

Yom Kippur in the Highlands...

....hmmm not everyone's immediate choice, but as we sat together midway through our fast this year and looked out over the mist shrouded mountains, it seemed to me we were in the perfect setting.

The journey of Yom Kippur from the strident prayers of the morning through the supplications of afternoon and into the quiet inner realisation of evening was reflected in the way the light and mists covered and revealed the mountains around us. As night finally fell and we entered the final phase of the fast, the darkness was almost palpable and one could imagine that the universe was holding its breath as the day of judgement closed.



Fanciful stuff yes? But then a mixture of Highland Magic and Mystical fasting will do that to you. I hope all you reading this had a good and safe fast, and who knows maybe next year you will join with us and hear the truly awesome sound of a shofar blast ringing out through the mountains.

JON FREEMAN

Tuesday in Jerusalem

... just a normal day, out taking photographs for a graphics job, searching for nature and beauty amongst the bustle and buildings, missing the scenery of Argyll. My journey led me unintentionally to the Kotel (the remaining 'Western Wall' of the 2nd Temple) and this untouched photograph was an Act of G-d - via a dove casting a shadow on her way home. I didn't find a scenic image but a spiritual one - just as real and just as natural!

JACQUELINE FRIEDMAN



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Welcome...

to another issue of Four Corners!

With this, the fourth issue, it seems time to take stock, to think about what we're doing and why. It seems to me that there has been a strong and positive message coming through from each of the communities, large and small. A message from a barmitzva in Aberdeen and from a suvva in Oban. A message from a refurbished mikveh in Edinburgh and from a festival of Jewish culture in Glasgow. A message conveyed in this newsletter first proposed at a meeting in Dundee. And what is that message? It seems to me that it says 'my community is still alive. We're doing Jewish things here'. There are also personal messages, individual people's experiences of being Jewish in Scotland and of being Scottish in Israel which seem to proclaim 'My Judaism is still alive, I'm doing something Jewish'. And throughout all of those messages, throughout the network of connections between people and communities, shines a message that 'Jewish ethical principles of tzedakah, of love, caring and concern for other people are still alive and happening here, in Scotland'. I've lost count of how many times I've been asked incredulously 'you mean there are Jews in Scotland?!' Perhaps next time I'll just hand the questioner a copy of Four Corners. Yes there are Jews in Scotland, and we're doing just fine!

Dundee afflicted by wobbling gravestones

New health and safety rules have prompted a general safety check, and cemeteries throughout the UK are being monitored for wobbles. The risk is in reality very marginal, but according to the BBC, five people, including a child, have been killed by falling gravestones in the last few years.

To the distress of some visitors 54 stones in Dundee's Jewish cemetery have been marked with yellow plastic bags indicating that they are unsafe. Most of the relatives left Dundee decades ago and this potentially leaves the community with a bill for thousands of pounds to correct the wobbles.

The answer could lie with the Council's Community Service team - that is, offenders undertaking community service as punishment - who would, under supervision, cement the bases. Although willing to help, no repairs have been done because the parks authority says the team is unqualified, and is unwilling to allow them into the cemetery. We are waiting for a decision.



THE CORNERS OF SCOTLAND

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A SHABBATON IN ABERDEEN...

Aberdeen? There are Jews in Aberdeen?

The guys in Shul were incredulous. Glasgow they had heard of; Edinburgh even. But as far North as Aberdeen? (and most of them weren't sure where it was either).

"And what sort of Jews are they?"

Let me introduce myself. My name is Elkan Levy, and I have just been appointed as Director of the Office of Small Communities. This is part of the Jewish Memorial Council, and I work alongside the Rev Malcolm Weisman the long-standing Minister for the Small Communities.

The JMC is one of the oldest Anglo-Jewish organisations, which does a lot of useful things in the community, but its biggest job these days is in the OSC, the Office of Small Communities. Our definition of a small community is a group of Jews, outside the main Jewish centres, that doesn't have a Rabbi or Minister. There are about 70 of these in the UK, from Truro in the West to Margate in the East, and from Bognor in the South to the far north of Scotland - hence Aberdeen. Yoni Shoshan and Ehud Reiter were most welcoming – "Come and see us; we'll even postpone the AGM so you can be present!"

Friday morning 12th November saw my arrival at Aberdeen Airport, at an unbelievably early hour. The taxi driver waxed lyrical about the beauties of the Granite City, and told me a most interesting tale about the temperate climate and the shortage of rain. Both stories proved less than accurate – Aberdeen rain has a peculiarly cold and penetrating quality, as I later discovered, in strong contrast to the warmth of its inhabitants.

Ehud had invited the community to supper on Friday night in the Shul at Dee Street, and promised everyone who registered that I would send them a free CD and other goodies. Twenty-five people registered and came, and I sent CD's out to ten family units.

The CD was a recording by Chazan Lionel Rosenfeld of songs for Friday night, and we asked people to listen during the week so that we were all able to join in at the meal... Each CD came with a booklet, a Grace after Meals Bencher, and the Shabbat Hone Companion, all of them in Hebrew, transliterated Hebrew for rusty readers, and English.

Friday evening saw a nice Minyan in Aberdeen's attractive little synagogue; we sang as much as possible, and everyone joined in. When we got upstairs Kiddush and the Challot were laid out, twenty-five people of all types and ages sat around the Shabbat table, the Buffet was laid out at the end, everything was prepared.



BY ELKAN LEVY
PICTURED OUTSIDE ABERDEEN'S SHUL

...AND THE AGM

REPORT BY EHUD REITER

The Aberdeen Hebrew community held its AGM on 15 November. We are a small community, with a formal membership of only 7 families and 4 individuals. Altogether about 50-60 people (including some non-members as well as members) participate in the community to some degree, out of a total Jewish population of about 200 in Aberdeen and surrounding areas. Most of these people came to Aberdeen for work or study, only a few members of our community (excluding children) were born in Aberdeen.

The high point of the past year was certainly the Bar Mitzvah of David Taylor; Rabbi Rose's shiurs and Elkan's shabbaton were also definitely highlights of the year! The low point was the death of our oldest member, Louis Cohen.

The most dramatic presentation was from our treasurer, Yoni Shoshan, who reported that our bank balance had dropped from £10277 (on 31 Oct 2003) to £446 (on 31 Oct 2004)! This is due to capital expenditure for upgrading both the caretaker's flat and the flat above the shul which is rented out. Although on the one hand it is worrying to lose our financial cushion, on the other hand it definitely was worth doing this if it makes the flat easier to rent and hence restores our income stream.

We also decided to raise our membership fees, from £80 to £100 for families and from £50 to £70 for individuals (the first increase in many years). We also introduced a new rate of £10 for students.

Looking towards the future, we were very impressed by the success of Elkan's shabbaton, and decided to try to have more communal Shabbat dinners in the future, ideally once a month. Some dinners may be associated with holidays (eg, the next one will be during Chanukah), and others may involve talks by visitors or members of the community.

The topic of a chedar or other activities for children came up, as it always does – the lack of Jewish education for children is one of our biggest weaknesses. We have tried to organise chedars in the past, but have had limited success because of the lack of teachers and also because the children in the community are very spread out age-wise, so there are only a few in each age group. No one had any good suggestions for improving the situation, unfortunately.

Our president, Ramsey Brown, had intended to step down, but graciously agreed to stay on "just for one more year" after much pleading by other members of the community – thanks, Ramsey! The other officers – Ehud Reiter (Vice-President), Yoni Shoshan (Treasurer), and Esther Shoshan (Secretary) – will also continue in their posts.

The Amazing Tale of a Duke, an Italian and a Scot [by adoption] – oh, and not forgetting the Chanukiah...

JUDITH LIPMAN

It came to pass that on a Friday night in summer some years ago I was sitting peacefully in the Youth Hostel at Inverary. Having ascertained no one around I prepared my evening meal, sat down and started to pray before lighting the candles. Saved stubs of candles in ashtrays. I then got a terrifically heart-wrenching shock. From behind me a voice said 'Shabbat Shalom', and a young man sat down with his plate at my table. I lit with shaky hands and replied Shabbat Shalom. Over the food we shared our 'where froms'. He was Italian from Naples. Just poured my tea out and another thundering shock. Had I been in the Bell Tower at the Church and seen the Chanukiah? At this point I expected Nessie to come serpentine through the door, or Salvador Dali master of the surreal. I was stone cold sober too. Shakily I said 'QUESTO HANUKIAH? DOVE E IL HANUKIAH?' and he replied 'CAMPANILE' and other Italian words.

The next morning we oiled up to the church, and sure enough it was there, but why? The Duke of Argyll collected candlesticks. Campbells do crazy things as well as murdering MacDonalds in their beds. Bad, mad and well never mind. We spent the day chatting in Italo Englesi. He went off to do his thing and to rearrange plans. Sunday morning with all the aplomb of a conjurer I produced my Italian friend Giovanna Micerra to the startled gaze of the Argyll and Bute (plus Galloway) Jewish Group - I think for one minute they thought I'd gotten a toy boy! – and announced the news about the Chanukiah. One tough Scot marched up to the Duke's door later and got permission to borrow the Chanukiah, get it mended and use it. Eventually it blazed out of Cowan's Croft's window, probably puzzling the sheep, but pleasing our group celebrating Chanukah.

Since my family in Israel are closely connected to the Hebrew University I got them puzzling why the Chanukiah was presented to the Duke of Argyll on the occasion of the University's opening – and found out that Arthur Balfour of the Balfour Declaration had a daughter Baffy who was present at the opening, and inherited the Chanukiah presented to her father. Baffy came on a visit to the Highlands carrying the Chanukiah in her luggage (why?) She died unexpectedly and her friends with whom she was staying knew the Duke of Argyll collected candlesticks and gave him the Chanukiah.

End of story. So if you visit Inverary and look at the collection of candlesticks in the Bell tower of the church, you will see a nicely restored Chanukiah sitting incongruously with church plate and candlesticks.....



BARRY KAYE WITH THE DUKE'S HANUKIAH PICTURED AT ARGYLL GATHERING HANUKAH 1996(?) AT COWANS CROFT, KILCHRENAN

Succot – another new experience.

The 3rd of October. A quiet Sunday. Little did I know!

Some weeks before Succoth, it was suggested that a Succah party should be held in my garden. This was based simply on the grounds of space. Little knowing, I happily acquiesced. A good opportunity to learn first-hand.

The week before the 3rd, I suddenly realised that this would entail the building of a Succah. Fine, except I'd never seen one before. A quick check of my book collection elicited the following information – Build a Succah! Typical, everyone assumes that we're all aware of the requirements. Not at all true in my case. So off to visit some knowledgeable friends who live nearby.

It soon became apparent that there shouldn't be too many problems. I was offered assistance – gratefully accepted and we set to to clear my patio (unused for 3 years) and work out how to make the structure. A quick visit to a builders yard provided us with standard garden trellis squares and building operations could commence – apart from the rain that is. After a dry sunny day, the heavens opened and in five minutes, we were soaked through. Owing to time shortage though, we had to continue so, amid much laughter we carried on and ignored the elements.

It took three more similar (soaking) sessions to complete the structure, and on the Sunday morning, I was left with the final preparations – hanging fruits. All finished and house tolerably emptied five minutes before the first guests arrived.

Succot in Oban

BY ISAAC LIPKOWITZ



After a morning of moderately heavy rain, we were all delighted when the sun came out and the ground dried sufficiently for everyone to sit either in the succah or around it on the patio. For about three hours the elements were kind to us and, just as the visitors started to re-enter the house, down came the rain (with terrible results as will be seen elsewhere).

It appeared that the guests were all content with the proceedings – giving rise to a sigh of relief from myself and my construction assistant. Nothing fell down, the weather stayed dry, nobody got lost on the way.

As the guests departed, I suppose like all organisers, I started to relax. All had been well and the day had passed without incident and I'd certainly learned. Until.....



The Succah was fun, the company and the food were good, but by far the best bit – at least as far as 11 year-old Yariv was concerned - was what happened next. All in the car to leave, and trying to reverse out of the grassy driveway, the wheels just skidded round without getting a purchase. The car did not however remain stationary, but gently slipped sideways down the slope until it came to rest against two compost bins. Simultaneously the skies opened and the light rain became a deluge. Much time, mud, tow-rope, landrover, garage van and large winch-truck later, the car achieved the road – at which point the rain stopped and we set off for home.

MORE JNAH CHANUKAH MEMORIES

In the early days of JNAH, Chanukah felt like 'our' festival. As Judith describes on page 2, the discovery of the Argyll Chanukiah in 1995 was a fortification of our embryonic group, and we made every effort to meet up every Chanukah thereafter, sometimes with the loan of the Duke's big bronze exhibition piece.

However, we remember Chanukah 2001 for another reason. We had made preparations to meet at the home of Mervyn and Helen Kessell, but 48 hours previously, Mervyn suffered a heart attack and tragically was taken from this life. To lose such a young and vibrant personality was a shocking blow to all the communities with which he was involved, and how much more so to his wife and children. JNAH misses Mervyn, his bright wit and friendliness, and our thoughts go out to Helen, Debbie, Caroline and Steven at this time of year.

THE 5TH CORNER

MIKE DIAMOND

I usually deny it. That I made Aliyah I mean. Two months before their trip, I'm summoned to brunch. "We're holidaying in Scotland this year. Where should we go?"

Afterwards, I'm invited back to see the photos. "It's such a beautiful country and the people are so friendly. How could you leave such a wonderful place? What on earth made you make Aliyah?"

"I didn't", I say, ignoring that I've here for 17 years. "I came for a visit and didn't go back. No ideology. No Zionism. I just liked it here. Besides, d'you know what the weather's like in winter?"

I speak Hebrew fluently – with a broad Glasgow accent. I do okay with the "chet" – unlike the Yanks and the Pommies who round off the throatiness with a "k". My blood stream has long since adjusted to the average 100° of the Negev. I take it in my stride. My infrequent Scottish visitors turn crimson in 7 minutes.

They press me for a better explanation. "Okay, if you really want to know". And then I switch to Hebrew, for only Hebrew conveys it.

"b'yisrael ani chai, b'scotland hayiti mitkayaim" Roughly translated: "In Israel I live. In Scotland, I existed".

Basically it means I'm a masochist. Not a day goes by in Israel that isn't as struggle. Everything is hard. Everything is pressured. Everything is disorganized. You have to fight for everything. If you don't fight, you don't get. And politics reign supreme.

But I'm never bored... Ever.

Had I remained in Glasgow I'd probably be living in Newton Mearns with the other Glasgow Jewish lawyers. Mundane suburbia - getting old and fat. Instead I'm in a flat in Beersheva, Middle Eastern music pounding the walls. Getting old, but not yet fat - it's too hot to get fat... I didn't have asthma before, but years of breathing microscopic sand have taken their toll.

I have two wee girls. Unlike the kids of other English-speakers, they don't speak *Heblish*. My kids talk *Scotbrew*. Actually I'm lying. Yuval (12) picked up American from MTV. Ophir, (9), speaks posh English she got from her wee ex-Israeli friend in London. I talk to them in Glaswegian. They reply in Anglo-American Scotbrew. We get weird looks wherever we go.

Life is tough, but I'm not complaining. The siege mentality brings people together. I have friends I trust with my life - literally. The other day I was at a café. A friend's 16-month old daughter waddled over to the next table. The stranger picked her up, sat her on her knee and they played for 10 minutes. Nobody raised an eyebrow. Returned safe and sound, stranger and mother - comrades in arms. Would it happen in Scotland? I don't remember, but it's common here.

I often think it's because I'm not an ideologist that I'm still here. If I were, I'd have left a long time ago.

Reflections

CAROLINE FLETCHER

Scottish weddings have been one of the highlights of our 3 years in Israel and there have been more of them than in the 16 years we lived in Glasgow, or do they just make more of an impression?

Last week there were two - on the same night. My husband dropped us off at the scenic park in Ramat Eshkol where we felt instantly be-tartaned, in the company of a surprising number of Glaswegians, present and former, to watch a simple chuppa dramatised by torchlight and the intensity of the emotions of all present. To the accompaniment of drums, in accordance with Jerusalem tradition since the destruction of the Temple, Jacqs and her Jerusalemite husband, Arnon led their delighted guests to a memorable celebration.

Meanwhile, not far away in the Tamir Hall, Rochel Silverstone was married to her Australian chatan, Naftali. She had been greeted on her way to the chuppa by hundreds of children from the Mattesdorf area in the north of Jerusalem, which she has made her home for the past 10 years. During the next week, we enjoyed Sheva Brachot meals with both couples after the weddings in the company of yet more expatriate Scots.

A cool wind blew rose petals across my path home from the shops in Ramat Bet Shemesh this week - and I wasn't even a bridesmaid. Autumn in Israel means temperatures still in the high 70s, but blessedly chilly evenings. We live in a strange mix of palm trees and pines, with enough deciduous trees to offer the crunch of leaves underfoot. At this time of year the Brits, Canadians and New Yorkers come alive, revelling in the sensation of cold and refusing to wear sweaters, which those born in less temperate climates have worn throughout the summer. The first rumblings of thunder and welcome splashes of rain are already behind us and the bakeries are full of doughnuts, with Chanukah still three weeks off.

A special feature of life in this new town is the frequent inauguration of new Sifrei Torah (Scrolls of the Five Books of Moses) in the many schools, yeshivot, and study halls, as well as shuls. We happened to be in an older part of town the other evening when a group of boys suddenly ran from their school door, followed by their teachers. They reappeared as part of an excited but disciplined stream of torch-bearing youngsters, marshalled by a large number of adults, climbing the hill towards the new home of the Sefer Torah which was to follow. Behind the impressive train of flame-lit faces, a circle of men danced and sang in honour of the Sefer Torah, borne under a chuppa. The scene echoed the recent weddings, not only with the torches and the singing and the chuppot, but in the music, the purposefulness and the determined hope that mark our lives in Israel, despite all the odds.



Dear all friends of JNAH and other Corners.

I wish all of you could've shared the happiness of our wedding with Arnon and me, but hope these pictures will convey something of the atmosphere. Thanks to all who sent good wishes, it was heart-warming to hear from old friends at such a time of such changes! Happily we had the company of a few 'true' Scots, a number of expatriates, and others who have lived and visited my first chosen homeland.

Here in my ultimate homeland we celebrated in informal Israeli style, with an eclectic and joyful throng of friends and family. To us it was wonderful because it was our wedding, but others have reported it was special for them too...

We look forward to visiting Scotland together in the coming year and sharing another special gathering with my equally eclectic community in Argyll... The dancing styles are a bit different - but food, music, fires and joy are not exclusive to Israel!

JACQUELINE FRIEDMAN
(NEE SPEYER)

More useful definitions:

SANTA-SHMANTA: The explanation Jewish children get for why they celebrate Chanukah while the rest of the neighbors celebrate Christmas.

TORAHFIED: Inability to remember one's lines when called to read from the Torah at one's Bar or Bat mitzvah.

GOYFER: A Gentile messenger.

HEBORT: To forget all the Hebrew one ever learned immediately after one's Bar Mitzvah.

Come and join us!

Events are being planned for Chanukah: SUNDAY 12TH DECEMBER IN DUNDEE and Tu B' Shevat, the new year for trees: LATE JANUARY IN OBAN.

Do come along and join us! For further information contact Leah Granat: 07887 488 100

Chanukah lasts for eight days: 25 Kislev to 3 Tevet, (7 December pm till 15 December 2004.) The word means Dedication.

In the year 175 BCE Palestine came under Greek-Syrian rule. Jews were forbidden to practice their religion, and the Temple was invaded and defiled. The army of the Greeks under Antiochus Epiphanes seemed to be invincible, but in 165 BCE a tiny band of Jews led by Judah Maccabi, a son of the priestly family, overcame them.

Chanukah celebrates the military victory and the further miracle which followed. The Maccabis rededicated the temple finding only enough pure oil to light the menorah (The 7-branched everlasting oil-lamp) for one day, but it burned for eight days, during which time new oil could be procured and the purity of the Temple maintained.

Did Chanukah happen years ago, or is it happening now?

Looking at the events today, you start to wonder. The story of a little candle pushing away the monster of frightening darkness, of human sensibility overcoming terror and brute force, of life and growth overcoming destruction — the battle is very much alive within each of us, and in the world outside of us.

After all, the victory of light over darkness is the cosmic mega-drama — the ongoing story of all that is. It reoccurs at every winter solstice, at every dawn of each day, with every photon of sunlight that breaks through the earth's atmosphere bringing it warmth and life-nurturing energy. With every breath of life, every cry of a newborn child, every blade of grass that breaks out from under the soil. With every flash of genius, every stroke of beauty, every decision to do good in the face of evil, to be kind where there is cruelty, to build where others destroy, to move humanity forward when others pull us toward chaos. And that is Chanukah.

Most would acknowledge the miraculous nature of the Maccabee victory. However, a person could say that there have been other fights for independence, and attribute military success to superior strategy. When the nation witnessed a scientific impossibility, when oil that was sufficient for only one day burned for eight, there was no denying G-d's hand in human affairs.

Without miracles, we might come to believe that the laws of physics define the underlying reality. Once we see the inexplicable, we witness that there is a transcendent reality. We attain a higher consciousness. And then we look back at physics and say, "This too is a miracle."

Coincidences are miracles in which G-d prefers to remain anonymous. They happen every day. We need only to open our eyes and hearts to notice them.

The final war is not fought on battlefields, nor at sea, nor in the skies above. Neither is it a war between leaders or nations. The final war is fought in the heart of each human being, with the armies of his or her deeds in this world. The final war is the battle of Chanukah and the miracle of light.

ADAPTED FROM CHABAD.ORG

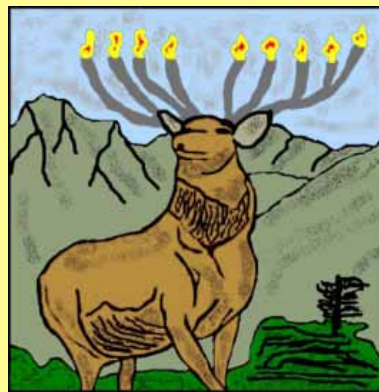


On Chanukah it's traditional to eat food fried in oil to remember the miracle of the small jar of oil that burned for eight days when it should only have lasted for one. Traditionally latkes are popular, but many people also enjoy sufganiyot (doughnuts)

POTATO LATKES

- 3 large potatoes, grated
- 1 large onion, grated
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons matza meal or wholewheat flour
- Salt & Black pepper to taste
- Oil for frying

Press the potatoes and onions in a colander to allow excess water to drain. Mix all ingredients together. Take small handfuls of mixture, flatten and fry gently, turning over to brown both sides (if you coat your hands in flour the mixture won't stick to them)



MacCabi of the Glen

WITH APOLOGIES TO LANDSEER

Cartoon by JACOBSWORLD

Michael Jacobs is a born Sassenach, never having set foot in Scotland, but many of his best friends are Scottish. He lives in London with his wife and sons, but wishes he was still in Israel.

See more of his work at

www.jacobsworld.com

Chanukah symbolises a confrontation between two philosophies...

The Greeks had a mission to fill the world with their civilization: their arts, sports and education in a philosophy of physical beauty and visual aesthetics. The Jewish people were reaching for spiritual heights, living a holy existence in their land, with Torah study and the Temple as the centre of service to the one G-d. The Temple menorah, never extinguished or allowed to go out, was unseen by any human eyes except the High Priest's.

The miracle of its oil gave rise to the little Chanukah menorahs which have burnt for over 2300 years and have seen all the tinsel of past civilizations burn out. And we eat oil too. That's not to make sure we don't have great physiques like the Greeks, but because Jews should be like oil. It floats on top of everything else, it doesn't mix well and it burns with a bright light.

Our ability to stay apart when the outside world tries to force Plato or Santa on us is what prevents our light vanishing into the world of darkness that surrounds us. Maybe the Greeks had a message of Western Civilization that was a step up for other pagan cultures but for us Jews it was a step down to a world devoid of holiness and true meaning.

ADAPTED FROM ESSAYS BY RABBI DAVID ORLOFSKY

The festivals of Chanukah and Purim were earned by the Jews because of our response when our lives were threatened. To the threat of physical genocide at the time of Purim, we employed spiritual weapons - fasting, prayer and repentance. At the time of Chanukah, the threat was spiritual annihilation - the Greeks wanted to uproot the faith of Israel, and remove the light of Torah. And our response was physical warfare. It's as though we say to G-d "Your light is in our hands, and our light is Your hands."

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

"Where were you born, dear?"

KATHY HAGLER

I do have a slight accent and here in the Highlands – a place not known for its cosmopolitan attitude – it can be quite noticeable.

The accent is not English, so it doesn't cause too many problems and the natives do not consider me to be a 'white settler', but they do often express a friendly interest.

"Where were you born dear?" is the usual question, mostly from little old ladies at the fish shop, or from the 15 stone hunk at the gym. And here is where the problem starts. I don't like lying to them; I don't like telling them it's none of their business; and I do not wish to get into long explanations. So I've developed a shock answer saying I've grown up in Hungary. This is of course certainly true, but definitely not the whole truth.

Alternatively they start guessing my accent: "Are you German?" "No", "French?" "No", "Dutch then?" "No", "Polish" "No".

Their geography usually failing at this point I put them out of their misery with my stock answer. Yes "I've grown up in Hungary".

So now I'll put you all out of your misery, and if you have the patience to read on I'll tell you the story.

Being the epitome of the 'Wandering Jew' I was born in quite a few countries. It is not that my mother gave me birth on a high-speed jet plane, it's just that the borders moved around a lot in Central Europe.

I was born in the middle of the Second World War in a small market town in the Carpathian Mountains. Originally, in the days of the wild peace before the First World War, the town – name of Munkacs – was part of Hungary which - in its turn – was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. When that was dissolved at the end of the war and several new countries were created, Munkacs got shifted into the Slovakian part of Czechoslovakia, but that did not last long. With the start of World War Two, when Germany and Austria re-annexed those areas taken from them just a few years before, so did Hungary, and Munkacs became Hungarian again, which was no big hardship, as the inhabitants still spoke Hungarian. That, however, only lasted for the duration of the war.

When the 'glorious' Red Army 'liberated' the region it also claimed it as its own, and my place of birth became a small, internationally ignored part of the Soviet Union, but by that time I was a toddler and was being hidden in Budapest, where I grew up.

It was my granny who brought me up there and it was she who taught me Hungarian. But my granny's mother tongue having been German (remember the Austro-Hungarian Empire?), I learnt mine with a built-in accent and nothing changed since.

In good time I learnt Russian and then German, English and then Hebrew. Every added language and every place I lived thereafter left its own mark and varied veneers were added on top of my already unidentified accent, the last one being a bit of Scots, even though Invernessians pride themselves – falsely, I sometimes think – for speaking the best English in the UK and having no accent whatsoever.

So now you tell me: where was I born and what accent do I have?

Sometimes I think I should print some cards with the text: 'you are the 9987th person to ask me this question. Stick around the 10,000th gets a prize!' and hand it out to all interested little old ladies at the butcher's and 15 stone hunks at the gym.



SCOJEC AGM

Now, I know that reading an AGM report is not the most exciting thing in the world even if you happened to be there, but reading about it when you didn't even go to it isn't something most people would choose to do.

BUT PLEASE DON'T SKIP THIS ARTICLE because the things discussed at SCOJEC's recent AGM affect everyone in the Scottish Jewish community.

THE GUEST SPEAKER was Rami Ousta, Director of the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS), an organisation which has been very supportive of SCOJEC. Without the help of BEMIS we wouldn't have received any money from the Ethnic Minority Grant last year – and without that money you wouldn't be reading this copy of Four Corners. Ephraim Borowski, Director of SCOJEC, is also a member of the BEMIS Board and Rami described the relationship between the Jewish community and BEMIS as a 'two way process' which can benefit us and also provide support for other minority groups in Scotland.

TO CONSULT OR NOT TO CONSULT is the question facing the Scottish Executive on a daily basis. And as inevitably as day following night they consult. And, whenever the issue might affect the Jewish community, SCOJEC responds. But how do we decide which issues are relevant to the Jewish community? And how is the content of our response decided? Members debated the merits and demerits of meetings, e-mail, phonecalls as a means to achieving the best possible result, and ended by recognising that each has its place and will continue to be used by us as appropriate.

THE FINANCIAL REPORT concluded that SCOJEC could do with more money (when did any financial report ever conclude otherwise?) and various possibilities for raising it were discussed.

SO WHO'S WHO IN SCOJEC! John Cosgrove was re-elected Chair, and Kenneth Collins and Philip Mason vice-Chairs. Stephen Kliner is now Honorary Secretary and Daniel Clapham Honorary Treasurer.

THE BEST BIT OF THE AGM! Undoubtedly the lunch (thank you Edinburgh!) and the opportunity it afforded for people to chat and get to know each other, to put faces to names, to e-mail addresses and to voices on the phone. And not just to SCOJEC members because anyone can come to observe, and many did. So see you next year! (if not before – why not come to Chanukah, Tu b'Shevat and other events being held in a community near – or not quite so near – you?)

The following are allegedly actual answers given to history tests by children in the USA...

The Greeks were a highly sculptured people, and without them we wouldn't have history. The Greeks also had myths. A myth is a young female moth.

In the first Olympic games, Greeks ran races, jumped, hurled biscuits, and threw the java. The games were messier than they show on TV now.

Socrates was a famous old Greek teacher who went around giving people advice. They killed him. He later died from an overdose of wedlock which is apparently poisonous. After his death, his career suffered a dramatic decline.