



*Working Family Stories  
and Treasures  
of the Hamilton Jewish  
Community*

*Shalom  
Village*

*Anshe*

Inspired by the *Family Treasures* program developed by the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa and the *Working Family Treasures Program* offered by the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (WAHC), a group of seven community and arts organizations<sup>1</sup> in Hamilton, Ontario, have developed a collaborative partnership to capture work-related stories that shaped our Jewish community. The *Working Family Stories and Treasures* program combines oral history, storytelling, the visual arts and drama to bring to life our Jewish history.

The starting point is for participants to build their own family trees, going back to 1900 or earlier, and have each present the stories and treasures of their family's working life in imaginative and creative ways. This story telling, through a variety of media, will be shared with others in small exhibits at each collaborative partner location. Following these small exhibits, a city-wide exhibit will be mounted combining the work from all the participating organizations. Our history is to be cherished. It is also to be shared.

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<sup>1</sup> The collaborative partners include: Shalom Village; Beth Jacob Hebrew School; Hamilton Jewish Middle School; Jewish Community Centre; Kehila Jewish Community Day School; Temple Anshe Sholom Supplementary Educational Program and The Print Studio.

*Working Family Stories and Treasures, c/o 70 Macklin Street  
N. Hamilton, Ontario L8S 3S1*

*Sholom*

*Educational*

*Program*

*Beth Jacob*

*Hebrew*

*School*

*Hamilton*

*Jewish*

*Middle*

*School*

## **Our History**

Imagine having to leave your home country. Poverty and strife have made it impossible for you to stay. Canada, a country half way across the world, has opened its doors. You and your family start a journey that will be full of surprises, disappointments, happiness and fear. It was, and is, a continuing story of problems faced by immigrant populations to this day, as well as a story of being accepted in a new land, finding work and forging a community where there was none.

For many Jewish immigrants to Canada, the journey was not easy. The hope of a better life was often tempered and discoloured by discrimination, poverty, and the sheer strangeness of their new home. It was a sense of community that provided the support these families needed to live and work in this new land.

The working stories of each immigrant - man, woman or child - are woven into the fabric of our collective history. Each story is like a piece of a patchwork quilt – individually very special, together a tapestry that tells a rich tale. It is a tale that will impact us for generations to come. Therefore, it is a story that must be passed along from one generation to the next.

*"Do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and your children's children."*

(Deuteronomy 4:9)

## **The Challenge**

In every home, there are objects that we cherish or that have been passed from generation to generation. These are our family treasures. Just like these objects, the stories of our heritage play an important part in our personal and communal histories. We treasure them as well.

*"There's a world of wisdom in our personal stories. Your life is a legacy, a gift that only you can give. Why waste something so precious?" (Dorothy Berthelot)*

With the aging of the generations, there is a growing concern that the rich history of our Jewish ancestors who forged a life in the Hamilton area will be lost. Many in the Jewish community were very young when they came to Canada, or are already 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or maybe even 3<sup>rd</sup>

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*Jewish  
Community  
Centre*

generation Canadians. Our challenge is to ensure that those who lived the stories and those who will carry them forward have the time and tools needed to ensure that the stories are not lost. We need to connect our children to their histories so that they may learn and grow from the collective knowledge of the generations before.

*“Our death is not an end if we can live on in our children and the younger generation. For they are us, our bodies are only wilted leaves on the tree of life.”*  
(Albert Einstein)

**The Program**

*Kehila  
Jewish  
Community  
Day  
School*

The *Working Family Stories and Treasures* program is comprised of several workshops to help participants research, write about, and present their family’s working stories in imaginative ways. There are four workshops that will guide participants from creating a family tree to telling the stories visually, in written format and through performance art. In the end, each participant will have a *Family History Workbook* and various pieces of art depicting their family’s working history, thus passing on the stories to the current generation and preparing the stories for future generations.

By identifying and working with family stories and treasures, the program will:

- engage the community’s young people and seniors in telling the stories of their family’s journey to Canada and the kinds of work required to create and support the community here;
- help preserve our history and tell the stories of our ancestors;
- provide for the broader community a Jewish context for many subjects taught in schools and faced by immigrant populations to this day;
- give participants a greater appreciation of their own power to preserve and shape the past by acting as its interpreters.

*The Print  
Studio*

Not only our own community, but the community has a whole, will be able to see and understand our experiences of living and working in Canada – a story which is not unique to the Jewish community, but which transcends the barriers of culture, language, poverty and religion and is truly a Canadian story.

**Opportunity to Support**

The budget for this project is modest - \$28,000 to hold the workshops, provide materials to each participant and hold a series of local and city-wide exhibits. The benefit to capturing our stories for our children and our children’s children is priceless.

*“Whoever teaches their child teaches not alone the child but also*

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*Participating*

*Artists:*

*Thea Faulds*

*Khalm*

*H'erbin*

*Ellen S.*

*Jaffe*

*Hana*

*Pinthus*

*the child's child, and so on to the end of generations"* (Hebrew proverb)

The Jewish community in Hamilton has a story to tell. It is a story about an experience that differs from that of Jews who settled in other, and perhaps larger centres. Yet there are common and important threads that tie us to our past, and will help us understand and celebrate the contributions, trials and tribulations of our ancestors.

The ***Working Family Stories and Treasures*** program is for all of us. It is a chance for the elders of our community to share their working stories and treasures with our younger members. It is also a chance for our younger members to gain knowledge of the experiences of their Jewish ancestors. To understand where we are going we must first understand where we have been.

Your donation to the ***Working Family Stories and Treasures Program*** is a commitment to preserving our past and helping future generations understand the marvellous contributions of the Jewish community to creating the fabric of our city.

Gifts to the project are eligible for a charitable receipt, through Shalom Village Foundation. Contributions may be made by sending your cheque to Shalom Village Foundation or online at [www.shalomvillage.ca](http://www.shalomvillage.ca) by specifying that it is for the ***Working Family Stories and Treasures Program***. All donors will be recognized, if they so wish, in exhibit publications.

For more information about the project, please contact:

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