



CHAVERIM NEWS & VIEWS

2006

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through the written word

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Chapter's first major initiative
larger than life

ZIMBABWE'S MIRACLES

Ve'ahavta assists in
separating conjoined twins

WORLD ACTION

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repair the world?

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take a stand against
the torture abroad

CELEBRATING WITH

'STARRY KNIGHTS'

Chapter members
join forces to make this
annual Ve'ahavta event a success



together repairing the world

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CHAVERIM NEWS & VIEWS

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On the cover : Elizabeth, Grace, and the twins from Zimbabwe

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It's a pleasure to introduce the second edition of Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan's News & Views Newsletter. The Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan (VCV) chapter is not just a place to hang out with some great people, or to simply volunteer from time to time. Once it gets into your bloodstream, you get hooked and Ve'ahavta becomes a part of your everyday life.

Why is that, you may wonder. The meaning of Ve'ahavta is 'and you shall love'. Love shapes our lives and personalities and gives us hope and comfort. It gives us something to live for, to fight for, and in some cases, to die for. Love is highly infectious, it spreads and gets passed from person to person or animal, and the more it's given away, the more it comes back to you. When we love, our hearts light up with an incredible sweetness and joy, and suddenly the whole universe is our friend.

Ve'ahavta, what a powerful name, what a powerful awareness. Love does conquer all. Ve'ahavta's love has brought people off the forsaken streets of Toronto, reigniting their dignity. This love weekly feeds the homeless, reaches the remote rainforests of Guyana and the AIDS clinics in Zimbabwe, and touches devastated Tsunami victims and the tortured and starving of Sudan. Wherever else there is strife, Ve'ahavta's love sends warm rays of hope.

It has been wonderful seeing VCV, Ve'ahavta's first and only chapter, grow stronger in numbers and passion for *tikun olam* (repairing the world) this past year. It has also been great working with so many fantastic people who give so much of themselves for the sake of others in the pure spirit of *chesed* (kindness) and *tzedaka* (charity).

Heartfelt thanks to each and every one of our members for your eternal enthusiasm, cheerful hard work, and magnificent dedication. Each of you has a beautiful *neshama* (soul) and an inspiring giving heart radiating so much love.

Last year, chapter members had the pleasure of taking the conjoined twins from Zimbabwe, Tinashe and Tinotenda, plus mom Elizabeth and nurse Grace to hospital visits. The twins are exceptionally beautiful baby boys. Thank G-d, safely separated, they are now healthy and back home in rural Zimbabwe. We love and miss them so much.

Our Bizarre Bazaar event held at Earl Bales Park Community Centre last June was a lively event with an amazing sale and silent auction, which raised over \$4,500. Unique fundraising *tikun olam* bracelets also made their debut this spring, costing Chai (\$18.00). In addition to beautiful beads, they display the words "TIKUN OLAM" and also come in "PEACE" and "SHALOM" versions.

We also helped obtain food donations and acted as servers for the annual Ve'ahavta second Passover seder for the homeless, whose theme was "let all who are hungry come and eat." What a night to remember.

Our Chaverim also obtained food and gift donations for Starry Knights, a wondrous annual event, during the last night of Chanukah 2004, when we served Toronto's homeless a scrumptious banquet. The last Starry Knights this past November included a dynamic silent auction run by the chapter, through which we raised over \$38,000.

The chapter is constantly busy making fantastic Simcha Baskets for *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs* and other occasions. These baskets are purchased from Ve'ahavta and after the *simcha* (celebration) are returned to the office to be distributed to the homeless. How wonderful to share your happiness with those who have nothing.

This summer we also helped with the Great Escape Island Adventure held on Centre Island during a severe storm. We cooked, baked, obtained a mountain of food donations, acted as beauticians and hairdressers, and served meals to our homeless clients, giving them a day's holiday of food, fun and frolic. We all had tears just seeing their happy faces.

We have so many exciting events planned for 2006. We welcome new members who want to make a difference, are willing roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty and be excited to perform *mitzvot* (good deeds), have a knack for or interest in fundraising and community awareness, and want to be part of our warm caring fun loving *chevra* (group of friends).

May G-d bless all of you and may we always work together in the bond of friendship, love, strength, and good health.

Peace, love, and blessings,

Marleine Kay
VCV Director

Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan (VCV) is a most unique component of Ve'ahavta because it is our very first chapter – an interesting component of growth in itself – and because of the individuals who are part of it.

Having a chapter is a way of saying *Mazel Tov*, we're expanding. It is our first child, an extension from the source. I am always fascinated as I watch VCV weave its way into the light and establish itself as a viable entity within our family. At times it reminds me of a child taking its very first steps or uttering its first word.

Then of course there is the committee. Marleine Kay, the founder of VCV, was nominated Ve'ahavta's volunteer of the year in 2005. She knows that the decision was unanimous because of her leadership, tenacity, and ability to create something from nothing.

Marleine, her husband Alan, and her mother Eva, have continually approached this labour of love with such exuberance and sincerity that it has empowered Ve'ahavta's main office and staff.

The essence of my message is to wish each and every one of you *yaisha ko'ach* (Yiddish for 'well done') for committing to VCV, but more so for your gift of *tikun olam* (repairing the world). Your partnership is likely far bigger than you know.

Over the last few months alone, Ve'ahavta has been involved in launching a mother-daughter clinic in Sri Lanka to assist the victims of the tsunami. We are also about to open a similar clinic in Chad for the victims of the war in Sudan.

Ve'ahavta has also played an important role in assisting the family of the conjoined twins from Zimbabwe, who were recently separated at The Hospital for Sick Children through the efforts of the Herbie Fund.

We continue to travel the streets of Toronto helping the homeless and to work in sub-Saharan African to fight the worst disease ever to hit humanity, HIV/AIDS. In addition, in the rainforests of Guyana we have provided medical assistance to 1,500 men, women and children who normally go without basic care. This work, these *mitzvot* (good deeds), could not happen without the support of our family, including the VCV members.

I am proud to be a partner with VCV, and have great *nachas* (Jewish pride) knowing that you have decided to take your resources and invest them in Ve'ahavta. The fact that we are using our Judaism to empower and strengthen the world we live in is a reason to rejoice and celebrate.

I hope that every human being in 2006 is free and able to actualize the gifts that lie within all of us.

Take care, peace,

Avrum Rosensweig
Executive Director, Ve'ahavta



Never look down on anybody unless you're helping them up.

The Reverend Jesse Jackson, American Civil Rights Leader

You cannot do a kindness too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, American Poet



Repairing the World with Baskets

by MICHELE BRESLIN

Socks, scarves, toothbrushes, razors and soap are just some of life's necessary items that are easily found in your home. Imagine being homeless and no longer having a closet in which to put your gloves or a bathroom cabinet to hold your toothbrush. Chances are if you don't have a home to house these necessities, you most likely don't own them.

In our hands, these items are taken for granted; in the hands of a person living on the street, they become luxury items. Joanna Gryfe and her family recognized this dire fact and did something about it. They stuffed baskets with provisions for daily life, wrapped them in brightly coloured cellophane, and used them as centerpieces at Joanna's *Bat Mitzvah*. After the *simcha* (celebration), the baskets were hand delivered to the homeless through Ve'ahavta's Mobile Jewish Response to the Homeless program. Joanna's *tikun olam* (repairing the world) project spread throughout the Jewish community, reaching thousands of individuals living on or near the streets.

But with such a large project and limited pairs of hands, Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan (VCV) chapter director Marleine Kay and her husband Alan Levin took it upon themselves to help advance the initiative. To raise awareness of the baskets, Kay relied on her creativity and on those involved in the project. She wrote letters to companies, encouraging them to donate, as well as to entice them to order the baskets for corporate events.

This led to donations of \$1,000 from Shoppers Drug Mart and bottled water from Sam's Club. She also bought many of the other items that filled the tubs. Donation sheets and word of mouth also helped foster public awareness of the initiative and gather more financial donations or material provisions. Chapter member Sheri Sananes also donated 200 scarves, which she crocheted, while member Lesley Silver-Winick garnered \$60 from her colleagues at work.

Then one day last December, seven women gathered on Kay's living room floor, surrounding piles of socks, hats, soap, power bars, water bottles and many other items. Within several hours, seven pairs of hands stuffed 30 plastic tubs with provisions and beautifully wrapped them with large silver bows. They also added cards outlining the basket contents and purpose of the project. "It was an enjoyable spirited time," said Kay, who has since run several more basket-making nights at her home.

The overall goal of Ve'ahavta's basket-making project is to replace standard floral centerpieces with the meaningful baskets and transform any *simcha* into a *tikun olam* event. Baskets are priced at \$36 and \$50, with all proceeds going toward alleviating the dire situation of the homeless. Tax receipts are issued for donations of \$10 or more.

A LABOUR OF LOVE by MARLEINE KAY

Dedicated Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan (VCV) chapter member Marie Williams won't stop giving. She revealed her enthusiasm for helping others again when she generously spent endless hours last summer driving Tinashe and Tinotenda, the conjoined twins from Zimbabwe, along with their mother Elizabeth and devoted nurse Grace, to Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children for treatment and check-ups.

These brave twin boys, joined by a shared liver, were brought to Toronto from Zimbabwe for life-saving surgery to separate them, as well as for later operations to repair their cleft palates and lips. A Ve'ahavta volunteer doctor discovered that Elizabeth was carrying conjoined twins during a routine prenatal check-up at Zimbabwe's Howard Hospital.

While in Toronto, Williams helped the family by driving them to the hospital from their temporary housing at the Salvation Army apartment complex on Bayview (very different from the family's one-room mud hut in their native village). She stayed in the hospital for several hours each time, offering Grace and Elizabeth support and companionship.

Upon return to their apartment, Williams's work was not done – she helped to bathe and feed the babies. The three women shared many days together as their bonds of friendship continued to blossom. (cont'd next page)

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Some of the other members of Ve'ahavta's chapter, including Mary Cripps, Eva Kay, Pam Zierler, Alan Levin, and VCV director Marleine Kay, took the family sightseeing to Niagara Falls and Ontario Place and out to lunch and dinner. The chapter also held mini fundraisers such as a garage sale and raffles and obtained personal donations to assist the family financially.

As the twins spent their first birthday in Toronto, Kay invited Thornhill MP Susan Kadis and others to her home for celebrations, where the family was presented with \$2,000 (US), along with numerous gifts for the children.

Back home, thanks to the generous assistance of the VCV, Elizabeth was able to buy a bicycle. Previously, in order to purchase groceries she walked 15 kilometres to and from the bus stop. She also bought fishing nets in hopes of starting a fishing business; unfortunately, the river dried up, so there were no fish. Instead, she is raising chickens to sell. The remainder of the money the family received will go toward installing hydro in the hut, as only half the village has electricity. Another major challenge for the family is a great famine in the village at this time.

Williams and Kay continue to correspond with Grace and Elizabeth via phone calls and letters.

Our prayers go out to the family and their friends.



From left to right: Zimbabwe residents Nurse Grace, Elizabeth and her formerly conjoined twins Tinotenda and Tinashe, out for a good time at Niagara Falls with chapter member Marie Williams

'Bizarre Bazaar' Efforts Go Far

by SHLOMIT KRIGER

Smiles were contagious at the Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan (VCV) chapter's first major event, the one of a kind 'Bizarre Bazaar', held at North York's Earl Bales Park Community Centre last June.

A sea of blue Ve'ahavta T-shirts filled the large centre as dozens of volunteers put in tremendous effort to sell the thousands of items that had been collected prior to the event. Customers of all ages eagerly grabbed baked goods, toys, clothing, china, jewellery, household, books, and more off the tables.

Clowns, face painting, food, and soulful music played by Eldan Cohen entertained the guests and kept them motivated. Some miscellaneous items were sold through a silent auction running throughout the day. All proceeds benefited Ve'ahavta's humanitarian work with Toronto's homeless and international medical missions.

"To give of yourself for the sake of others is truly the greatest of all mitzvot," said chapter director Marleine Kay. "To be able to contribute to the empowerment of others who struggle so fiercely through life's most

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From left to right: Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan chapter member Alan Levin, director Marleine Kay, Ve'ahavta executive director Avrum Rosensweig, Thornhill MP Susan Kadis, and Ve'ahavta chapter member Eva Kay at the chapter's 'Bizarre Bazaar' last June. Mrs. Kadis came out to share her inspiring words and award the chapter with a certificate of recognition for everyone's tremendous efforts.



This year's bazaar was packed with items such as clothing, china, jewelry, books, and more available at unbeatable prices

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unbelievably difficult hardships; to help another human being rise like a phoenix from the ashes and become whole again, gives us all an incredibly joyful feeling of being connected to something far greater than we could possibly imagine.

"The money raised will be spread as far as possible to reach as many people as possible, all of whom pitifully cry out in their desperate need of help."

Thornhill MP Susan Kadis offered some words of wisdom and encouragement to the volunteers as they finished the preparations for the sale. She shared some of her experiences working on similar projects with various organizations when she was younger and noted that these types of initiatives are crucial to the community, especially today. Kadis presented a certificate of recognition to Kay, her husband Alan Levin, and the other chapter members.

The full-day event left some with back pain, sleepless nights, and messy homes, but it was well worth it. Money raised from the event totaled about \$4,400.

Writing to Be Heard

by SHLOMIT KRIGER

Dozens of Toronto's homeless people were empowered to make positive life changes as a result of Ve'ahavta's 6th Annual Creative Writing Contest for the Homeless held last fall. The main goal of the project was to allow members of this vulnerable population to share their stories, and in doing so, to assist them in finding some clarity and inspiration to make changes to a healthier lifestyle.

Ve'ahavta received 72 submissions this year. Each participant was allowed to submit a maximum of two entries. The pieces ranged in style and content from short stories to poetry to autobiographies and songs. While some were fictional, many contained a raw honesty revealing the hardships of street life and the authors' varied experiences that led to their situations.

Volunteers distributed contest submission kits to numerous shelters and drop-in centres across the city, complete with a contest flyer, pen, notepad, and writing tips. To further excite and inspire the participants as well as help them practice their writing skills, several Ve'ahavta volun-

teers and local journalists conducted writing workshops at more than 10 shelters. These workshops assisted in not only connecting human beings of different backgrounds but in also allowing participants who felt comfortable enough to share their personal life stories and traumas with people who were there to listen. "Nothing stifles the human spirit more than needing to speak but having no one to speak to," said Ve'ahavta's director of homeless initiatives, Darryl Borden. "This contest has empowered individuals of all ages as they unite by the light of a streetlamp, the light of a candle, or in the shadows of a stairwell."

This year's grand prize included a \$1,000 donation from Kernels Popcorn, a laptop computer, a writing course at Ryerson University's G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education, a 2006 Writer's Market book donated by Indigo Books & Music

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Inc., and makeup from MAC. This grand prize went to Theresa Schrader, a young woman who submitted a story detailing her experiences as a former prostitute and drug user and the brutal sexual assault she fell victim to last year. She said that her attacker has now been sentenced to 10 years in jail, and that she had neither taken drugs nor worked as a prostitute for the past six months.

On telephone from a women's shelter she was staying at, she cried and screamed in delight when she heard she won the contest. She said she loves to write and hopes to continue doing so, and that our contest was key in showing her that she is talented and capable of achieving great things. "The life that I was living took my soul," she said. "I want to share the experiences that I have had to help people. If I could save one soul, I would be happy."

Richard Fry, who came in 22nd (29 spots were allotted for winners thanks to all of the donations received this year), notified Shlomit Kriger, this year's contest coordinator and VCV member, that the contest helped motivate him to hold on to his money and check himself into an alcohol and drug treatment program at a shelter. "I have benefited from the hope and self esteem Ve'ahavta's recognition of the homeless granted me," he said.

A panel of 10 dynamic local judges reviewed the submissions this year, including Thornhill MP Susan Kadis, professional photographer, speaker and radio show host Barry Shainbaum, award-winning author Vivian Jeanette Kaplan, and director of JAM Productions & Boutique Communications and Metro News Columnist/Reporter Jill Andrew.

Winners were announced mid-December. The winning entries will be included in a small ZINE, which will be distributed to all contest judges, participants, Ve'ahavta clients, contest sponsors, and others.

For more information on the contest or to view related media articles, visit the writing contest section of the Ve'ahavta website.

Celebrating Humanitarianism with 'Starry Knights'

by MARLEINE KAY



The hardworking VCV chapter members who helped make Ve'ahavta's lavish silent auction at the 'Starry Knights' event last November a great success. Top row left to right: Marie Williams, Arlyne Walsh, Alan Levin, Esther Tabacznik, Linda Silver. Bottom row left to right: Eva Kay, Jeff Fishbain, Marleine Kay, Pam Zierler, Sandy Levy.

Ve'ahavta's dazzling third 'Starry Knights' gala fundraising event held last November was bigger and better than ever. About 300 people gathered at the Sheraton Hotel for a scrumptious gourmet dinner, a stunning fashion show hosted by Jeanne Beker, star and segment producer of "FT-FashionTelevision", phenomenal live entertainment, an exciting live auction, and a classy silent auction organized by the Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan Chapter (VCV).

This event attracted people from across the city who are all committed to humanitarian work and share compassion for those suffering from poverty. Monies raised from the gala will support Ve'ahavta's homeless initiatives and international programs. The Mobile Jewish Response to the Homeless program is instrumental in distributing food, clothing, and other necessities to homeless clients suffering on Toronto's cold and often lonely streets.

Ve'ahavta's executive director Avrum Rosensweig spoke passionately about *tikun olam* (repairing the world) and the organization's far reaching humanitarian work. A brief video followed that included commentary by Dr. Jay Keystone, a leading tropical disease specialist and Ve'ahavta board member, who spoke fervently about his quest to repair the world, one person at a time.

In only a few months, the VCV members put together an extremely successful silent auction. Items for sale included restaurant, hotel, vacation, theatre and retail vouchers; Judaic items; sports memorabilia; crystal; Italian china tea set; original paintings; jewellery; and an ice sculpture. The live and silent auction brought in almost \$40,000, helping make the evening's overall proceeds higher than in previous years.

Reaching Out in Guyana

by RON PODOLNY

Last year's floods in Guyana attracted media attention to Guyana. Close to three feet of rain fell in the impoverished country for over a month and thousands were forced out of their homes.

Situated on the north-eastern shoulder of South America, Guyana is roughly the size of the UK, with a population of just over 700,000. Originally populated by Amerindian tribes, Guyana was colonized by the Dutch and the British. Both empires brought African slaves to work on the plantations along the coast. When slavery was abolished in Britain, Indian indentured servants were brought to Guyana.

Today, the descendants of Africans and Indians transported to Guyana over the past two centuries comprise the two biggest communities in the country, and ethnic conflict persists. In addition to ethnic tension, over the last several decades political unrest and an almost constant recession have resulted in large emigration from the country. Crime continues to be a problem plaguing the Guyanese society. The majority of the population is poor, and, due to high mortality rates, young. The median age is only 26. Canada is Guyana's primary export destination, surpassing even the United States; hence, economic, cultural, and political ties bind the two countries.

Guyana boasts some of the world's best-preserved rainforests. It is in these pristine environments, away from the coast, that Amerindian tribes live. While their uncontrolled gold mining and logging threatens their environment, they have managed to maintain a lifestyle that has remained almost unchanged over the centuries.

However, the tribes desperately need help because of a variety of health concerns affecting their community. In particular, because of the local diet, the children are not receiving enough vitamins, leading to a wide array of health problems. Parasites are widespread and their effects are catastrophic. Medical help is desperately needed in this remote part of the world, reachable only by boat.

This is why over the past several years Ve'ahavta has organized a number of medical relief missions to Guyana. Last year's mission consisted of a number of doctors from Canada and Israel. Having brought a large amount of medical supplies from Canada, the team moved deep

Team photo from Ve'ahavta's medical mission to Guyana 2005 (with Sarah Zelcer, Ve'ahavta's director of international programs, last on bottom row)



Nurse Jana providing local children in Guyana special medication to help them absorb the vitamin A from the Flintstones Vitamins distributed to them through Ve'ahavta's medical mission to Guyana 2005

into the rainforest, providing medical aid to the local population. Because the Guyana mission is an annual project, relationships have been established with the Amerindians that go back several years. In a memorable episode during last year's mission, a local woman sang a Hebrew song to the group of Canadian doctors.

For more information, contact Sarah Zelcer, Ve'ahavta's director of international programs, at sarah@veahavta.org or at 416-964-7698 ext. 15.



VCV member Sandy Levy worked tirelessly to spearhead a latkes (traditional potato pancakes) operation to raise money for her synagogue to send a nurse on the last Ve'ahavta medical mission to Guyana, along with the help of some chapter members. She cooked thousands of latkes, along with others, to raise over \$3,000 for the nurse's sponsorship and \$800 worth of pharmaceuticals.

Continuing the Legacy of Tikun Olam

by SHLOMIT KRIGER

He paints, delivers weekly public lectures, pens a weekly editorial for the *Canadian Jewish News*, and hosts a culinary radio show. As if he isn't busy enough, he spends the rest of his time overseeing the work of his most cherished creation, Ve'ahavta.

But no matter where his life leads, Ve'ahavta's executive director, Avrum Rosensweig, 45, remains humble and never abandons his mission of *tikun olam* (repairing the world).

"[In the past], it was surprising to me and difficult to understand why people weren't seeing the world as I saw it," he said, leaning back on his office chair, his legs, cloaked in ripped jeans, resting on his wooden desk. "I believe that if somebody is in need, then you do your best to reach out to them, sometimes in a sacrificial manner, giving of your own life and resources." His bushy black and white hair illuminated his light blue eyes as they stared toward the ceiling. Several multi-coloured bracelets from his friends decorated his hands, complementing the vibrancy of his office filled with several of his paintings and various motivational quotes.

Born in 1960, Rosensweig grew up in a renowned Orthodox family in Kitchener, Ont. His father, a well-known rabbi, always



opened his doors to the needy and invited people from various backgrounds to his home. Some would stay for months, while Avrum, the youngest of five children, slept on the floor.

Apart from being immersed in the town's small Jewish community, his father also created relationships with local churches, schools, and mosques. "He was a man who lived for peace," recalled Rosensweig, "He strived to bring people together and break down differences and barriers among groups."

Having spent his teenage years attending *yeshivas* in Toronto and Jerusalem, Rosensweig felt confined by his level of religious observance. By his early 20's, he had slowly moved from an Orthodox lifestyle to a more Conservative one.

Residing in Toronto, he went on to study various subjects at different universities, including journalism at Ryerson University, but didn't graduate from

any of the five he had attended. Nothing compelled him enough. So he spent the '80s and early '90s seeking his calling, trying everything from working on a Jewish radio show five nights a week to working on Bay Street as a headhunter.

Finally, realizing he, too, had giving in his blood and wanted to work with the community, he landed a job with the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) in '97. He was fascinated by the job, because he got to work on such projects as Operation Exodus, a Diaspora fundraising effort to help Jews flee the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, he learned a great deal about program planning and fundraising.

Promoted to the position of Associate Campaign Director by the end of his seven-year term with the UJA, Rosensweig discovered his passion for humanitarian work as he coordinated relief missions to Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

Concerned that there was no sole Jewish humanitarian relief organization in Canada, he decided it was time to create one.

Within the next two years, he put together Ve'ahavta's mission statement and obtained charitable status for his new organization. When Ve'ahavta took flight in '96, the organization carried out its first successful operation, which developed into its annual medical mission to Guyana.

Since then, Ve'ahavta has grown tremendously, heading programs in schools, overseas, and on the streets, and embracing so many lives. Rosensweig finds it difficult to pinpoint only a few memorable moments. "They used to be every single thing we had done here," he said. "If we bought a stapler, I was excited."

Ve'ahavta is now widely recognized by many umbrella organizations, including the UJA, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the Trillium Foundation, all of which provide its much-needed financial support. The organization has also helped to unite people from all walks of life. Rosensweig is particularly fond of the expanding homeless programs and all of the people who were able to find homes as well as employment. "The idea that we may have spurred someone forward to make a life for himself or herself, to be a little bit more of a part of society, to be happy, is extremely gratifying," he said.

He recalled one incident a few years ago when Ve'ahavta held its annual Creative Writing Contest for the Homeless. The second

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place winner bought himself a small apartment. Although he passed away two weeks after moving in, he died with dignity because he was in a place he could call his own, explained Rosensweig.

But what makes Rosensweig most proud is seeing how his organization has influenced others, especially young children in public schools and camps who are actualizing their empathy toward others in following the principles of *tikun olam*. "That's the most important thing," he said, "because Ve'ahavta is more of a movement than an organization."

Looking back on Ve'ahavta's history, Rosensweig feels he has learned much from the experience. "It's opened my eyes up more to the world and many of the dynamics that exist within it from a humanitarian and relief perspective," he said. "On one hand, it has encouraged me a lot because I've mostly encountered the good side of people. On the other hand, sometimes it makes me greatly sad because people seem to repeat things over and over."

"As Jewish people, we make lofty promises such as 'never again,' and yet we don't seem to live up to them very well, nor does the rest of the world. But I've also seen many young and older people come around because of things that we've done, and I believe more so than ever, as Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said, that as we can spoil we can also create. I try to remain positive."

While much has been accomplished in bettering the world through Ve'ahavta's efforts, Rosensweig has many plans for the organization's future. He plans to franchise *tikun olam*, mostly through educating. "Ultimately my goal is to create a movement that compels people to believe in the possibility of peace coming to our world through action and education. "If we expand goodness, then evil has less room to move. But there's a lot of work to do."

Why Canada Must Do More for Darfur

by RON PODOLNY

In his recent book *Shake Hands with the Devil*, retired Canadian Lieutenant-General and former Force Commander of UNAMIR (the failed United Nations 1990s mission in Rwanda) Romeo Dallaire asks a poignant question: are we all human, or are some of us more human than others?

The answer seems obvious. From the Biblical idea of a common ancestor to all of humanity and a common dignity rooted in the "image of God," to the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our culture is based upon the belief in the equality of all humans. Yet judging by the recent behaviour of the major world powers, it appears some of us are more equal than others. And if you are an African, you are the least equal of all.

For the past several years, genocide has been continuing in the Darfur region of Sudan. Backed by the government in Khartoum, Arab militias called the Janjaweed have been attacking black Christian villagers, mercilessly killing over 400,000 of them and turning more than 2.5 million survivors into refugees. The campaign has been characterized by widespread use of rape with catastrophic results.

With casualties mounting and the world looking away, the situation closely resembles the Rwandan genocide of '94. Then, as now, the world was not willing to send any troops into the tiny African country where 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered. Then, as now, militias, supported by the government and inspired by racial ideologies, committed crimes against humanity with absolute impunity. The tiny UN mission in Rwanda was unable to stop the genocide, as top UN bureaucrats, including Secretary General Kofi Annan, insisted that as a peacekeeping mission it had no mandate to intervene to protect the civilians. As hostilities mounted, Belgian

troops actually withdrew from the theatre, leaving the Rwandans to die in the genocidal hell.

None of the permanent member nations on the Security Council supported a military intervention in Rwanda – no one thought the lives of these Africans were worth it. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton called his own decision not to intervene in Rwanda the biggest mistake of his presidency. Other Western leaders have yet to take the blame for what happened.

Rwanda made a joke of the solemn oath the world seemed to have made after the Holocaust – "never again." It proved that no lessons were learned. As millions were being killed and displaced, life went on as usual here in North America and in Europe.

The situation is eerily similar today. While hundreds of thousands are dying in Africa, the public attention is turned to such stories as the Peterson trial and the Michael Jackson trial. Governments and individuals spent millions of dollars to attend the papal funeral in Rome, ignoring the fact that a few dollars a day can provide food to Sudanese refugees. But it is not only the general public whose priorities are so tragically misplaced. Academics' silence on the issue of Darfur has been acute. Quick to condemn any American military intervention, academics and students are silent when it comes to widespread humanitarian abuses in the developing world. A small tuition hike can get thousands of students to come out in protest. Still, there is no such luck for Sudanese villagers.

In the atmosphere of moral blindness, Ve'ahavta has made efforts to assist Sudan. The organization sent a small team to Chad, a country neighbouring Darfur, to assess the possibility of deploying a mission to assist the refugees. Ve'ahavta has also been working with Canadians against Slavery and Torture in Sudan (CASTS) to promote awareness of the Darfur crisis among the general population. Several Ve'ahavta staff and volunteers were also present at a Queen's Park rally to attract the Canadian government's attention to the situation in Darfur.

Later, inspiring speeches delivered by Ve'ahavta's executive director Avrum Rosensweig and Dr. Acol Dor, a Sudanese refugee and CASTS co-chair, at a Montreal student conference inspired a group of Jewish students to start an organization called Students Taking Action Now: Darfur (STAND). That organization sent a petition call-

(cont'd)

ing for greater Canadian intervention in Darfur with 10,000 student signatures to Canadian politicians this year to show them that Canadian students do care and demand action.

Canada must do more to help Darfur. As a true peacekeeping nation that has no colonial legacy in Africa, we must urge our UN and NATO partners to form a "coalition of the willing" to stop the violence. However, with no government intervention in sight, it will be up to the non-governmental organizations to deliver aid to the survivors of the Darfur genocide. Organizations like Ve'ahavta will have to prove to the world that we are all human and have an equal right to live in peace and security, no matter where we were born.

Girl in feeding centre at a Sudanese refugee camp in Chad
(Photo courtesy of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)



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- ♥ Cheque, Visa or MasterCard
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- ♥ Stocks and securities
- ♥ Endowments
- ♥ *Tikun Olam* Tribute Cards
- ♥ Baskets for the Homeless

Tax receipts will be issued



TIKUN OLAM - REPAIRING THE WORLD



TOGETHER WE CAN DO IT!

For further information please contact
Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan Chapter

Ve'ahavta: The Canadian Jewish
Humanitarian & Relief Committee
22 Balliol Street, Suite 108
Toronto, ON M4W 3L4
Tel: 416-964-7698 ext. 19
Fax: 416-964-6582
Email: mail@veahavta.org

Please quote: Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan Chapter

Ida Snitman: A Beautiful Creation (1921 – 2003)

The following article is about a special woman who passed through our world, leaving much love to those she cherished. Her family made a generous donation to Ve'ahavta to ensure that we are able to keep our 'homeless van' on the streets year round to help those in need. Ida would have liked that. God bless her soul!

by AVRUM ROSENSWEIG

There is splendour in creation, in humankind, and it shows itself in many different forms.

On June 3, 1921, one such creation came into our world and she was named Ida.

Ida Snitman was born on Augusta Avenue in Toronto. She was a middle child, the daughter of Gitel and Benjamin, and was beautiful, with fair skin and blue eyes.

It was the '20s, the years leading up to the depression, and jobs and food were hard to come by for most. Ida's family relied on her father's skills as a *shneider* (tailor) for support.

But times were different then. You were thankful for what you had; didn't much bemoan what you didn't, and Ida and her two brothers, Alex and Harvey, likely grew up figuring that's just the way life is.

Ida began her studies at Ryerson Public School, later moving on to Central Commerce. Her mother was a housewife, and Ida rushed home from school at the end of each day to help her and take special care of her, as she would until the end of Gitel's days.

Time moved forward, and Ida began her career as an accounting clerk at the downtown Eaton's store, where she would stay until retirement at 65.

She did her job well and was regularly commended for her work. But the things that made her stand out, the character traits that will forever be in her colleague's memories, were her gentleness, attentiveness, and caring. Ida befriended many of the women who worked there. According to those who understood and knew Ida, she was "a true friend and a very loving lady."

Children grow, and our memories of the places where we played and the butcher shop where we bought our chuck and beef fade away. But Ida Snitman adored the downtown Jewish community and the character of old homes and buzzing commerce. She, therefore, continued to live in her parent's home on Augusta even after their demise.

The decor in the home never really changed much over those years, and the thing that stood out proudly were her mother's brass Shabbat candlesticks. Who knows why Ida clung to them with such reverence; perhaps they represented the light that shone through her own personal darkness, or maybe they expressed the illumination of her childhood on Augusta when she was little and life was simpler.

Despite her caring nature, deep down Ida was very shy, and never managed to find her beshert – her soul mate – the man of her dreams. I was told that this was especially, unfortunate, as Ida would have been a wonderful wife and mother. But one never knows God's intentions. Perhaps he had other ideas for Ida's life.

Despite the fact that Ida never married, she continually surrounded herself with love, curiosity and concern for relatives and friends of all ages. It was her pleasure to take family members

Lynda and Fern to Sunnyside for a dip in the public pool, to Tops Restaurant on Dundas, to Diana Sweets, or to a movie at the Cinema Shea's (that no longer exists).

Ida never forgot a niece's or nephew's birthday, and later as the family grew, she paid special attention to the little great nieces and nephews with a birthday card and a little '*gelt*'. This was a beautiful way of showing that her loved ones were on her mind and that she wanted to bring joy to their lives.

Ida was tremendously proud to be a Jew. She attended *shul* (synagogue)– Sha'arei Tefillah – regularly, never missed *Yizkor* (the annual prayer for the dead), and kept kosher. Lighting the *Chanukah* candles held a special place in her heart, and she looked forward to the family's annual *Chanukah* get-together, when the home was filled with the laughter and joy of her *mishpucha* (family).

Her mind was awash with curiosity, and like so many who grew up during the depression, it was important for her to stay on top of the news by reading the newspapers daily. She loved culture and frequented movies and theatres at least once a week; she was also a huge baseball and hockey fan.

In my discussion with some family members, it was obvious that Ida Snitman celebrated life in many ways, missed out on some of it, but left a heartfelt legacy like that of our Matriarch Sarah. Sarah was known for her kindness; Ida was known for the same – *Gmitut Chasadim* (acts of righteousness).

And this is where God comes in. One night, a beloved niece of Ida's received a call that Ida had slipped in a coffee shop. At her age, falls can be extremely serious, and this one ultimately led to her death.

But it is clear that while Ida was here in our present world, she made a difference, a big one, in the lives of those she knew. Simply put by one of her loved ones, "Ida was a loving person who never hurt a soul."

"She was protective of us; made sure her mother was comfortable in some awful times. Ida had great sympathy for the underdog and never, ever complained," said a family member.

Life is complex, and at the end of the day, it is only humankind that sets the standard for life and defines who we are, where we came from, and our future.

Each and every one of us is important in this context. Ida was no exception. She set the bar for goodness and love and will always be remembered as a Jewish woman who adored her Jewishness; as a human being who understood suffering but also joy – and was there for others when called upon or simply when the wind called her.

Ida passed away on August 14th, 2003. She is deeply missed and will always hold a special place in the hearts, souls, and minds of many. She was a true woman of valour and a splendid creation.

What *Tikun Olam* Means to Me

by ALAN LEVIN

Together we can make a difference in repairing the world
Individuals who are caring can do their part to end all human and animal suffering
Kindred spirits bringing together all people to heal the world
Uniting people through a common cause of peace and love
Never again will we stand silent while people of the world suffer

Open your hearts to mankind and spread the universal message of *shalom* (peace)
Light up the faces of those in need by giving without thought of receiving anything in return
AnsWER the prayers of the homeless and those who have nothing
Make the world a better place to live by caring about what you say and do to others

Tzedakah Experiences

All They Need Is Love

SHLOMIT KRIGER shares memories of her first meaningful encounters with Toronto's homeless in the summer of 2003

6:30 a.m. Two volunteers and I quickly work underground to pack a blue van with coolers filled with sandwiches, coffee, bottled water, cereal, cookies, socks, used-clothing, and toiletries.

Once inside the van, Darryl Borden, Ve'ahavta's director of homeless initiatives, hands one of the volunteers a log book so he can record the time and place of every site we visit as we begin our journey on Ve'ahavta's Mobile Jewish Response to the Homeless (MJRH) program. "We leave early because we want to start people's day in a positive way," says Borden. "This way, when we talk about changing their lives, that can begin today."

Through MJRH, the Ve'ahavta van goes downtown to help the homeless four times a week – twice in the morning and twice at night. Ve'ahavta has been running the program independently over the last couple of years, but originally began the program with members of the Native Men's Residence (Na-Me-Res) in 1998.



(cont'd)

There are only three volunteers on the Ve'ahavta van each week, because the homeless may feel uncomfortable if approached by a large group of people. This is the first time on the van for one of the volunteers and me. But for Devora Tenenbaum, 19, who has been volunteering with Ve'ahavta all summer, this has become a weekly routine. "Until you're out there on the streets, you don't really know what it's like," she says. "This experience really does help you learn to appreciate the simple things in life. I enjoy helping others, and this may be something I'd like to turn into a career."

Ve'ahavta's volunteers span all ages, the youngest being 12. The realities seen on the streets can be harsh for some, which Borden explains to parents. If the parents feel they cannot accept the responsibility to educate their children about what they see and experience on the van, then the children don't participate.

Borden asks the volunteers to point out anyone homeless people seen on the streets as he drives. He usually visits the same people along the way each week and has developed relationships with some. "It's important to develop bridges among the homeless and us," he says. "Ve'ahavta is trying to initiate all sorts of change, and it can come first from helping the homeless, then slowly developing trust, and then hopefully getting them off the streets."

Our first stop is at Yonge and Eglinton, where Darryl greets a MJRH regular. The man receives coffee and socks as requested, and when offered more he replies, "I don't want to take all of your supplies, but thank you."

I can't believe my ears and sadly watch him return to his seat on the ledge of a building as we drive off.

7:20 a.m. We have already stopped to help two homeless men. Borden and Tenenbaum sit in the front seats swaying and singing to the tunes of the Beatles tape Borden often plays in the van.

It dawns upon me that this is ironic. These homeless people have no music and few others to socialize with. I don't really feel like joining in at the moment and begin to feel like an outsider.

Ten minutes later, the van is parked near Bathurst and Eglinton. Standing near the front doors of a brown building is Lewis, another regular for the MJRH program. Lewis, 53, stands tall with curly white hair, a long white and red beard, and bags under his eyes. He is wearing a black and blue fall jacket over a navy sweatshirt and black sweatpants and sneakers, which look pretty clean. Plastic bags surround him on the ground along with some clothes and papers.

Lewis tells me he thinks Borden is very exuberant and he's thankful for everything he receives from Ve'ahavta. Meanwhile, Borden makes a few rounds to the van and back, bringing Lewis food, socks, and water. Lewis's hand and hips sway in sync every so often because of a spinal injury. Borden has been visiting him since late fall 2002, but says it took

him six months before Lewis began to open up to him. By April 2003, the two developed a deeper, more trusting relationship.

Lewis is Jewish, and has been living on the streets for the past two years after being deported from California, where he used to live in garages eating apples and drinking fruit juice. "You may not look at me like an alien, but others do sometimes," he says to me. "But I've never even begged anyone for money or food." I wonder how anyone could look into those sincere blue eyes of his and not feel that he's just like you and me.

He says he feels comfortable living at his current location because his old high school is nearby, yet he still moves around from time to time. Borden is in touch with Lewis's family, and tells him he'll help him find a home. Lewis prefers to live in a kosher home, and says it comforts him to know that Ve'ahavta is a Jewish organization. He suggests that Borden give the homeless people Israeli food. I listen as the two men discuss politics, places to visit in Ontario, and the Ve'ahavta event Borden is inviting Lewis to, a picnic for the homeless at Centre Island the following week.

As I return to the van, I think of having the sandwich I prepared for myself this morning. But I begin to feel guilty for being able to have food anytime I want and decide to wait.

Volunteers make about 200 sandwiches with fresh lettuce, cheese, and bagels donated by What-A-Bagel weekly through Ve'ahavta's Sandwich Challenge program. "We want to put the best supplies we can out there," says Borden, "because we want to bring the homeless towards life as opposed to away."

My most memorable encounter occurs at 8:10 a.m. with a man named John, who we greet under a bridge in the Yonge and St. Clair area. We laugh often as we speak in the dark. He complains, along with Tenenbaum, about how the recent massive city blackout prevented him from purchasing his daily icecap from Tim Horton's. That was all he really missed then, since he's used to living without electricity, a fridge, and a proper roof over his head - things people who slept on streets for the first time during the blackout take for granted. He adds that he submitted some stories to Ve'ahavta's annual Creative Writing Contest for the Homeless.

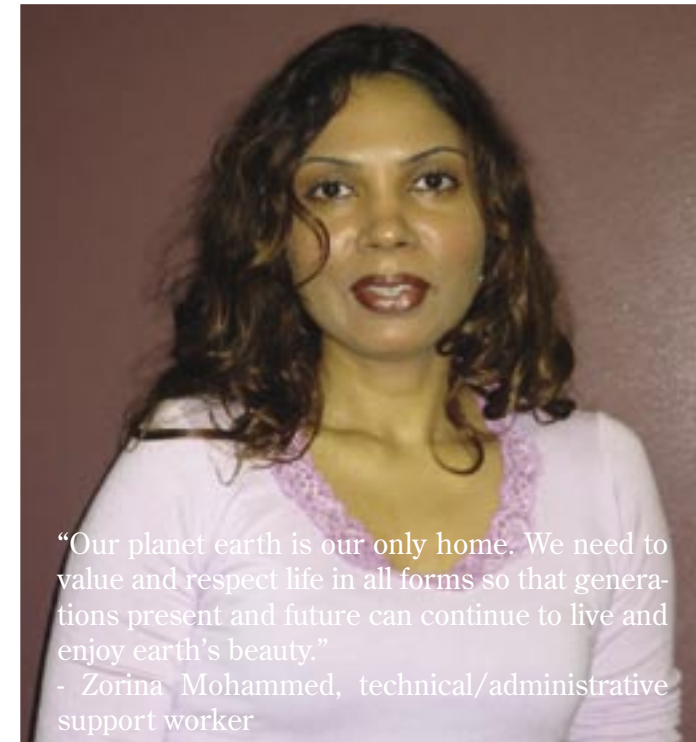
Back inside the van, Borden hands me a copy of last year's published stories from the contest. I read a story written by a girl living on the streets. She wrote that she never thought it would be this difficult, but knows her mom is watching over her like an angel from above.

I recall the Beatles song playing in the van, "All You Need is Love."

Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.

Martin Luther, German Theologian

Question: What action do you think would make the world a better place?



"Our planet earth is our only home. We need to value and respect life in all forms so that generations present and future can continue to live and enjoy earth's beauty."
- Zorina Mohammed, technical/administrative support worker



"We are our brother's keepers and we should all show much more care and concern toward our fellow human beings."
- Sophia Clark, customer account manager



"Tikun olam involves everybody acting responsibly and thinking about their actions while considering the consequences."
- Noam Guberman, VCV chapter member



"The world would be a better place if the mainstream media accepted science fiction as a legitimate genre with important lessons to teach. More than any belief or creed, the body of work being written today in science fiction helps turn our minds to a future in which humanity sees itself as united, not just with itself, but with all life."
- Greg Sparling, director of technical support

Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan Highlights



(left) Seven pairs of little fingers were busy at Temple Kol Ami when seven eight-year-olds stayed after class to put together almost 100 snack packs to be distributed to Toronto's homeless through Ve'ahavta's Mobile Jewish Response to the Homeless program. These eager kids were also instrumental in obtaining the donations and writing beautiful notes of encouragement for the program's clients. They said that they wanted their snack packs to make everyone living on the streets feel better. Pictured from left to right are: (top row) Eva and Marleine Kay of Ve'ahavta Chaverim Vaughan; teacher Tova Nathanson; (bottom row) Samantha Shore; Sydney Mulpea; Emily Stone; and Sarah Prut

(below) Three members of the VCV chapter, Linda Levinson, Rachel Friedman, and Marleine Kay, spoke to a group of students during the BBYO Tikun Toronto Sunday event about Ve'ahavta's work and the real meaning of *tikun olam* (repairing the world). After a very interactive discussion, the eager group of 14- to 17-year-olds made posters advertising the chapter's bazaar held last June at Earl Bales Park to raise money for homeless and international programs. After their posters were drawn, the entire group headed out to the Bathurst/Sheppard area to hang their artwork.



(above) Marleine Kay was chosen as one of Ve'ahavta's Volunteers of the Year in 2005! She is pictured here with her husband Alan Levin (on left) and Ve'ahavta's director of homeless initiatives Darryl Borden. Since she was 7-years-old, Marleine has helped her mother, who's also an active volunteer, in various capacities. She's also taught arts and crafts to physically and mentally challenged children and helped raise funds for a residency for mentally handicapped adults in her previous hometown in Scotland. But one of her greatest experiences arrived in the '80s, when she and a group of volunteers ran out of money during a visit to Israel and camped out on a beach for a week. She's never been able to pass homeless people without giving them something since. When she joined Ve'ahavta two years ago, she was immediately hooked and has since continued giving and giving. She puts in hours and hours into managing all of the chapter's initiatives, helping out with other projects at the Ve'ahavta office, and sharing her kindness and zest for life and *tikun olam* with everyone around her. It becomes contagious! We are grateful to have such a wonderful human being on board!



Chapter member Sheri Sananes handing out colourful wool scarves she made to Larry, a Ve'ahavta homeless client



Thornhill MP Susan Kadis attended a VCV chapter meeting last fall to discuss details of her background and ways chapter members could continue our participation in repairing the world. Kadis is also a humanitarian at heart and has been to several of the chapter's events. We graciously thank her for all of her support!



(left) face painting was on hand at VCV's 'Bizarre Bazaar' held last June at Earl Bales Park.

(right) Chapter members Sharon Stein and Jeff Fishbain showing off the tasty cookies they and other chapter members sold to help raise money for Ve'ahavta while supporting the Curtain Club Theatre last fall. The Curtain Club donated 75 tickets for the chapter members to sell in order to raise money for Ve'ahavta. VCV raised \$1,020 by selling the tickets, raffling a pair of silver plated candlesticks, and selling drinks and pastries at the intermission. The play was excellent and a great social success.



(left) The chapter members threw a farewell party for Nurse Grace (second from left of top row), Elizabeth (first on left in second row) and her beautiful formerly conjoined babies Tinotenda and Tinashe before their return home to Zimbabwe last summer. Thornhill MP Susan Kadis (first from left on top row) was also in attendance.

Ve'ahavta desperately needs the following items that are clean and in good condition:

- Long johns, gloves, hats, scarves
- Backpacks
- NEW socks
- Blankets
- Sleeping bags
- Bottled water
- Prescription eyeglasses and non-prescription sunglasses
- Tinned salmon and tuna
- Non-perishable items for food bank
- Packets of cuppa-soup
- Packets of instant oatmeal breakfast cereal
- Snack items
- Small Tetra-Packs of juice
- Sunblock
- Baseball hats
- Small sewing kits
- Toiler paper
- Ladies and men's toiletries, hairbrushes, shaving items, talcum powder, deodorant, and other hygiene products
- Packets of Kleenex

We welcome your generous assistance in obtaining these items through donations from friends, family, work colleagues, school projects, and large corporations. Together we can make a difference!



Addictive Nacho Dip

by SHARON STEIN

BOTTOM LAYER

2 medium avocados mashed with 1 tbsp. lemon juice

SECOND LAYER

Combine the following:

1 cup sour cream

1/2 cup mayonnaise

1/2 envelope taco mix

THIRD LAYER

Mix the following:

2 plum tomatoes finely diced

4 green onions well chopped

A few red or green peppers finely diced

FOURTH LAYER

2 cups of grated cheddar cheese
Serve with tortilla chips



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Love Written Word

The following is one of the winning submissions from Ve'ahavta's 6th Annual Creative Writing Contest for the Homeless

Untitled

by LAURA MAYO

It's time I was moving on
You know I've been here way too long
It's time I was moving on

After a while you just get to know
It's late and I'm tired, the streets are cold
One more time, It's time to go

No place to be, No place for Me
Always in the way, Never able to stay
They don't care where, They just don't want you here

I Dream a dream of a place to stay
A world where there is a way
But a dream it must stay
For it is time to go.

I tell myself it is the last time
That this time it will be different
Always down to the last dime
Never a last time.

Lesley Silver-Winnick made Aliyah, but is still a member of the chapter from Israel.

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.

Buddha, The Enlightened One

Charity should begin at home, but should not stay there.

- Philip Brooks