

Segal Family

This story was submitted by Melanie Segal.

It was written by Josh Morris, family friend.

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Haskell (Yechezkiel) Segal: Husband, Father, Grandfather, Great Grandfather, Canadian wholesaler, jam maker, wine maker and **Holocaust survivor**.

He was born in Sveksna in 1924 and died in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in 2016, at the age of 92 years.

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread.

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's own way.” Viktor Frankl

Even after losing almost everyone he ever loved, Haskell Segal's life was the embodiment of Frankl's 'Man's Search for Meaning'. He was principally known for his unfailing kindness and generosity, sense of humour and his twinkling blue eyes.

Haskell was born into comfort in the Lithuanian village of Sveksna. His father Michael had a thriving business purveying meat for the army. At Passover, Michael invited soldiers, Jewish and gentile, to join his family Seder. No rebel, Haskell attended synagogue every morning, and after school every day engaged in his joy, playing soccer.

That life ended when the Nazis arrived in 1941. On a single day all Jewish residents were rounded up and murdered in a pit outside the village, the atrocities committed by the same soldiers who ate Michael's meat. The entire Segal family perished, except Haskell, his brother Abe, their friend Naftali Sieff, three of only seven Jewish villagers to survive four years of slave labour in five concentration camps.

At the age of sixteen, Haskell was deported to a labour camp in East Prussia. One day, Haskell got separated from his work crew and wandered past a farmhouse. The farmer invited him in. It was his single feast in four years of hard labor, including eggs and fresh bread. He never forgot the kindness of the German family. He reported back to the work crew with bread stuffed in his pockets. To this day, his friend Naftali has never forgotten Haskell sharing that bread with him.

In 1947, after the war Haskell immigrated to Palestine, immediately enlisting in the army. He settled at Kibbutz Kfar Blum on the Syrian border. Civilian life in Israel in the 50s was tough. Sponsored by distant relatives, Haskell immigrated to Montreal with his brother Abe. He maintained the machines at Richstone's Jewish bakery, and was determined to start his own business.

In 1967, Haskell married Shifra Eisenberg, a divorced single mother and adopted her boys, Laurence and Brian. Their daughter Melanie was born in 1968. He bought a truck and started BLM Import and Export, the initials of each child. He commissioned Canadian items to be produced at indigenous

reserves: dolls, t-shirts, and raccoon hats for sale at tourist stops. This was a true multicultural exchange, Haskell taught Yiddish to the chief at Kahnawakhe, forging a business friendship that thrived for decades. In retirement, Haskell and Shifra followed their sons, relocating to Vancouver. He maintained his lifetime routine of waking up early, going for a swim and a long walk, then caring for his wife and elderly most afternoons. He delighted in making and sharing jam and wine made from blackberries picked on his son Laurence's Richmond property. In Shifra's final days at the assisted living center knew him as 'banana man' since Haskell faithfully brought his love a banana every day. Melanie has two granddaughters, Emma and Samantha, the joy of the final chapter of Haskell's life. He died peacefully one hour and a half after the Yom Kippur fast ended. Along with the kindness, Melanie and both granddaughters inherited those twinkling blue eyes.

Here are a few photographs of Haskell Segal:



This photograph was taken when he was living in Israel in the late 1940s/early 1950s before he moved to Montreal, Quebec, Canada.



This is a photograph from Melanie's wedding,



Melanie is very interested in her Father's Sveksna past. She and her immediate family went on a trip to Sydney Australia to visit her father's friend Naftali Seiff.

This photo shows the position of the door to the family home in Sveksna. The door of the family home had Jewish motifs carved into it.



Recently Melanie and her cousin Mayda were reunited. Mayda is the daughter of Abe Segal (known in Canada as Charles). The two brothers did not get along in Canada and went their separate ways. Both Melanie and Mayda live in Toronto Canada. Melanie has become a devoted cousin to Mayda.

Here is a photograph of Melanie and Mayda together:



(The masks are due to the corona epidemic situation)

Mayda is considered legally blind. Here is a writeup about her:
Overcoming challenges is nothing new for Toronto's Mayda Segal. At age six, doctors told Segal's mother that her daughter had only five per cent vision and would never know the simple pleasure of seeing colours. In 1985, doctors at Toronto's Clarke Institute of Psychiatry diagnosed Segal with autism. Born with a developmental disability and living today in a Reena residence located in North York, Segal funds e-glasses for longtime resident September 5, 2019 By Daniel Horowitz Mayda Segal wears her eSight glasses. The CJN 20:23 ,28.10.2021 Reena funds e-glasses for longtime resident /https://thecjn.ca/news/canada/reena-funds-e-glasses-for-longtime-resident 2/5 Born with a developmental disability, and living today in a Reena residence located in North York, Segal, 63, simply refuses to succumb to her challenges, choosing instead a path of courage, perseverance and positivity. "That's all I do, I just keep going. I have no choice but to keep going forward," says Segal. Starting in 1975, Segal spent two and a half years in Jerusalem, where she attended a special Haddasah-WIZO school and learned to speak Hebrew. "I like being Jewish and I want to learn more Hebrew," says Segal. "I enjoy walking by myself to

Beth Emeth synagogue, and sometimes I take the TTC (public transit) to other shuls, such as Beth Tzedec," she adds. Her father, Charles Segal, who was born in Lithuania, survived a concentration camp during the Holocaust, but lost his parents, sister and two of his three brothers. After living in Montreal, as well as Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, Ont., her family finally settled in Toronto in 1979, where Segal lived in a Reena group home. Today, Segal does not have any family left except her sister, who is disabled and in chronic care. Segal seems to have a survivor's genetic makeup, explaining her courage, tenacity and will to carry on despite the odds. Yet, one fateful day, after having accepted her virtual blindness for decades, there was a new glimmer of hope. READ: PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO TOUR THE HOLY LAND Segal's sister saw a story on television promoting eSight, a biotechnology company that makes electronic glasses that give people who are legally blind dramatically improved eyesight using algorithms that capture and enhance exactly what the user is looking at. In spite of Segal's retinal detachment and her grim diagnosis decades earlier, the eSight glasses turned her natural 20:140 vision into 20:50 vision, allowing her to enjoy the sights and vibrant colours most of us take for granted. "It was like a miracle. I remember the first time I tried them in March of 2018. I could see bright, pretty colours, people and all the buildings outside the window," says Segal. Of course, man-made miracles don't come cheap, and Segal's life-changing eSight glasses were no exception, coming with a price tag of about \$10,000. Fortunately, the Reena Foundation stepped in and covered the cost from a portion of the proceeds raised at Striking for Reena, a popular bowling fundraiser held by the organization each May. "The Torah states 'You should not place a stumbling block before the blind' " says Sheila 20:23 ,28.10.2021 Reena funds e-glasses for longtime resident /https://thecjn.ca/news/canada/reena-funds-e-glasses-for-longtime-resident 3/5 The Torah states, You should not place a stumbling block before the blind, says Sheila Lampert, executive director of the Reena Foundation. "Individuals supported by Reena often face multiple stumbling blocks to inclusion in the community. Our goal is to remove as many of those challenges as we can. "One of Reena's core values is to provide the individuals we support with a life of meaning and dignity. Mayda's success story is a perfect example of tikun olam and what we can accomplish when we all work together." "Mayda is brilliant, very sweet, very strong and very independent," says Tammy Lariviere, one of Segal's caregivers at Reena. "Of course, she wears a safety vest and uses a cane when she's out and about so that people will notice her. "She was so excited about the eSight glasses since she first tried them. Now that she has them, she still needs to practise with them; and with our guidance, and being there for every training session, I hope that she will eventually be able to use them perfectly by herself." "I want to thank Reena Foundation and all of the people – people who don't even know me – who went bowling and raised money for me to get these glasses that finally let me see," says Segal. "I bowled, too, but I had to have special help to throw the ball down the alley. Next year, I plan to be there with my new, special glasses on and bowl just like everybody else. This is the best present that anyone has ever given me."

Mayda had a sister Ellen who died. Here is a writeup about her:

ELLEN MAE SEGAL passed away at home in Toronto on Thursday, November 28, 2019, at the age of 65. Though she spent decades bravely dealing with many physical challenges, her abilities far outshone her disabilities. Ellen was born in Montreal, Quebec, the older daughter of the late Charles and Alice Segal. She is survived by her devoted younger Mayda Segal. In her youth, Ellen was Yeats' "glimmering girl"--a shining light who faced her life's challenges with gumption and humour. She will be remembered and missed by the many friends and supporters who helped her along the way and who were touched by her wonderful spirit. To Plant Memorial Trees in memory, please visit our Sympathy Store. Published in Toronto Star on Dec. 3, 2019