorough and as inclusive as possible. If you have any names or biographical information to add please contact us through info@asianjewishlife.org. All of the cemetery photos were supplied by Eildo.
What happens to the garbage you throw away every day? This is something journalist Adam Minter thought about when writing his book, *Junkyard Planet: Travels in the Billion-Dollar Trash Trade* (Bloomsbury, 2013). But it’s also something he grew up with, as the fourth generation of scrap yard owners. Minter was raised in Minneapolis, where his great-grandfather had settled after emigrating from Russia and first trying his hand in Galveston, Texas. It wasn’t that Minter’s great-grandfather was particularly interested in scrap; circumstance drew him to the profession. Like many Jews around the turn of the last century, his grandfather met with anti-semitism in the U.S., including Minneapolis, so he took the jobs he could get.

Collecting other people’s scraps was a way to make money and something the well off certainly wouldn’t have done themselves. Minter gives some interesting facts about the early U.S. scrap trade and how most of the people involved in the field were from Europe. And of those, many were Eastern European Jews. In New York alone, he states, a quarter of the Jews there were in the scrap trade. This was all around 1900. Fast forward one hundred years and the leaders in the field are now from China.

*Junkyard Planet* is a fascinating book, not just because of the stories Minter tells about the trade, but also because of his own story and that of his family are so captivating. Minter first learned about China’s role in the American scrap trade when Chinese buyers came around to his family’s junkyard, where he and his grandmother worked alongside his father.

“I can’t recall, precisely, when the first Chinese scrap buyer appeared at the front window of my father’s scrapyard. It was probably around 1994, right around the time China had begun to deregulate key industries, and private entrepreneurs had decided that scrap metal was the business where they’d strike it rich.” (Page 59)

And the United States was the perfect place for Chinese scrap buyers to make their purchases. As Minter states, “I gradually came to appreciate how tightly connected Chinese demand for American recycling is to American demand for Chinese goods.” (Page 84). China had the factories, but not the natural resources. The United States was the perfect hunting ground for metals such as copper.

That’s where Minter introduces Johnson Zeng and Homer Lai, one of the most memorable sub-stories in this book. Imagine a lone Chinese man driving across the United States, visiting scrap yard upon scrap yard and exporting millions of pounds of metals back to China. That is Johnson Zeng. Based in Vancouver, Zeng spends half the year on the road in the United States. On the other end of the business is Homer Lai, a metals expert in Guangdong Province. Zeng snaps photos of the scrap he finds in the U.S., sends them electronically to Lai back in China, who receives them immediately and can quickly tell Zeng how much money to offer. According to Minter’s book, there at least a hundred such Chinese traders who travel around the U.S., exporting metal back to the mainland.

Waste takes on another meaning in a recent book by Michael Meyer. In *Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China* (Bloomsbury, 2015) is an absorbing look at Meyer’s three years in his wife’s hometown in northeast China (all while she worked in a swank law firm in Hong Kong). Aptly called Wasteland—which, incidentally, doesn’t have a relationship to the scrap metal world—the town was home to a large rice producer but in recent years has been developed, thus forcing farmers into high-rise buildings and a life away from agriculture.

Although Meyer himself isn’t Jewish, his book celebrates this area’s vibrant history and its diverse population, including the vivacious Jewish community a century ago. Harbin is probably the most known city in Manchuria and was once home to 30,000 Jews who either moved to China from Russia for economic reasons or fled for political reasons (i.e., pogroms). Most were stateless, no longer citizens of Russia but also not of China.

According to Meyer, in the heyday of Jewish Harbin, the city boasted two synagogues and 20 Jewish periodicals, including something called the Siberia-Palestine Weekly. It was this community where the grandfather of former Israeli Prime Minister Elud Olmert lived. Olmart’s grandfather is buried in the Jewish cemetery there.

A century later, the Chinese government has restored one of the two former synagogues in Harbin and has turned it into a Jewish history research center. Meyer writes that the last Jew left Harbin as late as 1985, a solid decade after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Just a few years ago the Chinese government announced that it would restore the other synagogue, which had been used as a hostel.

Visitors to Harbin today can stroll down Zhongyangdajie, or Central Boulevard—which before 1949 had been known as Kitaiaiskaya Street—and view plaques in English and Chinese that tell the origins of the buildings, many of which had been Russian Jewish department stores. Meyer also writes about visiting the Harbin Sister Cities Museum, which displays a yarmulke to symbolize Harbin’s important role in the Jewish diaspora, once the largest in the Far East.

These two books are excellent narratives of the connections between Jews and Chinese, in niche arenas like scrap metal and far off places like northwest China. Minter and Meyer are brilliant storytellers who add to the already rich literature on China. Both books are available in hardcover, paperback, and electronic format.
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