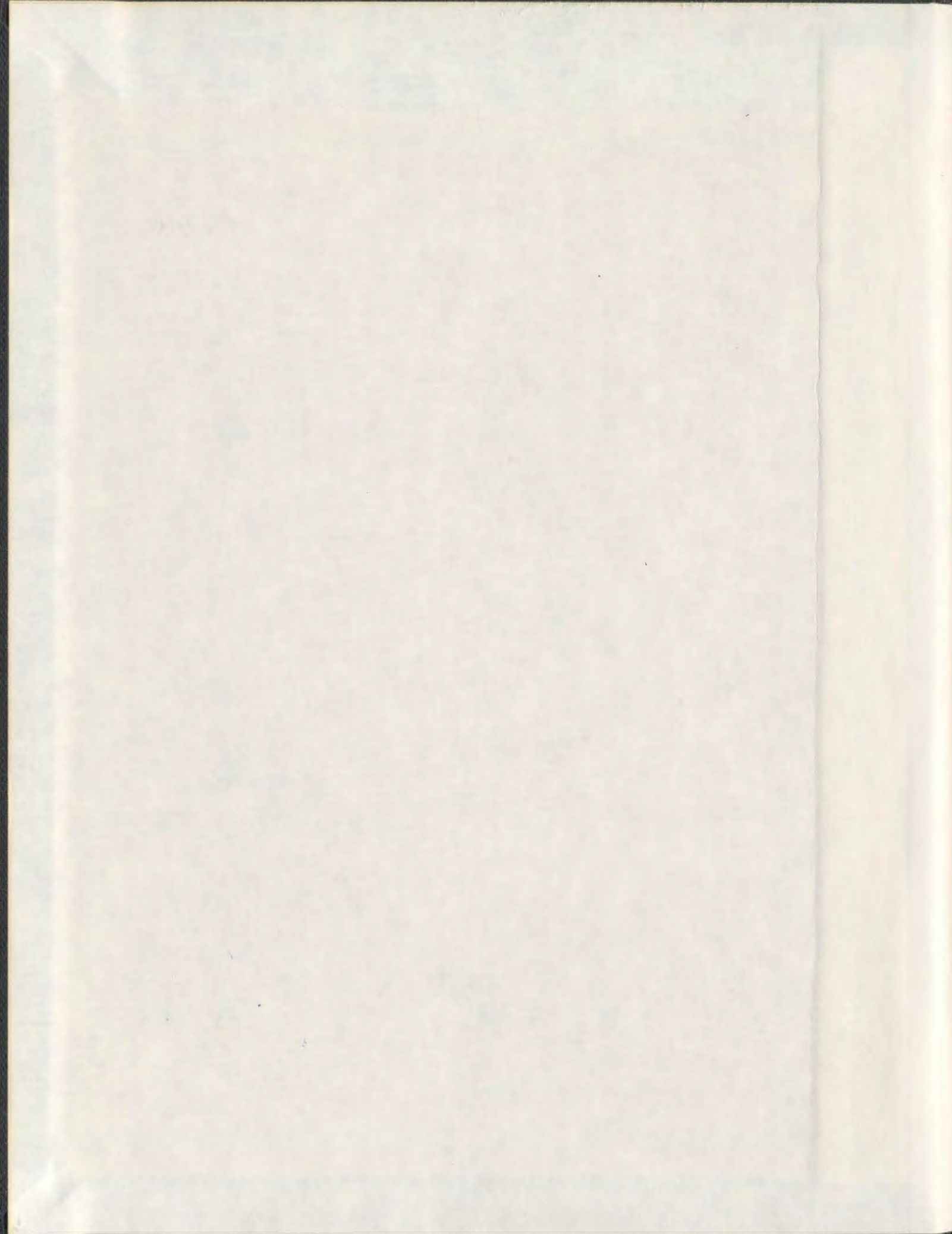


Heimish AND HOME-ISH: AGING, JEWISHNESS AND
THE CREATION OF "HOME" AT A TORONTO
ASSISTED-LIVING RESIDENCE, THE TERRACES
OF BAYCREST

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Heimish and Home-ish: Aging, Jewishness and the Creation of "Home" at a Toronto
Assisted-Living Residence, the Terraces of Baycrest

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of how the elderly residents of the Terraces of Baycrest (“the Terraces”) – a Jewish assisted-living facility in Toronto – create and re-create tangible and intangible notions of home. While the Terraces is an ethno-specific setting, the diverse resident population incorporates many languages, experiences, beliefs and values. Nevertheless, through their shared cultural identities as Jews, old people, and as residents who live in the same institutional home, they form a unique collective group. This thesis examines the intricate relationships Terraces residents have not only with each other, but also with their current living space. In this instance, I am referring to both the larger “home” that is the institution, as well as to each individual home where residents actually live. In fact, residents “live” in both the institution as well as their private apartments. As such, they must constantly negotiate between the dichotomies of their spatial worlds. This thesis demonstrates that while we use ideal notions to talk about our spatial worlds: home and institution, religious and secular, public and private – the “real” story takes place in between these ideals. Home is not the physical structure, but the way we imbue spaces with value and meaning. Terraces residents achieve this in various ways: with the material objects they use to personalize their private spaces; by sharing and participating in Jewish creative rituals in public and private spaces; by sociability and hospitality; and by shared ethnic and cultural identities. Finally, this thesis suggests that although home is constructed through objects and the creation of meaningful space, home also is a “feeling.” As such, residents construct “home” so that they can *feel* “at home” – in turn, this allows them to live in comfort and to age well.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Ethnography at the Terraces of Baycrest	12
Chapter 2. Historical and Spatial Contexts of the Baycrest Home	49
Chapter 3. Spatial Units of Home	60
Chapter 4. Dichotomies of Home	96
Chapter 5. Creating Ritual Space in the Institutional Home	129
Chapter 6. Performing Home: Setting Tables for the Sabbath Tea and the Ideal Tables of <i>The Jewish Home Beautiful</i>	183
Conclusion: Feeling at Home	222
Bibliography	230

List of Figures

Introduction

Figure 1. Map of Toronto, showing the Baycrest Campus	2
Figure 2. Terraces of Baycrest and the Wagman Centre	2
Figure 3. Map of Baycrest Campus	2

Chapter One

Figure 1.1. Ruth Hanff	37
Figure 1.2. Rebecca Hoch	40
Figure 1.3. Fela Karmiol	43
Figure 1.4. Edith Kursbatt	46

Chapter Two

Figure 2.1. Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home	52
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Chapter Three

Figure 3.1. Terraces of Baycrest	60
Figure 3.2. Front entrance to the Terraces of Baycrest	61
Figure 3.3. Map of Terraces/ Wagman Centre main floor	62
Figure 3.4. Terraces “pre-lobby”	63
Figure 3.5. Terraces lobby	64
Figure 3.6. Terraces lobby and elevator sitting area	64
Figure 3.7. “Mirror of Our Lives” – Terrace Holocaust Survivors Group quilt	65
Figure 3.8. Sitting area in the Wagman lobby	66
Figure 3.9. Map of Wagman Centre ground floor	68

Figure 3.10. Lobby/ sitting area near the 6 th floor elevators	70
Figure 3.11. Lighting the candles at the 9 th Floor Hanukah party	71
Figure 3.12. Floor plan for typical one-bedroom apartment	72
Figure 3.13. Floor plan for typical bachelor apartment	73
Figure 3.14. Ruth Hanff's apartment: entrance and kitchen area	76
Figure 3.15. Ruth Hanff's kitchen	76
Figure 3.16. Kitchen table and chairs. Door opens into Ruth's bedroom	78
Figure 3.17. Ruth's bedroom	78
Figure 3.18. Ruth in her living room	80
Figure 3.19. Silver <i>chai</i> made by Ruth	80
Figure 3.20. Ruth's cabinet where she keeps Sabbath candlesticks	82
Figure 3.21. Welcome sign to Rebecca Hoch's apartment	83
Figure 3.22. Rebecca's kitchen	84
Figure 3.23. Rebecca's souvenir spoon collection	85
Figure 3.24. Rebecca's wall of photographs	88
Figure 3.25. Closer look at wall of photographs	88
Figure 3.26. Rebecca's kitchen table, bookcase, and television set	89
Figure 3.27. Paintings, photographs and plates	90
Figure 3.28. Shelving unit divides living room from bedroom	91
Figure 3.29. Rebecca's bedroom	91
Figure 3.30. Rebecca's dressing table and photo collage	92
Figure 3.31. Rebecca's Sabbath table	93

Chapter Four

Figure 4.1. Bert Davis in her tiny kitchen	100
Figure 4.2. Bert sits in her favourite chair, portrait of young self behind	102
Figure 4.3. Mah-jongg game with Edna Lester and friends	108
Figure 4.4. Elsie Kay sitting by the coffee thermos	127

Chapter Five

Figure 5.1. <i>Shtefen</i> just out of the oven	147
Figure 5.2. <i>Shtefen</i> , cut and ready to eat	147
Figure 5.3. Yom Hashoah Ceremony chairs for audience	163
Figure 5.4. Yom Hashoah tables, cards and yartzeit candles	164
Figure 5.5. Cards with black mourning ribbons	168
Figure 5.6. Yartzeit candles in front of place cards	169
Figure 5.7. Yartzeit/ shiva/ Yom Hashoah candles	170

Chapter Six

Figure 6.1. Mira Jafine folds napkins for the Sabbath Tea	200
Figure 6.2. Mina Hauer sets a table for the Sabbath Tea	202
Figure 6.3. Elsie Kaye uses her walker to transport lemon slices to tables	203
Figure 6.4. Centrepiece basket and a plate of lemon slices	203
Figure 6.5. Sara Rotbard and Mollie Davis arrange honey cake on platters	204
Figure 6.6. Tables set, the Tea Hostesses take a break before guests arrive	205
Figure 6.7. Residents sit on walkers in hallway before Tea begins	206
Figure 6.8. Tables are filled and lively buzz fills the air	209

Figure 6.9. Esther Haberman with tray of goodies; Mina Hauer with coffee	210
Figure 6.10. Tea is over and tables are cleared	212
Figure 6.11. Shabbat table from <i>The Jewish Home Beautiful</i>	217
Figure 6.12. Rosh Hashana table from <i>The Jewish Home Beautiful</i>	218
Conclusion	
Figure 7.1. Edith's kitchen table/ living room	226

Introduction

This is a story about the residents of the Terraces of Baycrest, a Jewish retirement home in Toronto, and how they create and re-create Jewish (and secular) domestic culture in an institutional home. In many ways, the Terraces is a microcosm of Jewish life, representing an ethno-specific group, which is at once multicultural, multi-lingual, and multi-denominational. A little Jewish world, diverse in its inhabitants, but also a microcosm of a spatial world. The Terraces of Baycrest is a single building that is first and foremost a retirement residence; yet its many layers reveal that it is also part community centre, part museum, and part sacred site – as well as a home, a memory space, and a location of personal, religious, and cultural traditions.

Located near midtown, close to Bathurst Street, between Wilson and Lawrence Avenues, “the Terraces” is part of the Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care campus (see figure 1). In addition to the eleven-storey residence and the attached Joseph E. and Minnie Wagman Centre (a senior adult day centre: see figure 2), other buildings on the Baycrest campus include the Apotex Centre (nursing home), and the Baycrest Hospital (see figure 3). That the building I focus on throughout this thesis is called “the Terraces of Baycrest” may be somewhat confusing, as people may imagine several buildings; but it refers only to one building. As a matter of fact, when it opened in 1976, it was simply called the Baycrest Terrace, but a marketing makeover in the early 2000s introduced the name change. I refer to it as the Terraces throughout this dissertation.



Figure 1. Map of midtown Toronto showing location of Baycrest Campus



Figure 2. Terraces of Baycrest (background) and the attached Joseph E. and Minnie Wagman Centre.

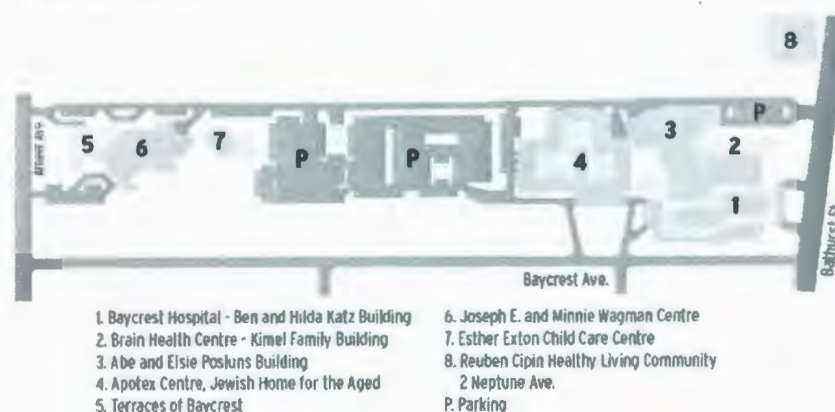


Figure 3. Map of Baycrest campus.

The institutional home

That the Terraces is an institution seems obvious, but many people fail to acknowledge it – like the elephant in the room. More politely, it has been called “supportive housing” (Baycrest 2007-08), a “retirement home” (Dube 2008), and a “housing facility” (Baycrest 2005a). It is complicated because these descriptions are not entirely euphemistic. While the Terraces – the institutional “home” – provides supportive services, each resident lives in a private apartment unit, a “home.” Therefore, while certain aspects are institutionalized (e.g. communal aspects of daily life; use of Terraces furniture, linens, etc.), other aspects are not (e.g. private apartments; freedom to come and go at any time). While this complex arrangement of space is becoming an increasingly familiar model for housing the elderly throughout North America, it has yet to attract much academic attention. In recent years, at least three anthologies have been published highlighting an emerging interdisciplinary interest in domestic cultures (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 1999; Cieraad 1999; Chapman and Hockey 1999). Yet, of the combined thirty-nine chapters which appear in the three collections, only two (both in the same volume) deal with seniors’ residences. Nor (by March 2009) has the peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal *Home Cultures*, established in 2004, published a piece on aging and the domestic sphere. While there have been several studies focused on concerns of culture and aging (Cole, Kastenbaum, and Ray 2000; Mullen 1992; Kuglemass 1996; Zumwalt and Levy 2001), domestic culture and aging – with exception of the work of Renée Shield (1997 and 2003 (with Stanley Aronson)) and Jenny Hockey (1999) – remain largely unexplored. As Gilbert and Hirdes note: “While a

substantial body of literature has emerged on the relationships between stress, social support and well-being in community-based older persons, few studies have examined institutionalized populations” (Gilbert and Hirdes 2000:50). This thesis arose in response to the need for further ethnographic analysis that examines the impact of institutionalization on senior populations.

It is important to state outright that while the Terraces is institutional, it is not a nursing home, which by definition is a government-regulated facility that provides shelter for infirmed senior citizens (Dube 2008). In the Baycrest system, the Apotex Centre is defined as a nursing home; whereas the Terraces is a retirement home, which is defined as unregulated and non-governmental (*ibid.*), and residents are fairly healthy and independent. Furthermore, the Terraces building is separate from the Apotex Centre and the main Baycrest buildings, so the residents are also physically separated from their nursing home and hospital peers. Their relatively good health, combined with the fact that it is an “assisted-living” facility, as opposed to a nursing home, may explain why I never once heard staff or residents refer to the Terraces as an “institution.” I found, like Renée Shield, in her work in an American nursing home, that “institution” was to be avoided in favour of the word “home.” Shield writes, “Some staff members insist that the nursing home is a ‘home’” (1997:475). When she referred to her fieldsite as an institution, a maintenance man rebuked: “ ‘This is not an institution,’ he said, ‘This is a home’” (*ibid.*). Likewise, staff and residents at the Terraces consistently referred to it as “home.” When I asked resident Ruth Hanff if she is comfortable at the Terraces, she responded simply, “I am comfortable here. It is my home” (6 May 2004).

Nevertheless, the promotional literature describing the Terraces does not link the facility to “home.” The *Baycrest Community Guide* bills the Terraces as “provid[ing] seniors with the privacy of independent apartment living, along with supportive services,” including one meal a day in a communal dining room, a twenty-four hour on-site health centre, a variety of programs, and weekly housekeeping and linen services, to name a few (Baycrest 2007-2008:17). This presentation may be deliberately aimed at prospective residents for whom the Terraces may seem far removed from the family home – they are forced to leave because of aging, ill health, and/or physical frailty. They, like their adult children, for whom issues of safety and support may be paramount, undoubtedly find reassurance in the listing of amenities listed in the brochure. The construction of the Terraces as “home” begins after the initial decision-making.

At the Terraces, hominess is initially introduced in the language of the “Welcome” package which is distributed to all new residents: “Looking around you now, it may be difficult to imagine that soon you will be familiar with this new place and all these new faces. Before too long... you will soon be comfortable and settled in your new home” (Baycrest 2005a). Here is a suggestion that the “place” will soon become “home.” But from its first mention, the meaning of home is ambiguous; there is an implied double reference. Does the brochure refer to the larger Terraces building – the institutional home? Or does it suggest the individual apartments, each one a private home? Although the Terraces is often called “home,” as British anthropologist Jenny Hockey points out, “life in a residential ‘home,’” which in Britain refers to supportive housing, “is at odds

with the ideal of home” (Hockey 1999: 108-09). Yet the same word is used by staff (and residents) of these facilities who insist that the two are the one and the same.

A Jewish Home

At the heart of this study is how Terraces residents negotiate their Jewish and aging identities through this “Jewish” “home.” In Jewish culture, “home” has long been a significant concept. The Yiddish word, *heimish*, derived from the German word for home (*heim*), is commonly used to describe people and places that are unpretentious. Another definition of *heimish*, according to Leo Rosten’s *The New Joys of Yiddish* is: “having the friendly characteristics, or kind of rapport, that exist inside a happy home” (Rosten: 212). “Jews” writes Rosten, “put a high value on being *heimish*” (ibid.). As historian Jenna Weissman Joselit points out, the Jewish home has been “admired as a safe haven for its inhabitants in an often hostile world” (1994:10). Furthermore, since the turn of the twentieth century, “home” has acquired new meaning, suggests Joselit, “now placed at the core of modern Jewish identity, often becoming indistinguishable from Jewishness itself” (ibid.). Consequently, for the residents of the Terraces, “home” and “Jewish home” are inextricably linked. Home is widely understood to be a physical place, a shelter; however, offering insight into the original museum exhibition, *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950*, Jewish Museum director Joan Rosenbaum suggests that among other things, home is “the site of an enormously creative process – the formation of cultural identity” (Rosenbaum 1990: 7). For the diverse Terraces resident population, this identity continues to change as it reflects the nuances of

Jewishness, the various understandings and experiences of home, and the cultural – and physical – realities of aging. As Baycrest senior social worker Paula David explains, “for the purpose of creating the optimum caring community, one must be cognizant of the culture of aging, Judaism as a culture, impact of country of origin and unique family cultural identities” (David 2000: 2).

Nevertheless, to outsiders, the Terraces may represent little more than a place where old Jewish people live. Or simply a place where old people live. The Jewish mission of Baycrest – though appearing on printed materials, is esoteric knowledge. There is nothing “Jewish” about the name Baycrest – although the roots of the organization began in 1918 as the Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home. Originally located in downtown Toronto, when it moved north, the organization took on the name Baycrest, after its new location on Baycrest Avenue. While the Baycrest nursing home (recently renamed The Apotex Centre, after the pharmaceutical company that helped finance it) continues to use “Jewish Home for the Aged,” as part of its longer name, “Terraces of Baycrest” is decidedly non-sectarian. However, as it is, to be old and Jewish is as complicated and textured as the space itself. The Terraces incorporates many beliefs and values, not unlike writer Vivian Gornick’s recollections of the East Bronx in the 1920s-30s: “The dominating characteristic of the streets on which I grew was Jewishness in all its rich variety. Down the street were Orthodox Jews, up the street were Zionists, in the middle of the street were shtetl Jews, get-rich-quick Jews, European humanist Jews” (quoted in Moore 1981:63).

A guiding force behind this research has been Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days*. In one way or another, this work has inspired all of my academic pursuits. Her beautiful ethnography of the elderly Jewish members of the Aliya Senior Citizens' Center in Venice, California, was my earliest academic inspiration – ever since my older brother, who was studying anthropology, gave it to me when we were both undergraduate students at the University of Toronto. I was moved by the lives of these elderly Jews, who were fragile, yet feisty and determined to sustain community; and by Myerhoff's prose, which was authoritative and insightful, yet unpretentious and accessible.

My interest in space and Jewish space specifically, began to take shape when I worked at New York City's Eldridge Street Project, now called Museum at Eldridge Street. This non-profit organization was restoring a historic Lower East Side synagogue as a museum and a cultural centre when I worked there as Education Coordinator from 1998-2001. While the non-denominational Eldridge Street Project was responsible for the restoration project, an Orthodox congregation actually owned the synagogue building. How these two groups shared the space, made decisions about how to use it, and "ownership" of the building were frequent issues. At the core of it all was a negotiation of Jewish space. This influenced not only how and when Eldridge Street Project presented public programs (not on Sabbath or Jewish holidays), but also what could be served for nibbles at exhibition openings (kosher wine, kosher cheese); as well as certain restrictions on musical performances (in Orthodox tradition, women are forbidden to sing in front of men). It was only towards the end of writing this dissertation that I realized how deeply my work at Eldridge Street impacted my research lens, and influenced how I

interpreted my fieldwork material, since similar issues – the negotiation of Jewishness and Jewish space – also come up frequently at the Terraces. Here however, there is a new layer: Jewish domestic culture takes the spotlight. Throughout my fieldwork I observed again and again how once private domestic rituals were recreated and performed in public collective spaces. From the onset of my time at the Terraces, I observed the performance of Jewishness, “oldness” and domestic culture. How these representations constantly shift through the various spaces of the Baycrest complex, is the focus of this study.

Chapter outline

My thesis explores how ideals and ideas of *home* are created and re-created within a Jewish institution. **Chapter One: Ethnography at the Terraces of Baycrest** sets the context for the study. Here I outline the research that I undertook at the Terraces of Baycrest, and discuss the methodological approaches of Jewish and auto-ethnography.

Chapter Two: Historical and Spatial Contexts of the Baycrest Home uses the narrative frame of a walking tour to situate the establishment of Baycrest and early Toronto neighbourhoods into both historical and contemporary spatial contexts. **Chapter Three: Spatial Units of Home** continues the “walk” through the various spaces of the Terraces – from the public spaces of the institutional home to the private apartments of several residents. **Chapter Four: Dichotomies of Home** examines the artificial dichotomies that make up the spatial worlds of the Terraces: public and private; Jewish and secular; kosher and *treyf* (non-kosher); home and institution. These dichotomies highlight how residents place order on their spaces, as well as how these spaces are

governed by various rules. The final section takes a close look at how residents negotiate kosher space. The nature of “Jewishness” itself becomes an additional topic for discussion.

Following the discussion of Jewishness and space, in **Chapter Five: Creating Ritual Space in the Institutional Home** I examine two rituals. First, I analyze the Shiva Gathering, the Terraces’ original response to the customary *shiva* (seven day Jewish mourning period). When a resident dies, the *shiva* typically takes place at the home of surviving family. While residents make a “shiva call” to express their sympathy to the surviving family members, the loss for Terraces residents is double-layered: not only have they lost a member of their community, but also, as residents of the same “home,” they have lost a member of their collective family. Consequently, Terraces residents observe two *shivas*: comforting family members at an off-site *shiva house*, and mourning one of their own at their own Shiva Gathering – a creative ritual facilitated by Terraces staff. While the *shiva* traditionally takes place in the private home, the Shiva Gathering takes place in the public space of the institutional home.

Secondly, I consider the Yom Hashoa (Holocaust Day of Remembrance) ceremony as both communal and personal remembering. Yom Hashoa is observed by Jews around the world during public remembrance ceremonies which most often take place at synagogues or community centres. At a unique ceremony at the Terraces, staff, residents, their families and outside community members are invited into the institutional home to remember victims of the Holocaust, as well as to honour resident Holocaust survivors.

An intensely moving creative ritual involves a candle-lighting ceremony, prayer and poetry.

Chapter Six: Performing Home: Setting Tables for the Sabbath Tea and the Ideal Tables of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* focuses specifically on the Jewish domestic custom of serving tea on the Sabbath. While many residents formerly served tea in their private homes, here a group of women continue the custom for a resident-run weekly Sabbath Tea. I present a history of the Tea, as well as provide ethnographic “snapshots” of a typical Tea. Finally, I discuss the aesthetics of table setting by comparing the reality of the Tea at the Terraces with the “ideal” tables of the popular 1940s publication *The Jewish Home Beautiful*.

The **Conclusion: Feeling at Home** moves from how residents create home in their institutional space to how they *feel* “at home” by living in a “neighbourhood” where they are comfortable with their Jewish and aging peers. I explore the notion of comfort and how it plays a crucial – yet difficult to define – role in the creation of home. Additionally, I discuss contributions of this study to the larger community, as well as directions for further research.

Chapter One: Ethnography at the Terraces of Baycrest

This thesis comes out of a literature of Jewish ethnography, particularly the strand that began – somewhat unknowingly – with the work of Barbara Myerhoff. As Victor Turner described in the Foreword of *Number Our Days*, Myerhoff's research was "in the vanguard of anthropological theory" (1978: xiii). The trend in ethnographic fieldwork had been to study cultures and places that were far away and not familiar. "The anthropologist," explains Myerhoff, "tries to understand a different culture to the point of finding it to be intelligible, regardless of how strange it seems in comparison with one's own background. This is accomplished by... living in it [the culture] for a time as a member, all the while maintaining sufficient detachment to observe and analyze it with some objectivity" (Myerhoff 1978: 18). Myerhoff previously had accomplished this with her well-known work on the Huichol Indians, *Peyote Hunt* (1974). Her next project, a study of ethnicity and aging, was based in the United States. Building on her prior fieldwork in Mexico, Myerhoff had intended to study elderly Chicanos, but as she recalls: "people I approached kept asking me, 'why work with us? Why don't you study your own kind?'" (1978:12). Candidly Myerhoff writes: "This was a new idea to me. Anthropologists conventionally investigate exotic, remote, preliterate societies. But such groups are increasingly unavailable and often inhospitable. As a result, more and more anthropologists are finding themselves working at home these days" (ibid.).¹ Because of her shared ethnicity with her subjects, Myerhoff struggled with labeling her research, which seemed to fall between "anthropology" and "personal quest" (ibid.). Her findings,

¹ While the idea of staying "at home" was new to Myerhoff, this is essentially what folklorists have been doing all along.

she explains, “did not resemble most anthropological writings” (ibid.). Her work was some of the earliest in reflexive ethnography (see Ruby 1982; Kugelmass 1988), and has had a profound impact on the disciplines of anthropology and folklore, as well as in the sub-category of American Jewish ethnography. In an original collection of essays on the ethnography of American Jewry, editor Jack Kugelmass dedicates the volume to Myerhoff, who died from cancer in 1985: “Her work has been an inspiration to many,” he writes, “and I believe I am speaking for us all in dedicating *Between Two Worlds* to her” (Kugelmass 1988:vii).

Jewish ethnography is unique, explains Kugelmass, because most often there is a familiarity between the ethnographers and their subjects, “there is a dialogue here that is not always made explicit in anthropological inquiry: the dialogue between the anthropologist as outsider and the anthropologist as insider” (Kugelmass 1988: 1). Through Myerhoff and Kugelmass, we begin to understand a turning point in ethnography when Jewish (and other ethnic) ethnographers began to look towards their “own” communities for their fieldwork studies. While Jewishness was often a common denominator between ethnographer and subject, other variables, such as ideology, denomination, religiosity, age and belief, complicated the relationships. That is to say of course, that although studies of Jews by Jews began with certain shared understandings, ethnography is essentially a dialogue (Kugelmass 1988: 26), and much remained to be learned.

Myerhoff’s exploration of the Jewish elderly was somewhat unselfconscious – growing out of a proposed research project on aging and ethnicity (rather than a study

specifically about Jews); but nevertheless, it set the tone for scholars to engage in fieldwork with Jewish-American communities (see Kugelmass 1988; Boyarin 1990; Prosterman 1984). While it is not my intention here to write a comprehensive history of Jewish ethnography, Myerhoff represented a shift from earlier American ethnographers' studies of Jewish life and culture. Before the Holocaust, notes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, German-Jewish Franz Boas, one of the founders of American anthropology, "tried to protect Jews from ethnography, because he saw cultural difference as a liability in the fight against anthropological theories of race" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2001:155). But the Holocaust proved "Boas's worst fears," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains. "Denying Jewish cultural specificity and avoiding ethnography had not worked in the way that Boas hoped" (ibid.). Consequently, there was a development in American anthropology. "For the first time," writes Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "American anthropologists, several of them students of Boas, made East European Jewish culture the subject of sustained research" (ibid.). This time period, beginning shortly after World War II, represents the first stage of Jewish ethnography. Based on the extreme loss of Eastern European Jewish life and culture, there was a yearning to recover (or to be more precise, not to forget) what had disappeared. Zborowski and Herzog's *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (1952) was "the first major anthropological study of East European Jewish culture in the English language" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:ix). The study was based around the organizing concept of *shtetl* life (small Jewish communities in Eastern Europe), which was destroyed in the Holocaust. The authors interviewed Jewish immigrants in New York City in an attempt to recreate a lost world.

As Margaret Mead explains in the foreword: "This book is an anthropological study of a culture which no longer exists, except in the memories, and in the partial and altered behavior of its members, now scattered over the world...." (Mead 1965:12). The combination of the missing "material reality" of the shtetl (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:4), along with the sense of loss that American Jews were feeling post-Holocaust (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:20) resulted in what is read today as a romanticized, idealized, and sentimentalized portrait of East European Jewish life (ibid.: 21). This is not surprising given that it was written so shortly after the Holocaust. "Not until the 1960s and the Eichmann trial would the full enormity of the tragedy begin to enter public consciousness," remarks Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (ibid.). However, despite its flaws, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, if "read in relation to the issues it raises, rather than as an authoritative account, *Life is with People* becomes a point of departure for new destinations unimagined by its authors" (1995:21).

Following this post-war first stage of Jewish American ethnography, Myerhoff and her peers established a second. As the children of survivors (both Holocaust survivors as well as those who survived by fleeing Europe pre-war), a generation separated these ethnographers from the Holocaust. Time had mellowed the urge to capture and romanticize what had been lost; instead, they turned their attention to *lived* Jewish life. While *Number Our Days* is the best known work from this period – and paved the way for contemporary Jewish ethnography – other notable Jewish ethnographers, including Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Riv-Ellen Prell were also

documenting Jewish life: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explored traditional storytelling in Toronto (1972), while Prell examined ritual in an urban Jewish prayer community (1978).

Those that followed in the footsteps of Myerhoff, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and others form what might be thought of as the third stage in American Jewish ethnography. Various ethnographies of the 1980s and 1990s focused on urban Jewish communities (Belcove-Shalin 1988; Boyarin 1988; Kugelmass 1986 and 1988; Prell 1988); like *Number Our Days*, these works also were rich in reflexivity. Other ethnographers took Myerhoff's lead in recognizing the significance of life narratives in Jewish culture, and conducted studies on oral history and life review (Boyarin 1994; Griff 1994; Kaminsky 1993). At the same time, another type of ethnographic writing emerged, moving beyond reflexivity and into post-modern theory. These ethnographers were writing about Jews, but delving deeper into questions and meaning of Jewishness, performativity and diaspora (Boyarin 1992; Boyarin and Boyarin 2002; Iztkovitz 1999). Additionally, some ethnographers heightened their reflexive stance, blurring the lines between ethnography and autobiography (Behar 1996 and 2007; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007). What stands out is the way that Jewish ethnography has developed into a distinctive sub-field, yet is influenced by many lenses.

My own work falls into this third stage of Jewish ethnographic inquiry. While I have been influenced in different ways by all of the above, my age also plays a role. Whereas Myerhoff and her stage two peers were children of Holocaust survivors, my generation represents the grandchildren. Naturally there is an overlap between the stages (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1972 and 2007; Prell 1978 and 2007) as the work of earlier

ethnographers continues to develop and grow; but on the “new” end of the Jewish ethnography scale, many of us, another generation removed, may be looking to connect – or to reconnect – with the lives of our grandparents.

Connections with my past

I grew up in Toronto in a Jewish family. My mother’s parents, as teenagers, fled from Eastern Europe around the time of the Russian Revolution (1917). They were native Yiddish speakers, and my *Bubbe* (grandmother) was famous for her chilled beet borscht (delightfully fuchsia, sour cream beaten in) and poppy-seed *moon* cookies. My father’s parents were the children of Jewish immigrants, born in Toronto, and decidedly more “Anglo” than *Bubbe* and *Zaide* (grandfather); in fact, we did not call them by Yiddish monikers, rather, they were Grandma and Grandpa.

My family belonged to a Reform synagogue. In *Essential Judaism*, George Robinson explains that Reform Judaism is a “modern movement originating in eighteenth-century Europe that attempts to see Judaism as a rational religion adaptable to modern needs and sensitivities. The ancient traditions and laws are historical relics that need have no binding power over modern Jews” (2000:588). My siblings and I went to public schools, but like many North American Reform Jewish children, we went to an afterschool Hebrew School twice a week, and to Religious School on Sundays. After my Bat Mitzvah in 1986, Hebrew School ended but my religious education continued until my Confirmation ceremony in 1989. In Reform Judaism, confirmation is a rite of passage that signals the end of formal religious education (Robinson 2000:571). At Temple Emanu-El, our learning was not so much religious (we did not study Torah), as it was

about Jewish history, culture, and philosophical issues. After Confirmation, I had little connection with our synagogue and no desire to explore my Jewishness any further beyond my domestic sphere (I was Jewish by way of family and chicken soup and Sabbath candles).

It was not until I participated in an international development exchange program that I began to consciously think about my Jewishness. It was 1992, I had just graduated from high school, and I decided to defer university for a year in order to participate in an eight-month exchange program. Half the time was spent living with a host-family and working in a community in a Canadian small town (Asbestos, Quebec); and the other half took place in an even smaller community in Indonesia (Rambah Hiller in Sumatra). The residents of Rambah Hiller, like the majority of Indonesians, were Muslim. I lived with a host family there, woke up early each morning to the call to prayer, and celebrated special holidays. Since everything was new to me, I asked a lot of questions. My host family and friends in turn inquired about my culture and religion. In Toronto, even though I went to public schools, the student body was diverse and Jewish students were far from an anomaly. I had never been in a situation where I had to explain my ethnicity. In Indonesia (and even in Quebec), I was often the first Jewish person community members had met. I ended up reaching back into my Temple Emanu-El education to explain my religion, and also to dispel myths. Although I did not realize it at the time, it was a turning point for me. As I reflected on and struggled to explain Judaism, I realized how little I knew, setting things in motion for what was to come.

I took a few Jewish Studies courses in my second year at University: Yiddish language, Jewish American fiction, and Yiddish literature in translation. Although, in truth, even though I enjoyed the courses, I felt a little uneasy about being pegged as a Jewish Studies major. Believing that university was a place to explore exciting new options, it was slightly disconcerting to study topics that were so close to home. I did not want to appear insular. In fact, I remember that when I finally declared my major (Jewish History and Literature), I was uncomfortable to admit it when people asked; and instead only revealed a part of it: "I'm a lit major," I'd lie. In any case, it did not take long before I became comfortable with my field of study. On the one hand, I felt that it helped me to understand my family history, and to connect with my maternal grandparents, who had not lived to see me studying their *mama loshen* (mother tongue). My paternal grandfather on the other hand, was somewhat flabbergasted with my academic choices. "Why would you want to take Yiddish?" he'd ask, astonished. He had worked hard to establish himself, to assimilate, to "fit in" – and he could not understand why I would choose to highlight my differences.

As I reflect on my decision, I realize that it was partly because of this assimilation that I wanted to reconnect with my past. As the historian Marcus Hansen suggests, "What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember" (quoted in Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:249). The sociologists Eugene Bender and George Kagiwada explain Hansen's "Law of Third-Generation Return" in this way:

[The] second generation – the sons and daughters of immigrants [in this case, my paternal grandparents] remained anxious and insecure about their foreign parentage... The third generation was a study in contrast. Grandchildren of the immigrant classes, already secure in their Americanness, took pride in the past

and formed historical societies to record their ethnic history. (Bender and Kagiwada 1968:360)

As an undergraduate student, I began recording my ethnic history through oral history and folklore, by creating a documentary video about the cultural and religious lives of five older Jewish women. I continued to use ethnography as a lens to study Jewish culture for my MA work in Performance Studies. Under the guidance of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, I researched the performance of contemporary Jewish life, taking a close look at Lower East Side walking tours, Jewish museums, and Jewish foodways. My MA major research project was a study of Jewish foodways, as well as a historical ethnography of New York City candy stores, which were pivotal urban Jewish social spaces between the 1920s and the 1950s (Gould 2001). When I interviewed older Jewish New Yorkers who grew up during those years, they all had narratives that were connected to these stores. All this provided a solid foundation for my work as a museum educator at the Eldridge Street Project, following graduation. When I began my doctoral studies, I wanted to continue to explore the intersection of Jewish place, memory, and narrative. When considering possible dissertation topics, I found myself returning to the undergraduate video project I had completed years earlier. Four out of the five women I interviewed had lived at the Terraces of Baycrest, and I knew it would be an ideal fieldsite – a place which would allow me to further develop my ideas about Jewish space, narrative and oral history, folklore, and Jewish ethnography.

Baycrest

The Baycrest Centre is a world-renowned research and care facility for aging. The complex is situated in a residential neighbourhood that is mostly made up of an observant Jewish population. Consequently, Bathurst Street offers many varieties of kosher grocery shops and restaurants, and other services for the Jewish community (book and gift shops, clothing boutiques, a wig store), as well as bakeries, including several specialized bagel bakeries. Baycrest was established in 1918 as the Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home, and has since become a multi-level health care system, providing care to more than 3,000 older adults every day (Baycrest 2007-08: 8). It offers programs and services that range from recreational and social programming; health promotion and maintenance programs; housing; specialized out-patient, mental health, residential and medical support services for people who range in age from their 50s to their 80s and beyond (ibid.: 3). Baycrest offers several housing options, providing services and care for seniors throughout their various stages of aging. My study takes a close look at the Terraces of Baycrest, which houses approximately two hundred senior residents who require assisted living.

Ethnography at the Terraces

Growing up Jewish in Toronto, I was always familiar with Baycrest and the Terraces. In the 1970s, 80s and 90s, it was understood to be the best facility for Jewish seniors to receive care. With today's aging population and a growing need for senior care, there are several alternatives, but Baycrest retains its stellar reputation. As mentioned above, I first explored the Terraces as a field site in 1996. As an undergraduate at University of Toronto, I was enrolled in a course called "Women and Religion," taught

by Dr. Martha Saunders. Instead of writing a final paper for the course, I opted to create a documentary video to explore the religious lives of five female Terraces residents, and their attitudes towards Judaism. Over the years, I stayed in touch with several of the women, in particular, Frances Levinsky, Fela Karmioli, and Edith Kursbatt. Sadly, Frances died before the time I began my doctoral research in 2003, but Fela and Edith – both in their nineties at the time of writing – became significant players in my dissertation.

The bulk of my fieldwork was conducted over a period of one and a half years: from October 2003 to June 2005. During that time – especially from October 2003 through June 2004 – I spent five to six days a week at the Baycrest Terraces. In order to conduct fieldwork there, I had to gain approval from the Baycrest Research Ethics Board. Once approved, I was given an identification card with photo ID, which I was required to wear whenever I was in the building. All staff and volunteers wear these identification cards. For the first four months, I was a participant-observer, attempting to understand and to experience the day-to-day life of Terraces residents. I attended programs and meals, went on shopping trips, and sat in on Residents' Council, Food Committee, and individual floor meetings. I rode the elevator during "rush hour" (before and after meal time), and socialized in the lobby before and after meals and programs. I went to religious services, bingo games, choir practice, and bridge and mahjong games. Because I attended such a variety of programs – and especially because I was present at the individual floor meetings – I had the opportunity to meet (or at the very least, to observe) each one of the one hundred and eighty-seven residents who lived at the Terraces during

the time of my fieldwork. By the end of my study, when I looked over a staff list of Terraces residents, I was able to match a face to nearly every name. Additionally, I was invited to attend Terraces weekly staff meetings.

For the first three months of this extensive participant-observation, although I spoke with staff and residents regularly, I did not conduct any tape-recorded interviews, nor did I take any photographs, because I wanted to have a clear sense of the place and the people before introducing my audio-recorder and camera. Instead I relied on taking daily fieldnotes. I always had a notebook with me; residents and staff began to expect it, oftentimes it helped to strike up a conversation. "What are you writing?" or "How's the book coming along?" or "See anything good today?" were icebreakers I heard regularly. Six Moleskin notebooks and four spiral notebooks were filled with notes describing my daily observations: conversations I heard or participated in, dining room meals, card games, daily programs, floor meetings, committee meetings, staff meetings, as well as my personal reflections. Some days I focused on describing my physical surroundings, writing and sketching; other days I tried to capture the sounds and voices of the Terraces. I attempted to type up my hand-written fieldnotes every evening, but I was not always able to accomplish this. Eventually however, I typed all of my hand-written notes, a process which allowed me to reflect further on what I had observed. Towards the end of my first stage of extensive participant-observation, I began to use my camera; first taking outdoor colour slides of the building's architecture and surroundings, and gradually shooting inside, capturing individual residents, programs and events. When I concluded my fieldwork I had developed approximately three hundred colour slides. Unfortunately,

since I was a novice, the colour and quality of some of the slides were compromised, making them unusable for this thesis. I had remained in good touch with Terraces social worker, Shawn Fremeth, and asked if he could take some replacement photographs for me since I had already moved to Newfoundland and would be unable to return. He was happy to help, and promptly sent me the digital photos, which I have included in Chapters Three and Five. Shawn's images are of excellent quality; however, it had been close to five years since I took my photographs, and there were differences between what I had originally photographed and written about, and what Shawn had photographed. Most notably were the changes at Rebecca Hoch's apartment (Chapter Three). Shortly after I had completed my fieldwork, Rebecca had a bad fall. Although she made a remarkable recovery, she now uses a wheelchair and therefore, she had to rearrange her furniture in order to accommodate this. I will make note of specific discrepancies as they appear in the thesis.

When I started conducting formal interviews in January 2004, word got around among the residents that I was recording life narratives. There was much excitement in the air – everyone had a story to tell and many residents were anxious to be recorded. “Come up to my apartment,” I’d hear daily. “I have a story for you.” From Holocaust survival stories, to tales of factory work in the 1920s and 30s, to love stories – every visit revealed the many layers that make up the resident population. I found it challenging to decide whom I would interview. At first I wondered if I should try to represent the diversity of the residents by interviewing people from the various sub-groups I had identified (i.e. men, couples, Yiddish speakers, Holocaust survivors, Toronto-born,

Montreal-born, Hungarians). I began with a list of ten people. If, after an initial interview, a resident and I did not have rapport, or if the resident did not show interest in participating further in the study, then I did not follow-up with a second interview. A couple of residents fell ill after we had met several times. In one instance a resident moved to the nursing home, in another, the resident simply was not well enough to continue meeting for interviews. Two other residents passed away during my fieldwork or shortly after. I attended a half-dozen funerals during the time of my fieldwork.

I conducted forty interviews from January 2004 to June 2005. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Consequently, the bulk of these interviews were conducted extensively with four female residents, with whom I conducted between four and five interviews each. Furthermore, I conducted a series of tape-recorded interviews for a public program I initiated, called "The Terraces Speaks!" For this program, I conducted one- to two-hour interviews with six residents about their work experiences in the garment industry. At the back of my mind I imagined one day carving out a paid position for myself there – to be the folklorist of Baycrest. As it stood, however, my job of the moment was to remain focused on my dissertation project. This was challenging because while there was obvious value in recording or simply listening to life narratives, on a practical level I had to think about how to best utilize my time in order to move forward with my fieldwork and eventually to begin writing my thesis. I often worried about whether or not I was veering too far off the path of my dissertation topic. Interviews touched on themes of "home" "aging" and "Jewishness" but they were also open-ended, and more often than not, ventured into other topics. Furthermore, my

fieldwork also consisted of umpteen informal visits in people's apartments, exchanging news and gossip over a cup of tea or a glass of ginger ale. In retrospect I see a richness to these interviews and visits that I did not initially recognize in my nervousness to "get enough" for my thesis. As the residents led me through their lives, they also told me what was important to them and highlighted areas that I may not have thought to ask about.

Fieldwork challenges

Certainly my Jewish background opened doors for my access to the Baycrest culture. Despite our vast differences in age and personal experience, my relationship with the residents was sealed in a particular way because of our shared cultural identity. As noted above, Jack Kugelmass describes the American Jewish ethnographer's dialogue as both "outsider" and "insider." Moreover, he explains, "the boundaries separating one from the other constantly shift, as perspectives, emotional ties, informants, and personal histories change" (Kugelmass 1988:1). Jonathan Boyarin, another contemporary Jewish ethnographer writes extensively of his shifting roles. Like him, I was "simultaneously or serially a visiting ethnographer and a resident Jewish participant" (Boyarin 1990: 248).

Consequently, there were times when I wondered if my "insider" status made me gloss over some of the nuances of the sub-groups. My Jewishness may have been helpful, but it did not mean that I understood all the rules. One day stands out in my mind. It was the first time I brought my camera to the popular resident-run weekly Sabbath Tea. This was partly because I was not totally comfortable with using it (it was new), and partly because I was not totally comfortable wearing my ethnographer's hat. I photographed the hostesses setting up for the Tea, and the Tea itself. By the end of the day, I felt like I had

captured some nice moments – discreetly – my main interest was to document the hostesses while not interfering with the regular workings of the Tea. I was pleased that all went well. Or so I thought. While I was helping to clear the tables – camera around my neck – Rose Kiperman (tiny, determined and Orthodox) marched over to me and said I should not have used my camera on the Sabbath. “It is the day of rest,” she said, and work is prohibited. Furthermore, Sabbath law prohibits the carrying of objects and/or money, as well as using electricity. In fact, I was violating all of these prohibitions. I felt sick to my stomach. This ignited earlier insecurities I had about whether or not I was “qualified” to conduct fieldwork. My actions were not only ignorant, but also disrespectful. Nevertheless, it had not crossed my mind that conducting fieldwork was “work” – violating the Sabbath – nor had any of the hostesses thought of it. In fact, several hostesses had brought in their own cameras and asked me to take pictures of them setting up. Apologizing, I explained that I had been documenting the Tea as part of my dissertation research, and that I had the permission of the hostesses and the Baycrest Centre to do so. (Before I began my research there, I had to submit a proposal to receive ethics approval from Baycrest’s own ethics board.) My reaction was a combination of an apology and self-defense. Not backing down, Mrs. Kiperman said she had discussed it with the ladies at her table and they all believed I should not have taken the pictures. “This is an Orthodox place,” she said, pointing out that it’s the Sabbath; and using my camera was in fact, work. I felt stuck. I knew I was wrong, but at the same time, I did not completely agree with her. Baycrest was Orthodox, but I wondered, to what degree? Was it ever acceptable to look the other way?

In the ethnographer-participant relationship, I became aware of two levels of sensitivity: one on a personal level between the ethnographer and the participant, and the other on a group level – to be aware of the greater patterns of the group – in this case, regarding Jewish customs. On a personal level, although ethnographers are trained to observe and document cultural scenes, they are not always sensitive to the rhythms of those they are documenting. At one point in *The Miracle of Intervale Avenue: The Story of a Jewish Congregation in the South Bronx*, Jack Kugelmass admits to “completely misreading a situation so volatile that it threatened... the very close working relationship” he had established with his key informant over the previous two years (1996: 184). On a personal level, Rose Kiperman and I did not have a close working relationship; however, I worried that my action and her reaction could negatively impact my fieldwork at the Terraces. Other ethnographers have worked with observant Jewish communities (Kugelmass 1996; Belcove-Shalin 1988; Boyarin 1988, 1992; Myerhoff 1985) but I found no discussion regarding how they conducted fieldwork on Sabbath and holidays without offending the community – even though both Kugelmass’ and Boyarin’s fieldwork documented synagogue congregations, and so both conducted fieldwork on the Sabbath. The closest reference I found was a conversation transcribed in Belcove-Shalin’s work, between two ultra-Orthodox men who were discussing whether or not they should participate in Belcove-Shalin’s ethnographic study. Concerned about exposing themselves to “possible ridicule,” the men recalled when another [unnamed] scholar came to study their music and dance traditions, and “wrote notes like mad in the *vayber shul* [women’s area of the synagogue] and made everybody feel uncomfortable”

(1988: 78). Reading that struck a chord with me, because regardless of whether or not I agreed with her reaction, my picture-taking had made Mrs. Kiperman and others feel uncomfortable in their own home.

About the Intervale Jewish Center, Jack Kugelmass notes, “despite the Orthodox affiliation, the congregation imposes no code of conduct on its members outside the shul and is tolerant inside as well” (Kugelmass 1996:65). Similar to the Terraces, the Intervale Jewish Center accommodates the most observant Jews, but its members consist of various denominations. Nevertheless, Kugelmass describes how a woman “would sit outside the shul on warm sunny days and watch disparagingly as... others violated the rules concerning work on the Sabbath. She would click her tongue and refer to Intervale as ‘*di komunistishe shul*’ (the communist synagogue)” (ibid.). I wondered, why couldn’t Mrs. Kiperman simply have “clicked her tongue”? After all, others at the Terraces work on the Sabbath: kitchen and housekeeping staff, for example. Here is where my Jewishness comes in: I believe that my actions upset Mrs. Kiperman because I was Jewish, and in her eyes, I should have known better. This was Janet Belcove-Shalin’s experience when she studied the Hasidic Jews of Boro Park, Brooklyn. Belcove-Shalin was Jewish, but to the Hasidim, she was a “*goyishe yid* (Gentile Jew), someone viewed with a combination of contempt and incredulity” (Belcove-Shalin 1988:85). As Belcove-Shalin learned, she was able to use her relative ignorance of Jewish law and custom to her advantage at the beginning, but she explains, “once I had learned the way, I had to be very cautious not to breach it, for then I would be cast as an *epikoyres* (a nonbeliever or skeptic who knowingly disobeys the law) and risk total ostracism” (ibid.:94). I thought of

Kugelmass' reference to "the peculiar mechanisms of *makhn zikh nisht visndik* (pretending not to know)" at the Intervale Jewish Center – the willingness to turn a blind eye to certain unorthodoxies that take place there, but which are necessary in order for the Center to keep running. While at Intervale, this policy was a matter of survival; this was not the case at the Terraces. Consequently, my exchange with Rose Kiperman was a turning point, raising my awareness about how Jewishness impacts the construction, use, and ownership of space, as well as a reminder of how my fieldwork and my presence impacted the daily lives of the residents.

Throughout my fieldwork, participant-observation allowed me to survey the wide-ranging life and culture of the Terraces – more so than personal interviews. Participant-observation allowed me to concentrate on what I was observing, as well as to think about how I in turn responded to my surroundings. In my writing, I wanted to insert myself into the text of the Terraces in an interesting and meaningful way. When this proved to be challenging, I looked to Ruth Behar, who suggests the ethnographer needs to "draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study... [and] require[s] a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied" (Behar 1996:13). Behar is something else – because she herself is an immigrant, she uses her experiences to empathize with her subjects – she is, as Michelle Fine describes, "working the hyphens" (1994).

In this case, Jewishness was my filter. But while I wanted to write myself into the narrative, I did not want it to become an ethnography of "me." Looking for guidance, I returned once again to Myerhoff to learn from what she had to say about reflexivity:

The decision to include myself was immensely liberating. I was able to expose and explore my conflicts and choices instead of presenting them as hardened, closed states or facts; I could unfold them as processes, resonant with elements originating from the research situation and my own personal reactions. It felt more honest, deeper, and finally simpler than any anthropological work I had ever done... I could never imagine trusting my own or anyone else's work as fully again without some signposts as to how the interpretations were arrived at and how the anthropologist felt while doing so. (Myerhoff, 1988:284)

Her words convinced me: using a reflexive, or auto-ethnographic lens was not only liberating, but also necessary.

While there is no standard definition of auto-ethnography, Deborah Reed-Danahay suggests it meets at the crossroads of three types of writing:

(1) "native anthropology" in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group; (2) "ethnic autobiography," personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3) "autobiographical ethnography," in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing. (Reed-Danahay 1997: 2)

As such, the term "auto-ethnography" not only has multiple meanings, but also can be traced to several disciplines. According to Reed-Danahay, auto-ethnography has been around at least since the 1970s, and has been used by anthropologists (ethnographers), as well by literary critics and sociologists. As this method crosses disciplines, it is a reminder of the shifting boundaries and borders of ethnography itself – think of Geertz's "Blurred Genres" (1980), as well the shifting titles of those who conduct ethnography: are we folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, or are we simply ethnographers?

Matchmaker, matchmaker...

The residents were extremely responsive and supportive of my research and my presence at the Terraces. Within a short time, I had dozens of new “grandparents” who were looking out for me, and wanted to see me succeed – on both personal and academic levels. For the former, this most often occurred in the form of matchmaking. The residents were bewildered that I was in my thirties and still single; they wanted to help me in any way they could. Their help took many forms: friendly suggestions about how to improve my social life (“don’t work so hard, make the time to go out and have fun”) to personal anecdotes (“don’t worry, I was late getting married as well”); to actual matchmaking offers. Of the latter, there were many, but the following was the most memorable:

It was towards the end of my fieldwork, and my visits were winding down. A friend who worked at Baycrest told me Fela was desperate to get in touch with me and that I should call her immediately. I had been out of town and was worried that something was wrong. I called right away.

“Where are you?” Fela asked.

“I was out of town, but I’m back now, is everything OK?” I said.

“When can you come?” she said abruptly.

“Why, what’s wrong?” I asked, worried.

Not missing a beat, Fela explained, “Mr. Jurman from the 4th floor would like to meet you. He has a grandson, a good catch. A good job. When can you come?” she asked.

Relief washed over me. I had been really concerned that something was wrong. I was overdue for a visit, so I agreed to come that week. When I arrived at the Terraces I saw Fela in the lobby, kibitzing with friends. I waved and approached the group. She saw me and shot up. "Good," she said. "You look presentable, come with me." I laughed, but wondered when my appearance had been less than presentable. We went up to Mr. Jurman's apartment, and what happened next was like something out of a movie.

Fela knocks on the door.

"Come in," Mr. Jurman called out. Sitting at his kitchen table, papers everywhere, was a little man with a tuft of white hair, reading a book through a large magnifying glass. He looks up.

Fela says in Yiddish, "I brought the girl."

He looks me up and down, nods and smiles.

"*A shayna maidele*," he responds approvingly in Yiddish – "A pretty girl."

They said more, but with my limited Yiddish, this was all I understood. He looks to me and says in English, "Come, sit down." Fela nods and joins me at the table. Mr. Jurman hands me a piece of paper. "Write me your phone number," he says. "Wait a minute," I laugh. "Tell me about your grandson first," there is a pit of dread in my stomach. I have a feeling this won't be a match. "He's 29," he says. "Oh, I'm 32," I reply quickly. "I think I might be too old for him." Relief. "*Narishkeit!*" Foolishness! he says, and continues with his grandson's statistics. "He has a very good job – makes \$50,000 a year, but wants to go into business with a friend and then he'll make more," he said. "He's very nice," Mr. Jurman continues, "and handsome." A proud grandfather. I was flattered but this was

awkward. I did not have a good feeling about his grandson, but Mr. Jurman was so charming, and it meant so much to him and to Fela, that I wrote down my name and number for him to pass along to his grandson. "A pretty girl like you," he said. "And smart. This is very nice. I hope to see you again." We hugged briefly, he and Fela exchanged words in Yiddish, and we left.

When the grandson called – two weeks later – I still felt uneasy. I apologized for the mix-up but said I had recently started to date someone. Of course, this was a lie, but I believe he was equally relieved. Fela of course, was disappointed. There was an urgency to see me "settled down" – not only so that I could begin the "next phase" of my life, but also so she could be there to witness it. For Fela and many of the residents, death is constantly thought about. "It won't be long now," I recall my grandfather used to say dryly, "Before I leave this vale of tears." At this stage of their lives, many residents understand that they could "go" at any time. As folklorist Patrick Mullen explains, "Psychologically, dealing with death is an important issue for the elderly; they talk more about it than other age groups, and they feel growing fear and anxiety as others their own age die" (Mullen 1992: 259). When Fela and her peers wanted to "make a *shiddach*" (make a match) there was a subtext that they hoped to be alive to witness it.

Consequently, there are countless narratives of elderly grandparents who "hold off" death in order to be present for family rites of passage: a bar mitzvah, wedding, or birth of a great-grandchild. Furthermore, in addition to Fela and the other residents wanting to see me enter a new phase of the life cycle (marriage), exploring this through a Jewish lens adds another layer. Throughout Belcove-Shalin's fieldwork with the Hasidim in Boro

Park (Brooklyn, NY), she recalls, “My role as a single woman was also a source of constant concern to my informants. I was continually reminded about the proper station of the sexes” (1988:94). In Belcove-Shalin’s case, the concern was framed by religion, although, as she explains, “Strictly speaking, marriage is not a religious requirement for women, the way it is for men. Nonetheless, a woman finds herself in a difficult social position if she does not marry... a religious woman... can be fulfilled only as a wife and mother” (ibid.: 89). The Jewish lens is two-fold, not only religious, but cultural as well. Furthermore, as Jenna Weissman Joselit suggests, “American Jews regarded marriage not as an end in itself but as a first step in the creation of a stable, loyal Jewish household. ‘Transmitting a civilization’ and providing for the ‘the continuity of a cultural inheritance as well as an ethnological one,’ the modern Jewish family bore the weight of the generations” (Joselit 1994:9). And of course, many marriages in Eastern Europe were arranged by the *shadkhn* (professional marriage broker) – a profession that is still practiced today, though not as widely as it once was.² Finally, love stories are universal. People across age and cultural groups relish a good love story; even more so if they can help write it.

And just as the residents tried to write my story, I have tried to write theirs. To close this chapter I will introduce four of the key participants, and their stories.

² See Chapter 1, “Kissing Business,” in Joselit’s *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* (9-54) for further insight into Jewish cultural attitudes towards marriage and matchmakers.

Participants

Of the approximately two hundred residents at the Terraces, more than eighty-percent are female. As I have discussed previously, residents come from diverse backgrounds, but they are all Jewish and old. The average age was above eighty. A few residents were in their seventies, some were over a hundred, and most were in their eighties and nineties. I wondered if it would be best to describe "typical" residents, but there is no such thing. The four women I will describe below were no more "typical" than any other residents, but they were the four whom I got to know best, through multiple tape-recorded interviews as well countless informal visits.



Figure 1.1 Ruth Hanff in her apartment unwrapping Passover cake for tea.

Ruth Hanff, née Bergman (figure 1.1).

Ruth was born in 1914 in what was then known as Königsberg; today it is Kaliningrad. Shortly after Ruth was born, her family moved to a nearby German village.

“We were the only Jews,” she recalls. In Ruth’s words:

I grew up in a little village. Most of them were farmers. Some very big farms, some smaller farms. They were all quite well off. It was next to a lake. There were lots of fishers. I can’t remember seeing anybody very poor there. They were all living comfortable. Not rich, but more or less middle-class. My father was in a business, a small department store. We [sold] everything...clothing, ready-made fabrics, shoes, [and] all the materials that the fishers needed, [like fishing] nets.... When I was 14 years old I began to work with my father. Of course there was no high school. My education, with the exception of the first year, was a private education. Each class had only one child. Which wasn’t so easy. (4 March 2004)³

³ All subsequent quotations by Ruth in this section are from this interview.

Ruth's siblings were sent away to boarding school, but Ruth's formal education ended when she was 14. "I was always sad I began to work at 14... [and] that I wasn't sent to boarding school." Instead, Ruth worked at her father's store. She had a creative flair and dressed the windows. Customers used to come in and ask, "Who makes your windows?" When they found out it was young Ruth they asked her father why he didn't send her to art school in Berlin. "That was the place to go," Ruth explains, "but who would send a young girl to Berlin?" she says matter-of-factly. "Too dangerous. It was before the Nazis, but it was the big city. If I had gone, maybe I would have become a hippie," Ruth laughs.

When Ruth was fifteen, her parents sent her to live with relatives in the city in order to meet other young Jewish people. Sure enough, when she was 16 she met Siegfried Hanff, the young man who would later become her husband. They married in Prague in 1937, and fled Europe together in 1939 – narrowly escaping the tragic fate of their families who they left behind. They started a new life in Chile, learned Spanish, and raised three sons. In 1963 they moved to Canada and continued working together in the garment industry.

Ruth moved to the Terraces in March of 2000. She has a strong personality, a loud voice (partly because she has trouble hearing), and she's not afraid to express her opinions. She wears skirts and cardigans and turtlenecks – her style is at once no-nonsense and elegant. Her one-bedroom apartment is chic as well. While the majority of residents who move in make-do with the grey wall-to-wall carpeting and window coverings provided by Baycrest, Ruth spent close to \$3,000 to put in new off-white

carpeting to match her couches and curtains. It is such a lovely apartment that the Terraces Manager of Marketing frequently brings prospective residents to view it during the standard building tour.

Ruth looks back fondly on her younger years, but believes she put her own interests on the backburner in order to please others. "I worked with my father. Then we immigrated to South America, and I worked with my husband." Her creative talents were put aside, but not forgotten. With pride, she explains: "When I retired, when I was 67, *then* I could pursue something with my talents. That's when I learned silversmithing." Ruth has made many beautiful pieces, from jewelry to adornments for the Torah at the Toronto synagogue where she was a longtime member. Still, she wonders what might have been if she had followed her own path: "Would I be happier today? Who knows it? The grass is always greener. So all my life, mostly, I did what I had to do."

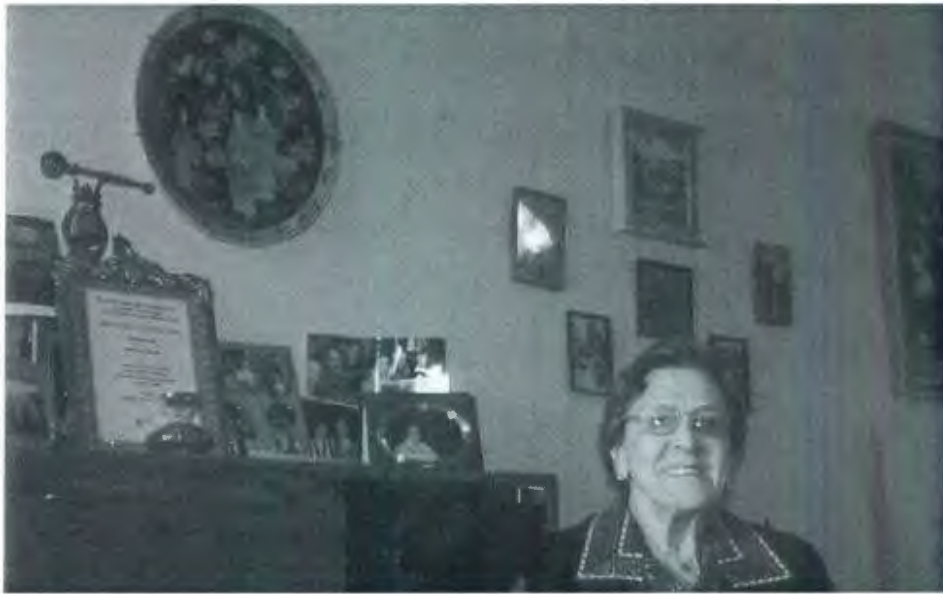


Figure 1.2. Rebecca Hoch in her apartment with family photographs and heirlooms.

Rebecca Hoch, née Rubin (figure 1.2)

“I’ve been told I’m the biggest talker in the whole building,” laughs Rebecca Hoch, “and I don’t care, because I love to talk! Otherwise I’d be talking to myself,” she says in her trademark Scottish lilt. “In Scotland there’s a response to ‘Are you talking to yourself?’ Answer is, ‘No, I’m chewing on a brick!’” Rebecca says in her inimitable way.

Rebecca Hoch was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1911. Her parents were Russian Jews who left shortly after the beginning of the Russian Japanese War in 1904, in order for her father, Solomon Rubin, to avoid conscription into the Russian Army. Her father had been a kosher butcher in Russia, and was able to continue his trade in Scotland. He opened his shop near their home in a Jewish neighbourhood known as the Gorbals. As Rebecca recalls, her father

was a remarkable man. In fact, when I was in the shop helping, if he saw someone out at the window, or even across the street, he'd quickly put in meat and stuff and wrap up a big parcel and say, go on there give it to that man. He was always giving, giving, giving. And I wish I had a penny for all the money he'd loaned and never got back. (18 Feb 2004) ⁴

Rebecca speaks so fondly of her parents and about growing up in Scotland. "We had a wonderful...very happy childhood," she says. She grew up with three sisters (remarkably, two of her sisters were still alive – and well into their nineties – at the time of writing.) "When we were children, we'd go on holidays, two months, July and August. Every year.... There's one place that we loved and it was Rothesay, and this was on the Isle of Bute.... We loved the sea. And even when we were adults we used to go to Rothesay too, we loved it!"

Their lives took a turn when her father died fairly young, at age 53, "it was by a wrong diagnosis... and he ought not to have died," Rebecca says sadly. She and her sisters worked to support their mother. Rebecca was already nearly twenty years old, but nevertheless, it marked the end of her happy childhood. They could no longer afford to live in the big house they grew up in, and were forced to move to an apartment. "My father had died, we had sold the house, I was away from the garden. We were in an apartment. I felt suffocated, somehow or other, and one day I just took off. And hitchhiked to London – 500 miles." This is not the kind of story you would expect to hear from Rebecca. She does not seem to be someone with a rebellious streak – someone who would break the rules. But she wanted to become a nurse, but there was a two-month waiting list in Glasgow; and there was no wait-list in London. She met some shady

⁴ All subsequent quotations by Rebecca Hoch in this section are from this interview.

characters along the way, but finally made it to her destination, where she stayed with an aunt. "It was exciting," Rebecca says about her hitchhiking adventure. "And it was not just my fear – we lived a very sheltered life – we had no responsibilities. Father took care of everything. We had a quiet and sheltered sort of life. And that's what got me through there unscathed, you know." She completed her training, worked in the hospitals, and eventually made her way back to Scotland.

She met her husband, Joseph Hoch, in 1945, after she and her sister made a Shabbat meal for some Jewish soldiers who were stationed in Glasgow. They had a wonderful, happy marriage and raised two fine sons. After Joseph died in 1976, Rebecca moved to Toronto. She lived in several apartments before deciding to move to the Terraces. She loves Baycrest and is involved with various programs. Her favourites are the choir and the poetry group. Rebecca is all warmth, intelligence, and optimism; but she is also extremely self-deprecating and has trouble accepting compliments. Her bachelor apartment is full of carefully curated "objects of memory" that trigger life narratives (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989): photographs of her parents, her mother's candlesticks, a collection of souvenir spoons. "There's a story behind each one," she says. Rebecca loves being surrounded by all her special objects. "People tell me my apartment is like a museum," she says. "But I don't care. I love it."



Figure 1.3. Fela Karmiol setting up for the Sabbath Tea.

Fela Karmiol, née Przysuski (figure 1.3)

Fela Karmiol is a pistol. She is small and feisty and has a Yiddish accent that was made for radio. Fela was born in Lodz, Poland in 1917. “I had seven brothers,” she says. “I was the only girl” (9 March 2004).⁵ Her father, Moishe, worked from home as a carpenter. At night the entire family slept in one room. “I was lucky I was the only girl, because I had my own bed,” she says diplomatically. Fela got along with her brothers, but she also wished she had a sister. “My friends, they all had sisters, which I was so jealous: four sisters, seven sisters, one boy, no boys – and I had seven brothers,” she smiles. At home her parents had conflicting views about Judaism. Her mother, Rifka, “was very religious. She believed in everything.” Her father on the other hand, was a secular Jew,

⁵ All subsequent quotations by Fela Karmiol in this section are from this interview.

and preferred to focus on Yiddish culture and Jewish history. "My father wasn't religious," Fela says, but he made sure she and her brothers knew the history of all the Jewish holidays.

Like many of her contemporaries – male and female – Fela finished school at age fourteen. High schools were private, so only a few families could afford to send their children. "I finished with forty-six girls in my class," recalls Fela. "One girl went on to high school. *One*. And forty-five went to work." Most of her classmates ended up in factories: "One was dresses, one was sweaters." Fela's first job was "underwear." "Everyone went to work," she says. "And then you start to date." But, she reveals, "This was a secret. Nobody could know." Fela explains the matchmaking culture: "You had to wait for the matchmaker to bring a boy," she says mischievously, "But I didn't wait," she laughs. She told her parents: "No. I'm gonna marry out of *love*, or I'm not gonna marry." "Once," she recalls, "I worked in a place and a man came in and he told the boss he'd like to meet me. I didn't want to even hear it! And he was a rich man, this one." Fela met her husband, Kuba Karmiol, when she was sixteen. He was not rich. "He was a worker." Her face lights up. "He was so handsome," she recalls. "I married this boy when I was twenty-one... And we had a romance all of our life." She first fell in love with his deep brown eyes. "These eyes go generation after generation," she says, showing me his picture alongside photos of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren to prove it.

"We were divided for a year and a half during the wartime once," Fela says. "You see, I was still in Russia when the war was on, and he was in the army. Near the end of the war, it was very hard to come to Russia. Somehow he made some document and he

came and picked me up. This was like a scene in a movie.... So many others got killed, so many. And he still was in the uniform... the whole village came to look.... And everybody cried and smiled... and my son, [who was] three and a half when we left... was almost five.” Fela says Kuba took them back to Poland, and shortly after they ended up in Siberia. Tragically, Fela lost her parents and most of her siblings in the Holocaust. While she grappled with religion before, the Holocaust was a turning point; she no longer believes in God. Like her father before her, she continues to feel strongly about her culture and history, but like many other Jews of her generation, her faith is gone.

After the war, Fela, Kuba, and their two young sons lived in Displaced Persons (“DP”) camps, then France and Israel before arriving in Canada in 1953. She continued to work in the needle trade, first as a lining-maker, then as a skirt-maker until she retired in 1982. Fela was an active union member and still receives a pension today. A familiar face at Baycrest, Fela moved in shortly after Kuba died, and has lived in her small corner bachelor for over fifteen years. She is active in almost every program, and loves to speak out whenever there is an opportunity. Even when her opinions differ from those of her peers, she continues to hold her ground. Her stubbornness has caused a few rifts in the Terraces community, but Fela always carries on. She has various volunteer positions, including Elevator Monitor, and she also sits on various Committees. Currently she is the Head Hostess of the Sabbath Tea.



Figure 1.4. Edith Kursbatt, knitting in her apartment.

Edith Kursbatt, née Sager (figure 1.4)

For a woman of ninety-plus years – for anyone in fact – Edith Kursbatt has impeccable posture. To be in her presence forces you to sit up a little straighter. With her perfectly coiffed short white hair, native British accent, poise and style, Edith is a picture of grace.

Edith Kursbatt was born in the East End of London on November 20, 1913. Her parents, Jacob and Rose Sager ran a kosher restaurant out of their home. Edith recalls feeling resentful that she didn't grow up in a private home. Her parents were busy running the business and she and her sister were seldom allowed in the restaurant. Sometimes however, they would go to the kitchen and watch their father cook. As Edith remembers, there was "a huge black coal stove... [and] there were about three types of

soup and several types of meat... but no dairy products were ever in this kitchen.” With affection Edith recalls, “I was fascinated when my father prepared the eggs.... He had his famous little black iron frying pan which never went into water and was always cleaned out with a cloth and it was always kept for him” (11 May 2004).⁶

When she was a young twenty, Edith married Ivor Kursbatt, an engineer from Oxford who was twelve years her senior. Her parents had arranged the marriage and Edith always wondered what her life might have been like if she had married for love – as her younger sister Gertie did. Although at times she was unhappy, Edith was devoted to her husband, enjoyed welcoming guests to their home for dinner parties, and took up painting as a hobby. They had two children, whom they raised partly in England and partly in Montreal. It wasn’t until they were senior citizens that Edith and Ivor finally moved to Toronto.

The Kursbatts moved to the Terraces together in 1995. Eight months later, Ivor was in the Baycrest nursing home, where Edith visited him everyday. He died within the year. During that time, Edith also had to deal with the tragic loss of her adult daughter, who died from cancer. To help deal with her losses, Edith became more involved in the programs at the Terraces. One group in particular, the Women’s Discussion Group, became an important part of Edith’s life. “I was born again through Paula,” Edith says, referring to Paula David, the social worker who initiated the group. Discussions were open and frank, covering topics that others might consider taboo, including death and sexual intimacy (see David: 2001).

⁶ All subsequent quotations by Edith Kursbatt in this section are from this interview.

Edith participated in programs and continued to run the popular resident-run Sabbath Tea, which she had started while Ivor was alive; but nevertheless, she only had one or two friends at the Terraces. Although she tried, Edith found the Terraces a difficult culture to break into, mostly she feels, because she was not from Toronto. "I was brought up in England, married in England, lived in England; and then I came to Canada." Most of her old friends have died. "I'm the last survivor," she says sadly. She tried her best at the Terraces, putting time and energy into the Tea and attending programs, but at the end of the day, she was often lonely. In 2006, Edith's health was deteriorating and she could no longer live independently at the Terraces. Currently she lives in a nursing home in Northern Ontario, ten minutes away from her son and daughter-in-law.

Four women, four unique stories. And yet, they – along with each resident at the Terraces – have been brought together at this later stage in their lives to build a new place called home. Through participant-observation, interviews, and friendly visits I got to know many of the residents in various contexts of their lives. Sometimes I wondered if what I was doing was actually "fieldwork," but in retrospect it became clear that in order for me to understand how residents create home, that first I would have to understand where they came from. Just as context is needed in order to understand the complexities of the Terraces residents, the building itself also needs to be understood in context. The next chapter explores the historical and spatial contexts of the Terraces home.

Chapter Two: Historical and Spatial Contexts of the Baycrest Home

“Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps” (de Certeau 1988: 97).

Baycrest’s physical structures hold complex historical and contemporary meanings, many of which connect to larger cultural stories of the Jewish community in Toronto. To a passerby, the Terraces looks like a typical apartment building. But the story behind it, as well the individual life stories of the residents, reveals the many layers of history, memory, and contemporary culture that penetrate beyond the physical walls of the building. This chapter is inspired by de Certeau’s chapter “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), Sarah Schulman’s walking tour “When We Were Very Young” (1989), and my own experiences leading walking tours in New York and Toronto, of the Lower East Side, and Kensington Market/ Spadina Avenue respectively. Like the streetscapes I introduced to groups of tourists, “When we walk everyday, we often forget to look up,” I used to tell walking tour participants. Usually we walk looking either straight ahead, or staring down at the sidewalk. The goal of walking tours is to connect people to the buildings that create our streetscape, and to discover the stories buildings tell of the neighbourhood and the people who live (or lived) there. “Walkers,” muses de Certeau, “follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (1988:93). Just as a good walking tour interprets the text, in this chapter, I attempt to re-frame the everyday, and to make connections between the building, its residents, and neighbourhood history.

Walking tours briefly transform neighbourhoods into museums, highlighting ordinary objects (in this case, buildings) with narrative frames. The tour guide provides the “labels,” and the participants interpret based on what they see and hear. Unlike interpretations that might occur from reading or watching a documentary film, participants on a walking tour have the opportunity to add their opinions, thoughts, and memories. “This Chinese restaurant,” I once explained on the Spadina walking tour, “was the Labour Lyceum. The heart of Yiddish culture, and a hub for the garment workers and labour organizers.” An older gentleman on the tour piped up. He had been a factory worker and a union organizer, and reiterated how significant the building had been. “But why,” he asked, voice rising, “why are there no signs or markers to indicate the building’s history? Not even a plaque,” he scoffed. He believed at the very least, the building’s past should be recognized. Ideally, he suggested, the government would buy the building and turn it into a labour history museum. Looking at the large stone lions guarding the restaurant, with its elaborate and colourful pagoda-style roof, it is difficult to imagine the Yiddish language meetings, lectures, and dances that once took place there. The discovery of these cultural palimpsests is the highlight of walking tours – and public history. But the Chinese restaurant/Labour Lyceum is not quite a palimpsest, since aside from memories and historic documentation, there are no traces of what the building used to be. Anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin calls this “naked absence.” Regarding the Lower East Side, he remarks on “the disappearance ‘without a trace’ of landmarks and other foci of ethnic culture” (Boyarin 1992: 4). In this case, the structure remains, but the façade has changed; in other instances buildings are demolished, but preserved through narrative and

memory. The building's past is in danger of being forgotten, but at present it serves a new community. Buildings in urban neighbourhoods reveal the layers of successive waves of migration – if not physically, then through memory culture. Folklorist Elaine Eff gave walking tours of North Avenue in Baltimore, where Jewish, Irish, and African Americans lived. She says the missing cultural sites help residents recall what happened there (cited in Zeitlin 1994: 217). It becomes our social responsibility to document and share what we know. These narrative exchanges become performance events, similar to the “storytelling sessions” discussed by Tamar Katriel in her work about Israeli settlement museums (1997: 27).

Like the buildings that make up walking tours, the Terraces holds its own stories and prompts its own kind of performance events. Both the Chinese restaurant/ Labour Lyceum and the Terraces of Baycrest straddle social memory and “living” culture. Architecture and American Studies professor Dolores Hayden points out that while many cultures have “attempted to embed public memory in the narrative elements of buildings.... The importance of ordinary buildings for public memory has largely been ignored, although, like monumental architecture, common urban places like union halls, schools, and residences have the power to evoke visual, social memory” (Hayden: 47). Although the Terraces is a new building (1976), its story, as I will describe below, resonates with the Jewish community; furthermore, the residents are the *living* social memory of Jewish life in the twentieth century. It is at once a building that invokes public memory, as well as what Henri Lefebvre would call a “lived space,” which “embraces the

loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time”
(cited in Lipphardt, Brauch and Nocke 2008: 16).

Historic overview of Jews in Toronto: before Bathurst Street

Baycrest’s current location on Bathurst Street, north of Lawrence Avenue, tells the story of the northward and westward migration of a large part of Toronto’s Jewish community. The forerunner to Baycrest, the Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home (established 1918, see figure 2.1), was located in Toronto’s historic Jewish neighbourhood, just a few short blocks away from Spadina and the Labour Lyceum described above. As Jews began to migrate north, Jewish institutions followed. While today Baycrest is located in a predominantly Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood, this was not always the case. In fact, Jewish presence in the city is also fairly recent.



Figure 2.1. The Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home, the forerunner to Baycrest.
(Photo courtesy of Paula David, date unknown.)

The first synagogue was established in Toronto in 1856, but it was not until half a century later that Jews began to have a presence in the city, when “floods of East European refugees arrived in Toronto as a result of the Russo-Japanese War and Russian Revolution, both of 1904” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1972: 40). At this time, the main Jewish neighbourhood was called St. John’s Ward, also known simply as the Ward, or even St. John’s Shtetl (Tulchinsky 1993: 172). It was a very narrow area bordered by Yonge Street (east), University Avenue (west), Queen Street (south), and College Street (north). As Canadian Jewish historian, Gerald Tulchinsky describes, it was “a slum by early-twentieth-century standards, it attracted notoriety for its crowded conditions, filth, squalor, poverty, and lack of adequate sanitation” (1993: 172). By the next decade, Jews started moving westward, to the Spadina area. At this time, Jewish immigration to the United States had slowed due to restrictive quotas, but Toronto’s Jewish population continued to grow as Jews fled persistent religious persecution in Eastern Europe.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, the area around Spadina Avenue and Kensington Market was the heart of the city’s Jewish life and culture. Yiddish theatres, grand synagogues and *shteibels* (small storefront synagogues), *kheders* (Jewish schools), fruit and vegetable stands, bookstores, and *landsmanschaften* (benefit societies named for Eastern European hometowns), along with countless garment factories created the Spadina streetscape. The predominant language was Yiddish. “The immigrant neighborhood in downtown Toronto, even as late as the 1950s, was reminiscent of New York’s Lower East Side decades earlier,” recalls Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who grew up there, “amid a host of Jewish institutions” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007: 360) –

including the Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home (1918). Members of the *Ezras Noshem* Society, a charitable Jewish women's group, raised funds for the "Old Folks Home" by collecting money door-to-door. Their work was grounded in their belief that elderly Jews needed a place to speak Yiddish and to eat kosher food (Baycrest 2006b: 2). The commitment of *Ezras Noshem*, along with various grassroots organizations established the building blocks of the Canadian Jewish community, providing not only social networks for new immigrants, but also job security, health benefits, community centres, and other services (Joseph 2000; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1972: 39-40; Tulchinsky 1998: 19-20).

Postwar years: downtown Jews moving north

As the immigrant community became more comfortable and financially secure, families began to move away from the downtown core of Spadina and Kensington Market – continuing the northward and westward pattern – to neighbourhoods such as Downsview, Bathurst Manor, Lawrence Manor, and for the wealthier Jews, to Forest Hill. Despite the move north, many continued to work and shop in the old neighbourhood. Several prominent Jewish Torontonians, including the journalist Rick Salutin (1985), folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2007), and the various contributors to Sharp, Abella, and Goodman's *Growing Up Jewish: Canadians Tell their Stories* (1997) have reminisced about Spadina and/or written about the move to the suburbs. While Bathurst Street and its surrounding neighbourhoods were some of the larger Jewish destinations, other emerging Jewish neighbourhoods of the era included

York Mills (where I grew up), and Don Mills. Both were slightly further north, and east of Bathurst Street. One Terraces resident, Abe Granatstein, remembers receiving a telephone call at his popular downtown shop, Grant's Fine China and Gifts, where "every Jewish bride registered," he explained with pride (10 January 2004). The call came from a female customer who had moved from Kensington to posh Forest Hill. After making arrangements to come to the shop to pick up what she needed, she haughtily added: "I'm calling from St. Clair [Avenue]." Pause. "What's the weather like down there?" Mr. Granatstein laughed as he told the story, hamming up her pretentious way of speaking, pronouncing it "St. Clah," and acknowledging not only that she was attempting to distance herself from her old neighbourhood (although the physical distance was negligible), but also performing her tones of condescension. Like reverse nostalgia, rather than longing for what she no longer had, she seemed to look back at her old life with disdain.

As the Jewish community moved north, many Jewish institutions relocated (or were newly built) as well. By the mid-1940s, the original Jewish Old Folks' Home was in a state of disrepair. Rather than renovate the old building, plans were made to build a new structure. Baycrest records indicate: "Abe Rovner, a former President of the [Jewish Old Folks] Home, negotiates the purchase of 25 acres of land on Bathurst Street north of Lawrence Avenue" to build a new Jewish Home for the Aged (*Baycrest Bulletin* 1993). The forward-looking committee also proposed to build a hospital, specially for the residents – the first of its kind in Ontario. After much lobbying, the plans were approved (*ibid.*). Minutes from the Executive Committee recall: "As you all know on Wednesday,

June 6 [1951], there was the turning of the sod at the site of the New Home. More than forty of our residents attended this affair.... Their constant wish now is to see the Home built and that they may live to be in it" (*Baycrest Bulletin* 1993). The new Jewish Home for the Aged (Abe and Elsie Posluns Building) opened in 1968, and the organization officially changed its name to "Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care" to reflect its location on Baycrest Avenue. Other Jewish institutions followed the move to Bathurst Street, including the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS), the Jewish Family and Child Services, the Ontario Jewish Archives, the Latner Jewish Library, and the Holocaust Centre of Toronto (all housed in the Lipa Green Building for Jewish Community Services); and the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre (JCC), which is known as the "uptown" JCC, or BJCC (Bathurst JCC). Despite the Jewish migration north, the downtown JCC remained in its original location, highlighting not only that Jews remained downtown, but also that the facility is used by the larger (non-Jewish) community as well. So while a contemporary walking tour of Spadina and the historic Jewish community is essentially a nostalgic tour of absences, the flipside tour is Bathurst Street, where Jewish organizations, shops and residential neighbourhoods ended up.

Subsequent postwar waves of immigration

As the pre-war Jewish immigrants settled into the suburbs, several waves of immigrants followed, skipping Spadina, and often finding their own pockets within the newly established suburban communities. Between 1947-1952, about thirty-four thousand Holocaust survivors came to Canada (Weinfeld 2001: 62). Presently, there are

approximately 12,000 Holocaust survivors in Toronto (and approximately 24,000 in Canada). A 2008 Baycrest media release estimates that it “cares for almost 1,000 Holocaust Survivors, in its nursing home and hospital and through its outpatient and the Community Day Centre for Seniors” (Baycrest 2008).

About six thousand Hungarian Jews (many also Holocaust survivors) arrived in Canada in 1957, after the failed 1956 Revolution (Weinfeld: 64). And beginning in the 1970s, the Soviet Jews began to arrive – known as *refusniks* (political refugees). North American Jewish communities rallied for their political and religious freedom, and partook in major fundraising campaigns to bring them over. From the 1970s to the early 1990s, tens of thousands arrived in Canada. Latvian-born writer David Bezmozgis, fictionalized his experiences of coming to Canada – and coming of age – in a collection of short stories. In “Tapka,” he is six years old in 1980. The setting is Toronto: “Goldfinch was flapping clotheslines, a tenement delirious with striving. 6030 Bathurst: insomniac scheming Odessa. Cedarcroft: reeking borscht in the hallways” (Bezmozgis 2004: 3). Each story illustrates life on and around Bathurst through the eyes of the young narrator, the persona of the author. In “Roman Berman, Massage Therapist,” he writes, “This was 1983, and as Russian Jews, recent immigrants, and political refugees, we were still a cause” (21). The area of Bathurst Street he describes, just two intersections north of Baycrest, near Finch, remains a little enclave for the Russian Jewish community.

The neighbourhood today

Today the community that surrounds Baycrest is home to many Hasidic and modern Orthodox Jews. The shops and restaurants help tell the story of who lives nearby: Perl's Glatt Kosher Meat Shop, Milk and Honey Kosher restaurant, King Kosher Pizza, Colonel Wong's "Best Kosher Chinese Take-Out," various kosher specialty food shops, and bagel bakeries within blocks of each other.

On Saturday mornings, men in traditional Hasidic garb: black hats, beards and long coats, walk to *shul* with their families. Girls in long skirts, boys in dark pants, *yarmulkes* (skull caps) and *peyes* (side curls), are seen on warm days riding their bicycles along the sidewalks. Jewish seniors – not necessarily religious – also are predominant in the neighbourhood. In fact, as indicated on the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Federation-sponsored Web site, *Doing Jewish in Toronto*, the neighbourhood where Baycrest is located, Bathurst Manor, was reported by the 2001 Statistics Canada census report as having the "fifth-highest population density of Jews in the country.... [and] the largest proportion of Jewish seniors in the city" (*Doing Jewish in Toronto*). In addition to those who live at Baycrest, some live independently, while others live in the various assisted-living facilities, nursing homes, and senior-friendly apartment buildings in the area. The Wagman Centre, along with other local organizations, offers special programs and activities for seniors. As the senior population ages in place, it is becoming more and more common for older adults to require the assistance of personal caregivers, many of whom live in the neighbourhood as well. Since many professionals who provide senior

care are from the Philippines and the Caribbean, many convenience stores around Baycrest offer specialty items and products from these countries, further reflecting the subtle diversity of the neighbourhood.

Through buildings and neighbourhoods, we learn a story of Jewish settlement in Toronto. The downtown area near Spadina and Kensington Market was once the hub of Jewish life, as seen in part by the location of the Toronto Jewish Old Folks' Home, one of many Jewish institutions in the vicinity. While today some may be struck by the "naked absence" of Jewish life downtown, many of these organizations have not disappeared, but rather they have relocated elsewhere. Many of the "absent" buildings have contemporary counterparts uptown, revealing the northward and westward dispersion of Jewish settlement in Toronto. This is by no means a singular story. As Jonathan Boyarin points out about New York's Lower East Side, "the living conditions, as in any immigrant ghetto, were terrible, and thus the usual sociological and popular valuation of the neighborhood's depopulation by Jews as upward mobility seems so transparently obvious as not to require explanation" (Boyarin 1992:3). As Jews moved north, many institutions moved along with them. The next chapter moves from the surrounding neighbourhoods of the Baycrest campus, into the building itself. The "narrative walk" will explore the public and private spaces that construct Terraces of Baycrest "home."

Chapter Three: Spatial Units of Home

This chapter explores the spatial units of the building, from the bottom-up. From the street, the Terraces of Baycrest is nondescript – a white brick apartment tower with rows of rectangular windows and corner terraces on each level. Inside the spaces reveal the various layers of “home”: the public spaces that make up the institutional home, as well as the private spaces of individual apartments.

The apartment tower is eleven storeys high, and houses one hundred and sixty-one bachelor suites, and forty-three one-bedroom suites.



Figure 3.1. Terraces of Baycrest, photograph taken from Ameer Avenue.

If you approach it from the front entrance (also called the “West entrance”) at Ameer Avenue, it appears to be an independent apartment building (figure 3.1); but from the

back you can see that it is attached to the Wagman Centre (see figure 2 on page 2). Several large parking lots separate it from the main Baycrest Centre, where the nursing home, hospital and extended medical services are located (see figure 3 on page 2). A shuttle bus runs on a daily schedule (except on the Sabbath) between the Terraces/Wagman Centre and the main Baycrest buildings. The front entrance of the Terraces is framed by two overlapping hexagonal porticos with white brick columns, and a dark wood roof (figure 3.2). The larger portico covers part of the circular driveway, providing shelter for residents who are dropped off or picked up by family members or the Wheel-Trans bus – the door-to-door public transportation service for seniors and people with disabilities.



Figure 3.2. Front entrance to the Terraces of Baycrest.

Terraces/Wagman Centre Main Floor (see figure 3.3)

Similar to other apartment buildings, the main (West) entrance of the Terraces does not lead directly into the building, but into a “pre-lobby,” with a buzzer board to alert residents that visitors have arrived. This area also has a bench, a small newspaper holder

stacked with copies of the *Hospital News* (“Canada’s Health Care Newspaper”), as well as the ubiquitous post-SARS hospital/nursing home hand sanitizing station, with four dispensers of alcohol-based gel.

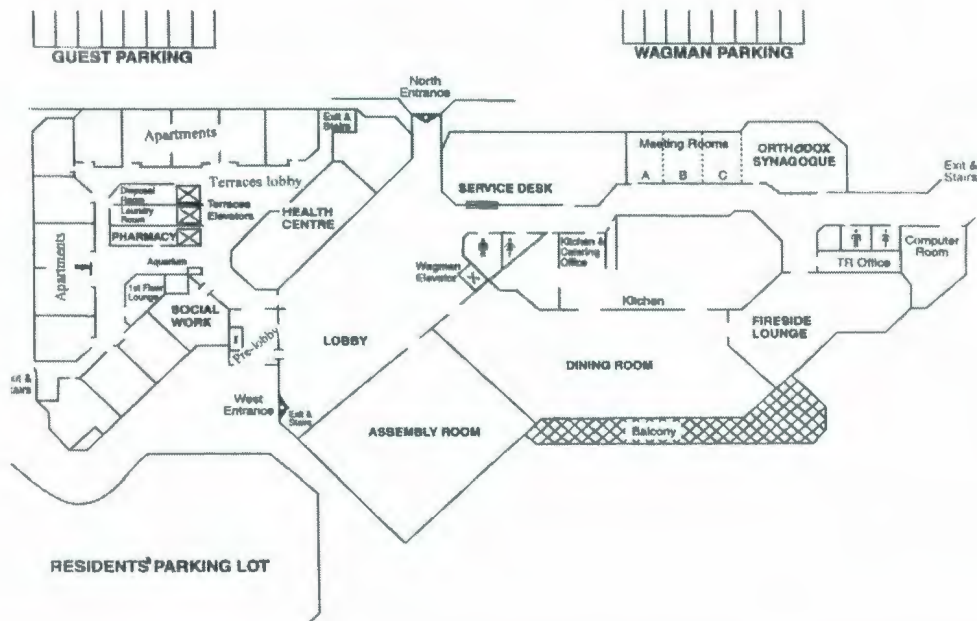


Figure 3.3. Layout of Terraces/ Wagman Centre Main Floor. The Terraces apartment tower is the triangular shaped area to the left of the West and North Entrances. Map by Monica Stevens.

There are two sets of sliding glass doors: the door to the right has a “Wagman Centre” sign above it, and the door straight ahead is labeled “Terraces” (see figure 3.4). While residents and their guests regularly use both doors, Wagman members use their designated entrance only.



Figure 3.4. Terraces “pre-lobby.” To the right is the Wagman Centre entrance, to the left is the Terraces entrance.

The Terraces lobby

As you walk into the Terraces lobby, Social Work offices are to your left (figure 3.5). The glass window allows residents and visitors to see if the social workers are in their individual offices. There is a small waiting area on the other side. The three full-time social workers are advocates, counselors, programmers, and friends to Terraces residents, who often drop in simply to say hello, to share good news, or to gripe. Outside the offices there is a message board announcing programs, outings and special events. Beyond the offices, there is an aquarium and a small corridor, which leads to the first-floor lounge, where floor meetings take place. Unofficially it is also a popular meeting spot for the Hungarian residents. There is a small pharmacy (for residents only), as well as laundry and garbage disposal room for the first-floor residents.



Figure 3.5. Entering the Terraces Lobby. Door on left leads to the Social Work offices. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.



Figure 3.6. Terraces Lobby and elevator sitting area. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Three elevators which provide access to the resident floors are on the left just past the small corridor (see figure 3.6). There are several chairs, a small couch and a coffee table. A dark wood partition with stained glass separates the small lobby area from the

hallway that leads to some of the first-floor apartments, although one apartment is in plain view. The Health Centre is across from the elevators, on the other side of the small lobby. There is a small waiting room inside, but early-bird residents waiting for the Health Centre to open in the mornings use the lobby space as an alternate waiting room. A unique “Holocaust quilt” hangs on a wall to the right of the Health Centre (figure 3.7). Each square tells the story – through scanned photographs and memorabilia – of the twenty-one resident survivors who helped create it.



Figure 3.7. “Mirror of Our Lives” – The Terrace Holocaust Survivors Group quilt.

Apartments are at the end of the corridor, and wrap-around the back and other side of the triangular-shaped building.

Wagman Lobby

Couches, chairs and tables are strategically set up around the Wagman lobby (figure 3.8). It is brightly lit, with natural light coming in through a skylight, as well as through the windows which frame the driveway and the building entrance. Residents sit on chairs lined side-by-side at the window, watching people as they come and go.



Figure 3.8. Sitting area in Wagman Lobby. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Towards the left wall are clusters of comfortable chairs, couches, and tables. There is a hutch with decorative china, and colourful, abstract art hangs on the walls. Before and after meals, residents sit here and socialize. It is here that the “Shiva Gatherings” I describe in Chapter Five take place, as well as occasional holiday celebrations, such as a Hanukah candle-lighting service. The Assembly Room and Dining Room doors are located to the right. The Wagman Centre elevators are next to the Dining Room. These elevators only stop between the main floor Wagman lobby and the ground

floor of the Wagman Centre. There is a chair, a small table and a telephone located near the elevator, and just beyond it is another set of doors, the “north entrance” to the building. This entrance is used by Wagman members, synagogue members, as well as by administrative and various staff members. Terraces residents use this entrance as well, especially because both the Community Bus Stop (making local stops on and around Bathurst Street) is located here, as well as the stop for the Baycrest shuttle bus, which travels between the Terraces and the main complex, where many residents have appointments, visit friends, volunteer, or eat at the cafeteria.

A quick right at the end of the lobby brings you to the Service Desk. Continue to walk along the corridor and you will see the entrance to the main office on your left. On your right is the Kitchen Manager’s office, which opens into the Terraces kitchen, and just beyond is another small corridor with the staff entrance to the kitchen, another staff office, as well as the entrance to the Fireside Lounge. This is the location of the Sabbath Teas that I explore in Chapter Four. The main corridor also leads to public washrooms, additional staff offices, two meeting rooms, and the Orthodox Synagogue. There are several display cases, highlighting art and/or Judaica, and there are large photographs on the walls. One series is black and white photographs of pre-Holocaust life in Eastern Europe; another series, called “Life Cycle,” follows the life of a young woman, from babyhood, to motherhood. At the end of the corridor to the right is the Computer Room, where classes and tutorials are offered to residents and Wagman members. To the left you will see a building exit and stairs, which lead down to the Wagman Centre. Additionally, there is another sitting area near the window.

The ground floor (lower level) – Wagman Centre

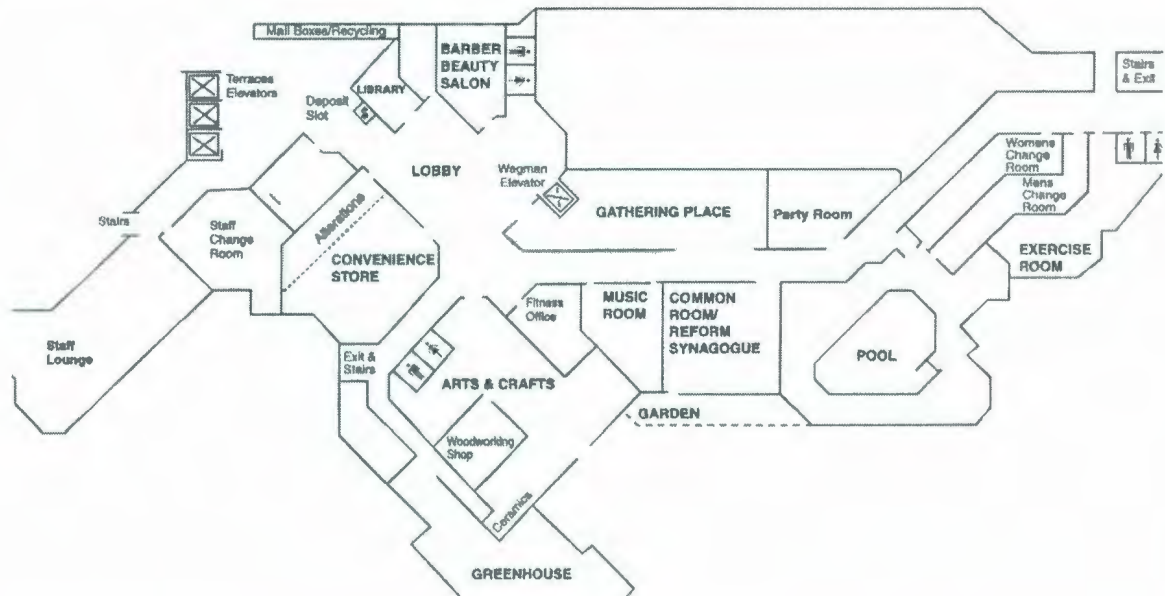


Figure 3.9. Layout of the Wagman Centre Ground Floor. Map by Monica Stevens.

Although the Ground Floor of the Wagman Centre (figure 3.9) is accessible from the outside, residents and community members who use it mainly use the Main Floor elevators to get there. Unlike the Main Floor entrances, which are open during “business hours,” the Ground Floor entrances are always locked. Mostly, only staff members who have parked in the nearby lot use these doors.

Resident mailboxes and recycling bins are located near the Terraces elevator. There is also a small library, a deposit slot for residents to leave their rent cheques, and a barber/beauty salon. At the west end of the floor, there are lounges for staff and volunteers, as well as a staff change room. The central lobby area has several small fixed

tables and chairs, as well as a microwave. Unlike the main floor lobbies, where couches, comfortable chairs, and coffee tables create a home aesthetic, this space is utilitarian: the tables and chairs are hard plastic, and there is no attempt to make it homey. Instead, fluorescent lighting and low ceilings remind me of a food court at a mall. There is a convenience store, which offers a small selection of groceries, ready-made foods, hot coffee and baked goods. A barber/beauty salon, alterations service, and small library further contribute to the mall atmosphere. Residents use the services, but like the Terraces lobby, they do not come to the space to socialize. However, it is somewhat of a hub for the maintenance and service staff, who sit and exchange news, and use the space to enjoy coffee and lunch breaks.

Beyond the lobby is the heart of the Wagman Centre. There is a large arts and crafts studio, with special areas for woodworking and ceramics, as well as a greenhouse. The Wagman/Terraces Choir meets in the Music Room for weekly rehearsals; and at the Gathering Place there are various daily activities, including a bridge club, which meets most weekdays, and evening "underground" Bingo games, which are organized by the residents and take place on evenings when there are no scheduled evening activities. There is also a Party Room for special events. Dance therapy and other activities take place in the Common Room, which also doubles as the meeting place for the Terraces Reform congregation. Finally, the eastern wing of the ground floor has a large swimming pool and exercise room.

Terraces elevators go to the resident floors.

Resident Floors: Two to Eleven

Floors two to eleven (the top floor) of the Terraces of Baycrest share the same general layout. There is an open lobby concept, and apartments line the perimeter of each floor. When you step out of the elevators, there is a small sitting area with three chairs and a table, as well as a column with a clock and a large sign indicating which floor it is (figure 3.10).



Figure 3.10. Lobby/ sitting area near the 6th Floor elevators.

Weekly events are posted near the elevators: “Gentle exercise. Thursday mornings. 8:30. 6th Floor,” as well as individual floor contact lists which include the names of the floor representatives for the Residents’ Council, the Food Committee, the Welcoming Committee, the meal delivery volunteers (to bring boxed meals to floor neighbours who are sick and unable to eat in the Dining Room), as well as the contact information for the

floor social worker and therapeutic recreationist. The open lobby is just past the elevators. There are four comfortable chairs, a loveseat, and a coffee table. Residents use the lobbies for card or mah-jongg games, as well as for monthly floor meetings and holiday parties (figure 3.11).



Figure 3.11. Mr. Leibach lights the Hanukah menorah at the 9th Floor Hanukah party.

Each floor is decorated with framed paintings or prints. The artwork ranges from reproductions of well-known impressionist artists (Renoir, Monet), to Jewish “Holy land” scenes (charcoal print titled “Damascus Gate, Jerusalem”), to original work by local artists, including former and current residents. The apartment floors are designed to be open, usable spaces, as opposed to the narrow hallways found in many apartment buildings. Apartment doors are labeled with residents’ names and apartment numbers. Each floor has a laundry and trash disposal room, as well as a public washroom. The atmosphere is pleasant and comfortable. Colours are muted blues, pinks, greys.

Typical Apartments

There are two basic apartment types: the one-bedroom (figure 3.12) and the bachelor (figure 3.13). The former has a “with balcony” variation, the latter has a “corner” variation.



Figure 3.12. Baycrest floor plan for typical one-bedroom apartment.

The standard one-bedroom apartment (not with balcony) is five hundred and seventy-four square feet. As you walk in, there is a small entryway, with a closet. Straight ahead is the living room/dining room area, and the full kitchen is slightly behind. Typically, residents have a couch, coffee table, and television set in the living room, and a small table and a couple of chairs just outside the kitchen. The door to the bedroom opens from the left wall of the living room. The bedroom has two closets, and an en suite bathroom.



Figure 3.13. Baycrest floor plan for typical bachelor apartment.

The considerably smaller bachelor apartment is four hundred and forty-four square feet. When you walk in, there is a closet on the right, and the full kitchen is to your left. Straight ahead is the living room/dining area. Many residents have a small table and chairs just past the kitchen entrance, and a coffee table and a couch against the wall of the living room. The bedroom is to the left, and while there are no walls to separate the bedroom from the living room, typically residents use a divider – often a hutch or a bookcase – to create a physical division between the rooms. The bedroom area has an en

suite bathroom to the left. Corner bachelors are smaller in size, and due to their awkward shape, there is no room for a divider so these apartments have more of a dorm-room feel.

Ruth Hanff's one-bedroom apartment: #805

Ruth Hanff moved into the Terraces in March 2000. At the time, there were three available one-bedroom apartments, "exactly the same," she says. "On the fifth [floor], on the eighth, and on the ninth floor. I looked at the three – but on the eighth floor, the vibrations were right. I can't explain why" (6 May 2004).⁷ Previously Ruth had lived in a condominium just north of Baycrest, where she moved shortly after her husband had died. "Before I moved in here I could go and do and make whatever I wanted and then all of a sudden I realized I can't – I shouldn't – do it by myself, so then it was time to come here." The decision was hers alone; in fact, her adult children did not think she was ready to move to the Terraces, but Ruth prevailed. "It's the best thing I did," she says. Before moving in Ruth asked for a floor plan. She loved her furniture, and wanted to set up her Terraces apartment to look as close as possible to the condominium she was leaving. Creatively, Ruth cut up paper plates and scrap pieces of cardboard to represent her furniture pieces and stuck them on the floor plan to ensure that there would be room for her belongings. She recalls, "When I moved in it was only a side table that didn't fit. There were no surprises." Ruth is proud of her foresight and still has the folded up plans to prove it. Design is very important to Ruth; as I previously pointed out, she spent several thousand dollars to install new off-white carpeting to match with her chic

⁷ All subsequent quotations by Ruth in this section are from this interview.

furniture, instead of moving in with the grey wall-to-wall carpeting provided by Baycrest. Her apartment is so lovely that it is often shown to potential residents when they take a tour of the building. Like every one-bedroom apartment in the Terraces, as you walk in, there is a small hallway with a closet on the left, and on the other side of the right wall is the small kitchen (see figures 3.14 and 3.15). Ruth has colourful magnets on her white fridge, including various garden bugs. A plastic chicken holds up a handwritten grocery list, and a personalized “Ruth” artist’s paint palette holds up the Baycrest Shuttle Bus Schedule. Centered on her freezer door is a large magnetic plaque that says, “Ruth’s Kitchen.” Although she does not cook very much any more, having her own kitchen – regardless of how often she uses it – is an important symbol of her independence. When she decided she no longer wanted to live on her own at the condominium, her children suggested she move in with them, but Ruth did not even consider the offer. Why not? “Two women in the kitchen!” she exclaimed. “An old one and a young one. And you know, I have my own ideas. That wouldn’t be really my home,” she insists. For Ruth, kitchen, home and independence are explicitly linked.



Figure 3.14. Ruth Hanff's apartment #805. Entrance, closet on right; kitchen and eating area on left. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.



Figure 3.15. Ruth's kitchen, like all Terraces kitchens, includes a full-sized fridge and stove, but little counter space. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Ruth's kitchen area looks much like every other apartment kitchen in the building. It is somewhat cluttered, but used to prepare light meals: toast, coffee and tea, sandwiches, eggs. Ruth also is an occasional baker, and a blueberry cake, covered in plastic wrap, sits on top of the refrigerator. The cupboards have a stained wood finish, the counter tops are neutral laminate; floors are light-coloured vinyl tile. There is an electric kettle and a microwave on the counter, as well as recently cleaned dishes next to the sink. The "working kitchen" opens into the living room/dining room area. Here the floor material changes from kitchen tile to carpeting. A small table with three chairs are just outside the kitchen (see figure 3.16) – nearly every apartment I visited had a similar set-up. The table and chairs are stock furniture provided by Baycrest, the only items in the apartment that Ruth did not bring with her. The table is covered with a white hemstitch tablecloth; the chairs have a wooden frame, and are upholstered with blue leather (or faux-leather). On the table, Ruth regularly keeps her prescription medications and a vase with cloth flowers. She has a *National Post* newspaper subscription, and often reads the paper at the table with her morning cup of coffee and a slice of toast. On the wall above the table is a framed photograph of her three adult sons and their wives, as well as a framed prayer, written in simple calligraphy, black on white paper. It says: "God grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference." Two other inspirational messages are taped directly on the wall. A door just past the table leads into Ruth's bedroom.



Figure 3.16. Kitchen table and chairs. Door opens into Ruth's bedroom. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.



Figure 3.17. Ruth's bedroom. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Like the rest of the apartment, a large window provides ample sunlight. The bedroom has a neatly made twin-sized bed, and a wooden bookcase with books that range from the Bible and various commentaries, to *The Jews of Germany*, to an older hardcover edition of Grimm's *Fairy Tales* (see figure 3.17). "I had to give up many books," Ruth recalls back to when she moved in. "Mostly I kept the Jewish books. I don't have many books left," she says. When Ruth moved in she donated several boxes of books to the small Baycrest library. Although she still has access to many of her books, she misses their presence in her private home. Still, her large bookcase reveals her fondness for books, even if every shelf is not filled. Despite her disappointment that she was not able to keep her collection, she emphasizes that in terms of material items, keeping her furniture was her biggest priority to retain her sense of home, along with art, family photographs and plants. The bedroom, however, does not seem particularly homey; in fact, it is quite sparse. There are two framed prints above her bed: figure drawings in shades of grey and pink of a woman reclining. (They are beautiful and somewhat racy; I imagine that's why they are hanging in the privacy of her bedroom as opposed to in the living room.) On the other side of her bed is a night table with a lamp and a telephone. A chair by the bed has two pink cardigans draped over the back. There are two humidifiers on either side of the bed, as well as two closets. Off to the right is the en suite bathroom.

Ruth's living room has a warm, elegant feel (see figure 3.18). While the bedroom seems more functional, the living room, true to its name, is comfortable and "lived-in." It is fitting then, to see the framed silver *chai* (Hebrew word for "living") on the small wall

between the kitchen and living room (see figure 3.19). Ruth made it herself when she learned how to silversmith at the age of sixty-seven.



Figure 3.18. Ruth in her living room. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.



Figure 3.19. Silver “chai” made by Ruth. Refer back to figs. 3.14 and 3.15 (page 75) to see it in the context of her apartment. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

There are plenty of plants and framed photographs, as well as floor lamps. A beautiful round glass and wood coffee table is the centerpiece of the room, surrounded by Ruth's furniture: a modern-looking round-backed chair with a curved wooden frame, upholstered in beige, ivory, light blue and pink striped fabric, and a matching couch. Several wooden furniture pieces: a large storage cabinet with shelves, a cabinet writing desk, and small table frame the room, along with family photographs and various sculptures and *objets d'art* – a bronze dancer, small Inuit carvings, an abstract crystal bowl, white and gold china vases and candy dishes. On the wall near the chair is a painting of a young girl in a dress collecting fruit. Ruth also has several stuffed animals placed around the apartment, gifts she has received over the years from her grandchildren. Looking at the photographs around the apartment, you might think Ruth's life began in middle age with her sons already grown up: three adult brothers (her sons) and their wives smile at a dinner table; Ruth standing next to a grandson on his Bar Mitzvah day; proud Siegfried (Ruth's late husband) with his arm around his beautiful granddaughter on her wedding day. The photographs show glimpses of their lives in Chile and in Canada, but their earlier lives in Europe remain unseen. I wondered if they were lost or left behind, but these older photographs from Ruth's childhood – Siegfried's as well – are stored away in photo albums in Ruth's bedroom. Siegfried carefully arranged the albums, says Ruth. In his later years, she recalls, it became very important for him to preserve all family photographs. Each picture was carefully documented with captions to the best of his memory. The album also contains maps to indicate the various places they lived. Ruth would like her children to have the albums one day.

Like many Jewish homes, religious objects are on display as well. The first, often unnoticed, but attached to every apartment door at the Terraces, is a *mezuzah* (scroll affixed to the exterior doorposts of many Jewish homes). The *mezuzah* is the first indication that you are entering a Jewish home. Inside the apartment, Ruth keeps her Sabbath candlesticks behind the glass doors of her large cabinet (see figure 3.20). Next to the candlesticks, she also has a *havdalah* spice container.



Figure 3.20. Ruth keeps her Sabbath candlesticks and her *havdalah* spice container behind the glass doors in the centre of this cabinet. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Havdalah marks the end of Sabbath on Saturday evening. Those who observe it may light a special braided candle to symbolize hope for a bright, joyful week ahead, while the spice holder contains sweet smelling spices (often cloves and cinnamon) to signify the hope for a fragrant week (Robinson 2000: 576). Each week, Ruth smells the sweet spices, and occasionally lights the braided candle. On Friday nights, she kindles the Sabbath

candles in her apartment, “For me alone,” she emphasizes. “At the condo I used to invite [people over for Friday night Sabbath meal], she explains. “I can’t do it here in my room. Not that I don’t want [to now], very often I think about it.... I just don’t have the strength anymore,” she says sadly.

Rebecca Hoch’s bachelor apartment, #1008



Figure 3.21. Welcome sign to Rebecca’s Hoch’s apartment. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

When you walk into Rebecca Hoch’s bachelor apartment, you are greeted with a cheerful hand-made sign taped on the closet door that says, “Welcome to Rebecca’s Home” in orange and blue bubble letters (see figure 3.21). Her great-niece made it for her, and Ruth

loves it because it makes people smile when they come to visit. Whereas Ruth's apartment is chic and sophisticated, Rebecca's is sweet and somewhat cluttered.

On your left is Rebecca's kitchen (see figure 3.22). Like Ruth's, her refrigerator is decorated with colourful magnets holding up notices for doctor appointments, as well as the Shuttle Bus Schedule. A microwave and plug-in kettle take up most of the counter space. To the left of the sink there is a dish rack, soap, and a red and black tartan dishtowel – a tribute to Rebecca's Scottish roots. Above the cupboards, making a border around the three walls of the kitchen, are brightly-coloured images – carefully torn from a wall calendar – of various tables set for traditional British “high tea”:



Figure 3.22. Rebecca's kitchen. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

teacups and teapots, fruit, dainty sandwiches, scones and flowers. Open shelving in Rebecca's kitchen display various “*tchotchkes*” (knickknacks) from cookie jars to

decorative plates. On the wall just outside the kitchen, there are two racks for her souvenir spoon collection (see figure 3.23). The spoons were brought back from Rebecca's own travel adventures: Israel, England, France, to name a few, as well as from the journeys of friends and family. Rebecca says her loved ones all know about her collection and are happy to add to it. "Each spoon has a story," she has told me on numerous occasions.



Figure 3.23. Rebecca's souvenir spoon collection. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Earlier I wrote that Rebecca calls her apartment "a museum." Walking through, one can understand why. Sometimes this metaphor is applied to homes (or certain rooms in homes) that seem to exist primarily for show, rather than used for everyday life. In

Calvert (Newfoundland) houses, remarks Gerald Pocius, "The front room is used as a kind of indigenous folk museum where everything that is special, unique, or fancy is kept on permanent exhibition, and every so often opened for viewing to a select public" (138). This is not the case here, partly because Rebecca's "front room" is essentially her entire apartment, so it is always "open." Rebecca calls her home a museum because she carefully created her environment so that she would be surrounded by objects that have had – and continue to have – meaning in her life. Rebecca, like the elderly individuals described by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, fills her home with "objects of memory" (1989). Using the metaphor of home as a museum, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes how these individuals "come to think of themselves as 'curators' of their own lives" (1989: 332). Rebecca's objects run the gamut: from photographs and family heirlooms, to paintings, collectables, and souvenirs. "I love being surrounded by my souvenirs," she says. "They remind me of my home in Scotland, and all the people I've known all my life" (7 May 2004). Rebecca not only tells the stories behind her objects, but also she uses the objects to trigger her own life and family narratives. On the relationship between family photograph albums and family narratives, folklorist Pauline Greenhill remarks: "The collection is a way in which individual family members can express themselves; in taking the photographs, arranging and displaying them, and discussing them" (1981: 2-3). While Ruth Hanff brought out photograph albums to help recreate life stories, in Rebecca's apartment, a wall of photographs gives a visual history of her life (see figures 3.24 and 3.25). Most of the photographs are framed, while others are taped directly on the wall. Looking at Rebecca's family history, David Lowenthal's book title comes to mind:

The Past is a Foreign Country (1985) – specifically “a little village in Kiev called Stavisht,” says Rebecca (18 February 2004). Her paternal grandfather, Joseph Rubin, looks like a typical Eastern European rabbi: long white beard, *yarmulke* (skullcap) and *tallis* (prayer shawl). He sits at a table, turning the pages of a book with one hand, while thoughtfully resting his head in the other. Rebecca points to the pictures as she begins her family history. “My father, *olav ha'shalom* [may he rest in peace] was one of five brothers,” she says. “I have a picture of the five brothers here,” she says, pointing towards the wall. The photographs span a century, four generations, and many countries, including Russia, Scotland, England, Israel and Canada. The most recent pictures include her grandson on his travel adventures, as well as a photograph of Rebecca and her two surviving sisters. They are all in their nineties and speak to each other at least once a week. The pictures hang above Rebecca’s kitchen table (directly outside the kitchen) and cover the entire wall until it ends (where Rebecca’s bedroom begins). There are more photographs, mostly unframed, on the small bookcase next to the kitchen table (seen in figs. 3.24 and 3.25), as well as various small items: a family of wooden ducks, a small stuffed dog, a vase with red plastic flowers, a small clock, a snow globe, a small Canadian flag, a postcard from Glasgow, and two little “Scottie” dog ceramic salt and pepper shakers. A television set on a small table stands next to the bookcase on a ninety-degree angle, and a TV tray (stacked with mail) has its place in front of the television. The arrangement of these items creates the effect of a separate space within the bachelor apartment (see figure 3.26).



Figure 3.24. Rebecca's wall of photographs. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.



Figure 3.25. A closer look at the wall of photographs, as well as the objects displayed on the small bookcase. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.



Figure 3.26. Kitchen table, bookcase, television set and TV tray. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Rebecca spends a lot of time at the kitchen table; not only does she eat here, but also she reads, does crossword puzzles, talks on the phone, and watches television. Although Rebecca has a couch set up in the living room, she says it is used primarily as a pull-out bed when her sons (who live in England and Israel) come to visit. Social visits with friends and relatives take place at the kitchen table with cup of tea and some biscuits.

Paintings and a framed black and white photograph hang in Rebecca's living room, all depicting still life and landscape scenes: building tops in Jerusalem; cool blue mountains; a vase overflowing with flowers, and a framed black and white photograph of a horse pulling a man and a cart by a lake. The photograph is not old, but it is reminiscent of an earlier time.



Figure 3.27. Paintings, photographs and plates in Rebecca's living room. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

A small desk is pushed against the wall, more framed family photographs take up nearly every inch of free space. On the back wall, Rebecca has arranged her collection of various decorative plates. Tucked in the corner is a small couch, with a leaf print design, covered with stuffed animals and pillows (see figure 3.27). By the window, there is a rocking chair where Rebecca sits from time to time. There are small tables on either side, one with a lamp, another with a display of family heirlooms, including two sets of Sabbath candlesticks and several *kiddush* cups (used for ceremonial wine). Another table has a display of tiny porcelain tea sets, along with Rebecca's brass Sabbath candlesticks, which she continues to use. Unlike Ruth Hanff's living room area, where the couches and coffee table are the highlight of the room, while photographs and other objects seem to be

of secondary importance, in Rebecca's apartment, the opposite is true: furniture takes second stage to her various displays of meaningful objects.

A shelving unit divides the living room from the bedroom (figure 3.28).



Figure 3.28. The shelving unit (L) divides the living room from the bedroom.



Figure 3.29. Rebecca's bedroom. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth. The set-up of the room, including the pole by the bed reflects that Rebecca now [in 2009] uses a wheelchair.

On the other side of the partition, the bedroom is equally full of trinkets and photographs (figures 3.29 and 3.30). The entrance to the bathroom is from the bedroom.



Figure 3.30. Rebecca's dressing table and her collage of family photographs above it. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Every Friday, Rebecca sets her kitchen table for the Sabbath (figure 3.31). As she explains, “I take my two candlesticks – brass candlesticks – and I bring them into the kitchen and I clean them and then I have a tray which I put them on. I bring the tray out and put the clean candlesticks on the table and away from the wall – because I often light them and leave them and go downstairs for supper. So I make sure they’re quite safe” (7 May 2004). Although candles will be lit downstairs in the main dining room for all the residents, Rebecca and many others continue to light their own candles at home.



Figure 3.31. Rebecca's Sabbath table. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Rebecca was careful to mention that she lights the candles away from the wall, safely, because Baycrest staff discourage residents from lighting (and especially leaving) candles in individual apartments as they pose a fire hazard. Nevertheless, many female residents could not imagine a Friday without lighting their own candles.⁸ Each week, Rebecca goes through the Sabbath ritual of lighting the candles, making a blessing over a cup of grape juice: "I can't drink wine now," she explains, as well as saying a prayer over the bread. If she does not have *challah* (Sabbath egg bread) she uses whatever she has in her kitchen. "It might be two rolls or two loaves.... two crackers or two matzos... I cover them with a special cloth, then I light the candles and make the *brocha* [blessing]" (7 May 2004). As Rebecca says the prayers, she puts a small lace cloth over her head. "And then I take the

⁸ While synagogues were traditionally considered to be male spaces, women were responsible for upholding religious law at home, namely maintaining dietary laws and preparing the home for Sabbath (Umansky 1992:2).

cloth off my head and it's Shabbos and I love it. That's my Shabbos," she says with a smile.

Ruth Hanff and Rebecca Hoch – along with every resident at the Terraces – create home by individualizing their private apartments with various objects. For Ruth, furniture is the focal point of her space, through which she creates (and re-creates) her home at Terraces. For Rebecca on the other hand, her sense of “home” is in the small objects and photographs that she displays throughout the apartment, while furniture and design are secondary. If we return to the metaphor of home as a museum, we see not only how Rebecca is a “curator” of her life, but that she is a tour guide as well. Surrounding herself with “memory objects,” she constantly recalls and shares life narratives with friends and visitors. Although Ruth also displays photographs and objects, because she rarely refers to them, they take on a more decorative function. Despite obvious differences regarding how they create and personalize home through material objects, an added layer is how both women display and perform their *Jewish* homes – firstly through Jewish material culture on display, and secondly by performing Jewish rituals, such as lighting Sabbath candles or smelling the *havdallah* spices. In this way, the creation and maintenance of a Jewish home – through ritual, objects and prayer – are equally meaningful to residents as the material objects which they use to personalize their living spaces.

In examining the spatial units, as well as the material culture of the Terraces residents, we begin to uncover how insiders use and construct their domestic spatial worlds. While it is fairly straightforward to describe physical spaces and material objects, symbolic spaces present new complexities. The next chapter introduces some of the

artificial dichotomies that govern how the residents understand and manage their various homespaces.

Chapter Four: Dichotomies of home

The Terraces consists of a complex of public and private spaces. Tipping the private end of the scale are the individual apartments, while the most public places are the areas shared by both Wagman members (“outside” community members who use the Wagman Centre) and Terraces residents. While not absolutes, the private spaces (in varying degrees) include: individual apartments, floor lobbies, Terraces Lobby, and the mailbox area on the ground floor; whereas the public spaces include: the Wagman Lobby, Assembly and Dining Rooms, Fireside Lounge, Orthodox Synagogue, Reform congregation meeting space, Wagman “marketplace,” and Wagman activity rooms. In discussing the nature of these spaces, the question becomes not if they are private or public; but rather, *how* they are private or public. Inextricably, public and private worlds at the Terraces are linked, multi-layered, and best understood through Henry Glassie’s idea of a sliding scale (Glassie 1975: 25).

Public and private space is central to the construction of the Terraces as both home and institution. Aspects of home are revealed through the private spaces, whereas the public spaces underscore the institutional aspects of the building. While on the one hand, the Terraces is partly home and partly an institution; on the other hand, it is not quite either of these. For example, the *Terraces of Baycrest Residents’ Bill of Rights* (Baycrest 2009) initiated and prepared by the Terraces residents, highlights the blurring of public-private that residents deal with on a daily basis. While several “rights” assure privacy and confidentiality – residents have the right to personal relationships,

confidential mail and banking, and private counseling – “responsibilities” more often underscore the institutional nature of the facility. Residents agree to “use with care the Terraces equipment, linen, furnishings, just as if they were one’s own,” to notify staff if leaving overnight, to keep one’s apartment “in a state of reasonable cleanliness” and to “participate in as many Terraces and Wagman Centre activities.” Neither home nor institution, the Terraces becomes a new place altogether, what Marc Augé would call a “non-place” (1995) where spaces can be best understood using Erving Goffman’s framework of front and back regions. “A region may be defined as any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception,” explains Goffman (1959: 106). These barriers may be physical, visual and aural, as well as determined by who may or may not be present at any given time. In “front regions,” we behave as our ideal selves to outsiders (Goffman: 111); whereas in “back regions” the opposite is true: “the impression fostered by the [front region] performance is knowingly contradicted” (ibid.: 112).

In its simplest form, public spaces at the Terraces are “front regions,” whereas the private spaces are “back regions,” however, because the Terraces serves many functions – home, institution, community centre, and sacred space – the spatial worlds of the building represent a cluster of opposing social forces. Building on Goffman’s model, along with various works on how we relate to our spatial worlds (Ardener 1993; Tuan 1977; Pocius 2000; Cieraad 1999), complexities emerge. The spaces of the Terraces and the behavior of those who occupy the building at any given time are shaped by whether or not they are in front or back regions, however Goffman warns that back and front regions are not fixed. He writes: “while there is a tendency for a region to become

identified as the front region or back region of a performance with which it is regularly associated, still there are many regions which function at one time and in one sense as a front region and at another time and in another sense as a back region" (1959: 126).

Gerald Pocius suggests our spatial world is socially constructed with "simple categories" whereby "the domestic interior is the scene for the private acts of the individual, [while] exterior domains are essentially public" (227). On second glance however, "boundaries are not that clear" – the interior and exterior spaces are "integrally linked" (ibid.). Likewise, the public and private spaces of the Terraces also are linked. But while public space may be considered the "conceptual counterpart" to domestic space (Cieraad 1999: 3), at the Terraces, public and domestic spaces blur under one roof. Like Dolores Hayden's discussion of urban, ethnic neighbourhoods, "A world of shared meanings builds up, couched in the language of small semiprivate and semipublic territories between the dwelling and the street that support certain kinds of typical public behavior" (Hayden 1995:35). At the Terraces, the "typical public behavior" is determined by various codes and understandings of these "semiprivate" and "semipublic" spaces. As Pocius suggests, "We can regard the dwelling as a cluster of ordered interior spaces: rooms with specific functions filled with socially appropriate objects and decorations. The entire visual environment becomes a code that is concerned with particular types of behavior" (Pocius: 228). While room furnishings and decorations are one way to indicate how to behave in particular spaces; a second layer is understood not through objects, but by insider knowledge of the space in question.

Individuals and groups bring their own framework to the spatial worlds of the Terraces. A visitor may understand the lobby as a place to walk through to get to a particular destination, whereas residents perceive the same space differently, through various layers: it is a place to walk through, but it is also a public living room, a “town square,” a place to rest, and a gathering place. In other words, spaces are constructed by how we frame them, based on our experiences (Goffman 1974). In her essay about “context,” Mary Hufford explains:

The basic metaphor [of framing] is that of a picture on a wall. The frame around the picture distinguishes the picture from its surroundings, invoking a different set of interpretive rules for what is inside the frame. Deploying this metaphor, analysts have looked at how expressive forms are first set apart from and then related to the flow of ordinary events. (2003: 147)

Extending the metaphor, interpretive rules do not only apply to what is in the frame, but also depend on individual perceptions of the contents of the frame since each individual or group brings a different set of interpretive rules to various spaces. Henry Glassie calls this “conceptual” or “cultural” context, whereby “the object exists within the sets of association that constitute the minds of its creators and users” (2000: 60). Because all space outside individual apartments at the Terraces is essentially public, residents rely on shared interpretative frames or cultural context to take ownership of their surroundings by turning front regions into back regions.

Extending home in back spaces

The first floor apartments are located behind the lobby, hidden from view. Although the apartment units are the most private spaces in the building, they do not always meet the residents' spatial needs, especially if they want to socialize. This section describes how one resident extends her homespace into nearby public space; thus claiming the public space as her own.

Bertha "Bert" Davis lives in 111 – a corner apartment (figure 4.1). She has been here for five years, and could not be happier: "I got everything handy," she says. "I can do what I want. If I want to lay down, my bed's right there" (3 May 2004).⁹



Figure 4.1. Bert Davis in her tiny kitchen.

While Bert is content with her living space, corner apartments are the least desirable units at the Terraces, not only because they are small, but also because they are awkwardly shaped. Bert however, liked the apartment at first sight. The day is clear in her mind, partly because she had to move in under difficult circumstances. For twenty-two years

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations by Bert Davis in this section are from our interview conducted on 3 May 2004.

previously, after her husband died, Bert had been living with her adult daughter and her family. She was like a second mother to her grandchildren, "I did all the cooking," she recalls; and she had a close relationship with her daughter and son-in-law. But in 1999 Bert's daughter became fatally ill. Losing her daughter "hurt pretty good." Although the family encouraged her to stay, it was too difficult for Bert, and she knew it was time to move out on her own.

At first she and her granddaughter looked at a senior group home (now defunct) that was affiliated with Baycrest. Bert took one look at the tiny room with the shared bathroom facilities and said, "If you don't mind, this is not for me." The social worker understood, and suggested coming over to the Terraces. There was only one apartment available at the time: a small, corner apartment, one-eleven. Bert recalls saying, "Lemme see that one-eleven." When Bert saw it she said, "You know what, I like it. I like the window. I like the brightness, I like it." And the social worker said, "Well, if you like it, it's yours. You can move in." Bert says she has never looked back. "I was very happy," she says. "And I'm still very happy." Even though she's been offered to move into larger apartments when they have become available, she just shrugs, "I really couldn't look for anything better because it's bright, it's clean, it's lovely."

Bert's apartment opens into a tiny horizontal hallway. It is so small that two people cannot comfortably stand there. The little hallway opens into her bathroom. Like all apartments at the Terraces, Bert's bathroom has a sliding door, which is almost always open. About three steps to the right past the bathroom is the end of the little "hallway" and there you see the rest of Bert's private domestic world. Corner apartments are the

most intimate and also a bit disconcerting, because there is no privacy – all is exposed. Even though there are no walls, regular bachelor apartments usually have a shelving unit (provided by Baycrest) that divides the main room from the bedroom. The corner bachelor apartments however, are too small, and the shape too peculiar for a divider, so there are no “private” areas. In this way, it is a bachelor apartment that could pass for a dorm room – except it has a tiny kitchen. Bert’s bed is in the corner with a pink comforter. Whenever I visited I always sat on the bed, and Bert sat in her chair next to the bed. Next to Bert was a small table with a placemat on top, made by school kids from an intergenerational program she once participated in. Bert eats here, as well as crochets, watches TV and sometimes dozes. On the wall behind Bert’s chair is a poster-sized photograph of her younger self. Black and white. She must have been in her mid- to late-twenties, perhaps even younger. When older Bert sits in the chair, younger Bert smiles behind her. Two faces, the same, years and experiences apart (figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2. Bert sits in her favourite chair, her younger self behind her.

Bert does not look her ninety-two years. Her hair is short, brownish-red. She is large-framed and mobile with her walker. She has a great voice, deep and expressive and peppered with Yiddish, sarcasm, and the occasional curse word. Her skin is a bit saggy, but not wrinkly. She wears make-up: blush, maybe some foundation, and lipstick. "I never go out without my lipstick," she says. Bert is very down-to-earth. She wears comfortable clothes: a blue cardigan sweater over a pink blouse, her gold "B" necklace, polyester slacks and orthopedic shoes.

Bert's creation of home reflects her family, her past and her life today. When she moved to the Terraces she had to make conscious decisions of what to bring and what to leave behind. Photographs of children and grandchildren celebrating bar mitzvahs and weddings decorate the walls next to newspaper clippings and appointment notices. Some photos and clippings are framed, others, yellowing, are taped directly on the wall or tacked onto a bulletin board. One article praises the business accomplishments of a grandson, another is about a women's discussion group at the Terraces that Bert had been an original member of; another is about seniors who learned to swim at this stage in their lives – a picture of Bert in a swimsuit illustrates the article – next to it is a swim certificate and a badge. There is a little pink and white couch against the wall, covered with stuffed animals Bert has acquired since moving into the Terraces. It started with one, a gift from a grandchild "to keep me company," Bert explains. The collection grew as friends and family brought more "friends" whenever they came to visit. Like Rebecca Hoch's apartment, Bert's domestic material world is filled with "objects of memory" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989) – which trigger life review. Personal and family

photographs, together with the articles, objects and awards that display her own significant accomplishments since moving into the Terraces. What struck me most is how the objects on display integrated the past with her contemporary life, shattering any assumptions, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, “that the elderly... are more connected to the past than the present (1987:12). In this way, the objects in Bert’s apartment help construct her life story – up to and including the present-day.

Bert loves her cozy space and the convenience of living on the first floor. And although she is constantly “on the go”: learning to swim; participating in discussion groups; flower-pressing for her signature cards and bookmarks; organizing fundraisers for the Residents’ Council; and going out for lunch with different family members several times a week, Bert also likes to catch-up with friends and relax. The only problem was there was not a comfortable space to do this. Her apartment was too small, and unlike the upper floor lobbies, the first-floor did not have a lobby specially for the floor residents. So if Bert wanted a change of scene from her apartment, her options were limited. Not wanting to venture too far beyond her apartment, she would simply sit on a chair outside her door. Some days she sat alone, other days she would invite her neighbour Sara to join her; together they would exchange news and ideas in this space that is less private than their apartments, but also less public than the Wagman Lobby around the corner. In her study of space in urban Greece, Renée Hirschon describes the afternoon custom of women who bring their kitchen chairs outside the house to socialize and “take the air” (1993: 83). By bringing a domestic object – the kitchen chair – outside, suggests Hirschon, “the house enters the street” (ibid.). Similarly, when Bert socializes

outside the apartment, she extends her home into the “street” – but unlike the Greek women of Hirschon’s study, Bert’s chair – and everyone else’s for that matter – is always “outside,” as every apartment at the Terraces has a chair outside the door. Here, it is not the material object that indicates a spatial shift from inside to outside, but rather, there is a functional shift of how the chair is used. When Bert and Sara socialized on the chairs outside their apartments it was an unusual sight. Residents do not typically sit on those chairs; rather, the chairs might be a resting spot for shopping bags while someone unlocks the door. Even on the upper floors, I have never seen residents sitting on the chairs outside their apartments simply to socialize, though of course, the upper floors have open lobbies with tables, couches and chairs.

Because the first floor combines residential and office space, the apartments are tucked away out of sight. The residential layout is more like a traditional apartment building: with narrow hallways that don’t lend themselves to a social atmosphere – unlike the upper floors where mah-jongg and card games take place daily. The most exciting thing a first-floor resident might observe would be a neighbour entering or leaving her apartment, or a visitor on his way in or out. Occasionally, these mundane actions provide elements of intrigue: I once overheard two residents gossiping during a floor meeting. Said Sophie: “There’s a man in the building who goes out every Saturday night with four ladies!” “Four ladies?” Ann responded, incredulous. Sophie just nodded and smiled. “I’m not naming any names,” she said. Juicy tidbits, however, are rare.

Despite the lack of action, Bert preferred to socialize on the chairs outside her apartment – just outside her door, essentially extending her private space; Bert created a

makeshift living room. While Bert and Sara sat side by side and exchanged news, it made for a tight squeeze when other residents tried to pass by with their walkers. "Somebody snitched" Bert recalls, "they said that we were sitting in the hall and we're blocking, and people can't go by and all that." Bert cannot suppress her grin as she recalls what happened next:

So Mrs. Smyth [Terraces Director, Sheila Smyth] comes down, and she says to me, "Mrs. Davis, I hear you're blocking the hall." I says, "If you tell me I'm blocking the hall by sitting here, I'd like to know who told you that. What do they got to complain? Look at upstairs: you got a lobby this side, and one on the other side. They can sit where they want, and they can walk." I says, "It's so comfortable, why can't we have a little lobby? After all, you don't feel like sitting in your room all day."

Outspoken and direct, Bert is not afraid to speak her mind. She wholeheartedly admits she was blocking the hall, but instead of apologizing she takes the opportunity to tell the Director that the first floor residents need a floor lobby. The original design of the first floor put the residents at a disadvantage. Heather Lisner-Kerbel, the social worker for the first floor suggests, "it is not a united floor" (25 May 2004). Whereas the upper floor residents have holiday parties or floor meetings in their lobbies, the first floor residents do not have the same layout, and therefore, neighbourly relationships do not have a chance to develop in the same way. Although the first floor residents do not have their own lobby, they do have a lounge; though it is an enclosed space, sequestered away, and used primarily for floor meetings. Nevertheless, I asked Bert if she ever considered using it as a place to socialize. "I'm not comfortable there," she says, and goes on to explain that a group of Hungarian residents – from various floors – regularly use it as a meeting space. "A lot of those people... I have nothing with them. They don't understand me, I

don't understand them," she adds, unselfconsciously. When Paula David interviewed twenty Hungarian residents for her study on multicultural issues at the Terraces, she learned that they:

often felt socially excluded by the others, but also stated that their interests were different.... They conceded that language barriers exacerbated the feeling of exclusion.... They felt that the "Polish-Russian" Jews did not understand their rich cultural heritage as Hungarian Jews, and out of this ignorance were painfully intolerant. (2000: 11)

Often viewed as outsiders, language is indeed a barrier for the Hungarian residents, many of whom speak only limited English. These tensions however, are not one-sided. One social worker recalls early in her career, peeking into the lounge to discover a lively group of women laughing and talking in Hungarian. When they looked up and saw her, she smiled and said hello. Silence. "Do you speak Hungarian?" someone asked. "No," said the social worker. "Then get out of here," was the response. Flabbergasted, she shut the door and never returned. The creation of a back region for the Hungarians reveals their need to carve out a space of their own; just as Bert did. Nevertheless, the repercussions of claiming public space as "private" are that even more people could potentially be displaced.

Since Bert did not feel the first-floor lounge was available to her, she created her own space to socialize in. Likewise, upper-floor residents use the floor lobbies for more private, that is, planned, social gatherings, as opposed to the more random socialization that takes place in the Wagman Lobby. I also asked Bert about whether she considered spending time in the Wagman Lobby, but she quickly dismissed my suggestion. The

Wagman Lobby is lacking in intimacy. It is more like a collective living room for the entire building; whereas a floor lobby is both a living room for each individual floor, as well as a living room “extension” for the private apartments. Edna Lester is a resident of the 8th floor and an avid mah-jongg player. Each week, she and four friends take turns hosting the game. When it is her turn to host, they meet and play in the 8th floor lobby (figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3. Mah-jongg game with Edna Lester (far right) and friends.

Edna prepares snacks, tea and coffee in her apartment, but since it is a small space, she essentially does not have a choice but to extend her apartment into the lobby. She explains that her apartment is too small to host “the girls,” and that the floor lobby is much more comfortable. Another resident, Edith Kursbatt, explains that mostly people visit in lobbies or meeting rooms, adding, “there’s not too much of what I call visiting at home.” Even so, privately organized meetings such as card games or visits in “public”

spaces – are nevertheless understood as “private.” On the other hand, when residents play cards or visit in the Wagman Lobby, it is understood that anyone may join in. In this way, Bert explained her predicament to Sheila Smyth. As Bert recalls:

Sheila said: “You know, you’re right. You’re perfectly right. And I agree with you a hundred percent. And I’m going to see to it that you get a lobby here.” So I figured she’d make something, you know across the elevator? She had broadloom put on. And she had tables there. You see how it’s fixed up. And she put that pink chair by the wall. And she says, “Mrs. Davis, this is your lobby.” I says, “Well I really appreciate it, and thank you very much.” And I did make a lot of use out of it, because I’d sit there with Sara. And instead of sitting with Sara by the door, I’d sit with Sara there. It was very nice. So whoever’d come in, I’d say, “You can sit in my lobby. You waiting for the elevator? Sit in my lobby and wait.” And that’s what they call it: Bert’s Lobby. (23 May 2004)

When Bert and others extend their home beyond the apartment door, they are claiming ownership of public space. The meaning of these various spaces shifts, depending on how individuals use them at different times: they may be “stoops,” “front porches,” or extended living rooms. For the collective Terraces, these same public spaces take on other meanings as well. At specific times, the Terraces Lobby, though mostly considered to be a public space, shifts in meaning to become a private space, or back region. For example, many residents visit the Health Centre every morning to receive their medication for the day. Located just past the elevators, it is not uncommon to see residents – from all floors – walking towards the Health Centre in their housecoats and slippers, as if they are going to the medicine cabinet in their private apartments. Goffman points out a similar phenomenon in some Parisian neighbourhoods early in the morning. He explains, “Women feel they have a right to extend the backstage to their circle of neighboring shops, and they patter down for milk and fresh bread, wearing bedroom

slippers, bathrobe, hair net, and no make-up" (1959: 127). On the other hand, Giovanna Del Negro describes a very different phenomenon for the women of the small central Italian town "Sasso." As Del Negro explains, "to appear in 'inside wear' in public is a sign of disrespect to others" (2004: 28). At Baycrest however, the Terraces Lobby, though seemingly "public" is understood by residents as "private," since it is a back region. While residents do not think twice about wearing their "private" housecoats in the Terraces Lobby, it would be very unusual if they left the boundaries of that space – even to go to the Wagman Lobby, which is just around the corner. Likewise, residents do not hesitate to pick up their mail in the same state of "un-dress" at the apartment mailboxes on the ground floor of the building (around the corner from the Wagman Centre Arts Room) – but would not venture beyond the mailboxes to the Arts Room. The idea of "pattering down" suggests that Terraces back regions are connected vertically by their proximity to the apartments as well as the elevators. As such, these back regions – although they are located on multiple floors of the building – are in fact only steps away from the apartments. In this case, the apartments, mailboxes, and Terraces Lobby all are back regions, as well as private spaces, whose boundaries are determined by their proximity to the apartments/ elevators. While hominess is emphasized through the creation of back regions based on proximity to private spaces, displays of Jewishness and kosher issues are underscored through spatial worlds as well – most notably through their proximity to religious front spaces such as the Orthodox synagogue.

Sacred Jewish space

In both front and back spatial worlds, Terraces residents create a homespace to perform Jewishness according to religious and secular ideals that are fluid and ever changing and where borders can blur and bend. For example, a recent marketing brochure prominently highlights the building's "Jewish environment and daily synagogue services" (Baycrest 2006a) as significant features of the building. Here the public home blurs into sacred institutional space. Although in reality, only a fraction of the residents regularly attend synagogue services, the religious spaces of the Terraces are important, as they are a public representation of the facility's commitment to supporting the Jewish life of its residents. In order to meet the diverse religious needs of the residents, the Terraces has two designated on-site areas for worship: the Beth Abraham Jacob Orthodox Synagogue, located on the main floor, and the Terraces Reform Congregation, located on the ground floor. No exception to the Jewish saying, "Two Jews, three opinions," there is some contention between the two congregations. Mainly, the issue is about space. The Orthodox synagogue – for which the majority of congregants are not Terraces residents, but Orthodox Jews who live in the surrounding neighbourhood – has a fixed, designated sanctuary space on the first floor of the building. The sanctuary has a permanent ark (where the Torah is kept), a *bimah* (altar where Torah is read), wooden benches and parquet floors. Since it is an Orthodox congregation, men and women sit separately, physically divided by a *mechitzah* (partition which separates men from women in an Orthodox synagogue). During the time of my fieldwork, the *mechitzah* was an eight-foot cabinet with curtains located at the back of the sanctuary. As Baycrest Culture and

Heritage coordinator Bobbie Cohen recalls, “Our little ladies couldn’t see” (8 December 2008). Renovations of the sanctuary were completed in 2007, and a new stained-glass *mechitzah* is located near the front. “Although the changes seem small,” Cohen says, “they make a world of difference, especially now that the women in attendance can sit where they feel they are active members of the congregation” (*Baycrest Matters* 2007). Despite the renovations, Terraces residents continue to make up only a small percentage of the already tiny congregation. Bobbie Cohen estimates there are perhaps only five or six Terraces residents, and about twenty regular neighbourhood community members who attend daily services. Holiday services, however, attract many more residents, “up to eighty may attend” says Cohen (8 December 2008).

On the other hand, the Terraces Reform Congregation is made up exclusively of Terraces residents, yet they do not have a permanent, designated synagogue space. Instead, they meet in the Common Room on the ground floor of the Terraces for weekly Friday night services, monthly Saturday morning services, and holiday services. Unlike the Orthodox congregation, which has its own rabbi, the Reform congregation has a rotating list of people from various synagogues to come in and lead the services. During the week, the Common Room is used for multiple purposes: from dance therapy sessions, to various types of meetings and small gatherings. The congregation has a portable Ark on wheels – it is locked up during the week, and rolled in for services. The room is simple and open, with lots of light and a nice view of the landscaped grounds of the Terraces. As a sanctuary, it is a transformed space. This may seem unusual, but in fact, it is historically grounded. As Deborah Dash Moore points out: of the many congregations

in 1920s New York, “only the larger congregations maintained a separate structure. The smaller ones generally met in such rented quarters as basements, halls, or lofts” (Moore 1981:125). This remains the case for numerous North American congregations today. Both congregations are relatively small – only about a dozen residents attend the Reform services, not to mention they meet only for Shabbat and holiday services – as opposed to daily prayer offered at Beth Abraham Jacob. Nevertheless, the resident members of the Reform congregation begrudge the fact that the Orthodox congregation, whose members are mostly “outsiders,” has a designated sacred space while their own congregation does not.

In the spatial hierarchy of the Terraces, the Beth Abraham Jacob Synagogue is a front region, revealing and catering to the outside world the Jewish religious “ideal.” Baycrest is non-denominational, but in order to meet the expectations of the most observant Jews, the “official” synagogue of the Terraces could only be Orthodox – even though ironically, Orthodox residents only make up a small percentage of the Terraces population, and the majority of the congregation is made up of outside community members. Moreover, as Terraces Director Sheila Smyth explains, “Our residents weren’t made to feel very welcome,” even though Beth Abraham Jacob was intended to be used by the building residents. Over the years, this congregation has had “somewhat of a tumultuous relationship” with the Terraces community, explains Smyth; although relations have improved in recent years, she adds (11 April 2006). There was a time, however, “when we needed to take back control of the synagogue,” recalls Smyth. The recent renovations were a response to this need, not only by creating a new *mechitza*, but

also the benches were repaired and altered in order to make the space more accessible for walkers and wheelchairs (*Baycrest Matters* 2007). While the renovations have created a more user-friendly space for the Terraces residents, the small membership reflects the denominational leanings of the majority of Terraces residents; many of whom grew up in Orthodox households, but chose to worship with Conservative or Reform congregations with their spouses and families.

In May 2004, I attended *yisgor* services (memorial services which take place four times a year) at the Terraces – observing both the Reform and the Orthodox congregations. Given the age of Terraces residents, nearly everyone attends these services, whether to remember their parents, a spouse, or a child. Both the Beth Abraham Jacob and the Terraces Reform Congregation were full. Even residents who consider themselves as “non-religious” or “secular” attend these services – to recite *kaddish* (prayer for the dead) is a pull deeply felt by many Jews, particularly of the older generation. The Reform and Orthodox services were very different from one another – not only liturgically, but also with regards to the relationship between the leaders and the congregants. The Reform service was much more inclusive of the residents. There was an implicit sense of communication between the leaders and the congregation. The leaders spoke directly to the worshippers, acknowledging certain challenges they may be facing. For example, when the order of the service called for congregants to stand, the leader said, “In our congregation we don’t have to stand. God knows when you’re praying.” Of course, it is difficult for residents to constantly stand and sit during a service – this nod by the leader adds a thoughtful and personal touch to the service. As Paula David points out:

Aging can impact on the ability to meet personal expectations of religious duties. Fasting, studying, praying and ritual foods may all be counter-indicated by various medical conditions.... These differences need not be problematic, but require knowledge, flexibility, understanding and perhaps the support of rabbinical interpretation. (2000: 8)

By contrast, despite the large numbers of Terraces residents at the Orthodox service (there was even a large overflow room) – the rabbi did not acknowledge or show concern for the older worshippers at any point of the service. On this last point, I believe there have been changes since the time of my fieldwork, including the renovation which I discussed above. Furthermore, during my research at the Terraces, the congregations represented denominational extremes; but in fact, more Terraces residents were Conservative and wanted a congregation to reflect this. Since the completion of my fieldwork, I have learned that the Terraces Reform Congregation has dissolved and now operates as a Conservative congregation with a new name: Beth Chaverim. Membership has increased to over twenty regular members, and according to Bobbie Cohen, they are currently working on their own prayer book (8 December 2008). They continue to meet in the Common Room; despite their growth, their meeting space remains a religious back region.

It's no accident that the Beth Abraham Jacob Synagogue is a front region, located on the main floor, in a prominent, permanent space. As cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points out, "Architectural space reveals and instructs" (1977: 114). Using the example of a cathedral in the Middle Ages, Tuan suggests the "building's centrality and commanding presence are immediately registered.... Inside the cathedral there is the level of explicit teaching" (ibid.). In this way, the Orthodox Synagogue sends a message to residents and

others that the Terraces is a religious building – guided by the principles of Jewish faith, and more precisely: “This is an Orthodox place,” as Rose Kiperman once told me. Both the Reform and the Orthodox sacred spaces host public performances of Jewish community that the Terraces is committed to fostering. At the same time these religious front regions and the religious ideals they represent affect the behavior of residents, as well as their relationships with the (outside) community, their space, and how they may or may not “own” it.

Issues of kosherness in back and front regions

So far, this chapter has explored how issues of dichotomy play an essential role in our understanding of the construction of the Terraces as an institutional home. When we look at the Terraces as a *Jewish* institutional home, a new layer is revealed. As an institution, the Terraces is kosher, but as I have discussed previously, many residents are not observant, and thus, eat *treyf* within their private apartments. In recent years, folklorists and anthropologists have explored various aspects of space and place, looking closely at the “public,” “private” and “domestic” spaces that surround us, and how we relate to our spatial worlds (Pocius 2000; Cieraad 1999; Bahloul 1996). However, I am not aware of any ethnographic research that has looked specifically at “kosher” and “*treyf*” spaces, and how people negotiate these symbolic boundaries. One exception is folklorist Alan Dundes’ specific research on the *eruv*, which has been defined as “an enclosure of real or symbolic walls surrounding a community, which Halakhically [by Jewish law] permits Jews to carry on the Shabbat” (Weiss in Dundes 2002: 45). As

Dundes explains, “As it is forbidden on the Sabbath to carry anything out of one’s home, the construction of an *eruv* basically extends the spatial limits of the ‘home’ such that women, for example, can wheel baby carriages through the streets to the synagogue” (45). Following Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s article, which traces the history of *treyf* Jewish cookbooks and cookery (1990), in this section I explore the notion of “Jewishness” and the concept of *treyf* in Jewish spaces. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s question, “What, then, made the *treyf* cookbook Jewish?” (80), inspired me to continue to investigate ideas of Jewishness, kosherness, and treyfness at the Terraces. With this in mind, when the Baycrest Terraces bills itself as a “Jewish environment,” where “a strong Jewish tradition is upheld,” (Baycrest 2006a) my question is, “Jewish, how?” With kosher kitchens and Jewish programming, this is more than simply “unselfconscious Jewishness” (Moore: 233). However, the diversity of the population necessitates that the staff be sensitive to the factors (environmental, attitudinal and emotional) that define the Jewish identity as a commonality, at the same time they might create a rift within the same community (David 2000: 5). As such, what does a “kosher” residence mean, not only in terms of how the laws of *kashrut* are regulated, but also, how the rules impact the use of space in the building. While there are designated “kosher” and “non-kosher” areas at the Terraces, these – like the varying degrees of public and private spaces – are not easily defined.

Most commonly, the terms “kosher” and “*treyf*” refer to Jewish dietary practices. In *Essential Judaism*, George Robinson explains:

Traditional Jewish dietary laws are based on biblical legislation. Only land animals that chew the cud and have split hooves (sheep, beef; not pigs, camels) are permitted and must be slaughtered in a special way. Further, meat products may not be eaten with milk products or immediately thereafter. Of sea creatures, only those (fish) having fins and scales are permitted. Fowl is considered a meat food and also has to be slaughtered in a special manner. (2000: 580)

But “kosher” and “treyf” can be applied to spaces as well – so that a “kosher kitchen” refers to more than simply the food that’s in it. In a kosher kitchen, the space itself reflects the laws of *kashrut* (religious laws pertaining to what is kosher), for example: since the mixing of milk and meat is forbidden, a kosher kitchen would have special plates and utensils (often colour-coded) to designate whether they are for “milchig” (dairy) or “fleishig” (meat) so the two do not mix, and some kitchens even have separate sinks and counters. This is because food may be kosher but if the kitchen and the utensils are not, observant Jews would consider the meal to be *treyf*. At the Terraces, the entire kitchen is a meat kitchen – that means dairy is never served or prepared, leaving absolutely no room for error. While this is useful in terms of dietary laws, it limits the meal options for Terraces residents. The all-meat kitchen is the source of unhappiness for the general population. Not only because it restricts variety, but also because residents long for traditional Jewish dairy meals, for example, cheese blintzes (crepe filled with sweet cottage/farmer’s cheese blend), or a dollop of sour cream in their beet borscht. Furthermore, certain Jewish holidays are linked with dairy meals. The holiday Shavuot (festival of the Torah), for example, “is marked by the consumption of honey and dairy foods, with which the Torah is allegorically identified. *Blintzes*... are displayed on Ashkenazic tables, while Sephardic traditions include yogurt or *baklava*” (Bahloul 2002:

328). And while residents may not follow dietary laws, they do miss these holiday customs. The Gathering is a program facilitated by Terraces staff to encourage discussion among residents about the topic du jour. In May 2004, just after the Shavuot holiday, there was a heated discussion about their disappointment with the non-dairy meal offerings. Bobbie Cohen, the session facilitator, asks, "If this is your home, what are you making?" Bert Davis responds: "A dairy lunch or a dairy supper." All agree. Bobbie suggests the residents share their concerns with the kitchen manager in order to make change for next year. "We may not be religious," says resident Ida Peikus, "but we'd like it." In the meantime, program staff organize a "Shavuot Tea" with musical entertainment and a slice of cheesecake in the Assembly Room.

In any case, the "kosherness" factor – or the degree to which kosher rules are enforced (or not) – depends on the private or public understanding of the area in question and/or, as I have discussed above, whether or not the area in question is a front or back region (Goffman 1959). As such, there is a performance of "kosherness," which depends as much upon the "audience" – who is watching – as upon the actual practice of kosher law. During my research, it became clear that the Terraces – a "kosher" residence, was in fact not "all" kosher – and that laws of *kashrut* were not imposed by staff, but by a *mashgiakh* (supervisor of Jewish dietary law who is hired by Baycrest to oversee the kitchen). Furthermore, because the on-site synagogue is nearby, the congregation members have been known to keep a close eye on the activities of the residents, making sure that everything is both literally and figuratively "kosher." Not surprisingly, a tension exists between congregation members and some of the residents, that has erupted into

occasional instances of what Victor Turner describes as “social drama” (see Myerhoff 1978: 149), one of which I describe below.

The kosher kitchen and food services at Baycrest are supervised by a *mashgiakh* (supervisor of the ritual purity of food) under the Kashrut Council of Canada – a large governing body that guides the observance of kosher dietary laws in Canada – known by the acronym, COR. In her study of the work of a kosher caterer, Leslie Prosterman highlights the clout of the *mashgiakh* in the following scene: The caterer recalls being approached by the sexton of the synagogue where he was catering an event. The sexton asked, “Who is your *mashgiakh*? Who gives you supervision?” The caterer replied, “We have none. We’re coming to a synagogue, everything we prepare is kosher.” The sexton asked, “By whose standards?” And [the caterer] said, ‘By *my* standards.’ And he said, ‘Well, I’m not questioning your standards but in order for you to be able to say you’re a kosher caterer, you need religious supervision that says so” (1984: 131). While the supervised space is considered kosher, other unsupervised areas of the building (floor lobbies, private apartments), are considered *treyf*. In a private home that is considered “kosher” – the degree of kosherness falls to the homemaker (most often female) – whereas at the institution that is the Terraces, in order to meet the highest standard of *kashrut*, the responsibility is given to the *mashgiakh* (most often male). Clearly some residents question their own abilities to meet absolute standards. Terraces resident Ruth Hanff explains that while she keeps a kosher kitchen by her own standards, she would not go as far as to offer food to an observant guest, believing that “her” kosher may not be “kosher enough” (22 June 2005). Some observant guests however, come prepared. Fela

Karmioli describes how one of her friends “brings a little pot” to his daughter’s house when he visits for dinner. His daughter does not keep a kosher kitchen, “so he will come to dinner, but she has to cook in this [kosher] pot” (21 June 2005).

In private homes there are varying degrees of kosherness. I have heard people say they do not have a kosher kitchen, but they unselfconsciously use separate meat and dairy dishes – most likely because that was how it was done for them growing up. In certain homes that observe *kashrut*, there is a somewhat dubious practice of having three sets of dishes: milk, meat, and *treyf* (for “takeaway” food – most often pizza or Chinese). In this way, kosherness is negotiated with material objects. While laws of *kashrut* have been called “laws of pots and pans” (Robinson: 247), at the Terraces, kosherness is not so much material as it is spatial. Thus, the kosher spaces can become contaminated by *treyf*. Residents may not bring their own dishes or utensils into the dining areas – these are considered *treyf*. To bring them in would contaminate the space. As resident Fela Karmioli remarks, “Your home, your room, is not kosher by them [the COR] ... so this is not kosher to bring something to the Dining Room. If [after a meal in the Dining Room] you forgot and took a plate [upstairs to your room] – you’re not allowed to bring this plate back. This already is *treyf*” (21 June 2005). In other words, material objects, as well as food, can contaminate an otherwise “kosher” space.

Jewish enough?

Even though the majority of residents do not keep kosher at all, many are concerned that others may be critical of their practices. Edith Kursbatt explains, “I would

never ask for help unloading my groceries, so they [homecare workers] can see I don't buy kosher. They talk. And it's nobody's business" (11 March 2004). Another time Edith asked me to bring her a loaf of bread during Passover – the holiday when Jews customarily are forbidden to eat leavened bread. Edith gave me explicit instructions to "double bag" it, so that no one would see the bread in the bag – despite the fact that Passover food restrictions do not apply to the very old, young, or infirm. When I pointed out that most residents do not keep Passover, let alone keep kosher, she was unfazed, convinced that her grocery list would make the gossip rounds. Edith's fears of being identified as a *treyf* Jew can be best understood through the framework of Goffman's "impression management" (1959). In the privacy of her own apartment, Edith might not be as concerned about what others think of her, but within her larger "home," as well as the outside Jewish community, she worries. When I mention the incongruity that although Baycrest is kosher, most of its residents are not, Edith responds, "Oh no. Don't you dare put that in... we don't want them to know outside that we are not kosher" (29 January 2004). Edith concedes that most of her neighbours do not keep kosher, but she does not think it would be wise to flaunt it. While the Terraces has back regions, there are no "back doors" to access them, and Edith believes in keeping up her kosher "front." In other words, residents constantly negotiate between their front and back regions.

While keeping kosher is one way to measure "Jewishness," it is not the only way. As a participant in Barbara Myerhoff's study, *Number Our Days* illustrates, following religious law does not always equate to being a good religious person:

Some people would say being a Jew is how you follow the laws. Some people would say... it's from the inside. I will give you a little *myseh* [story] on this. In my town was an old lady who was a miser, very big. Nobody was getting a penny from her. She had money all right. She kept strictly kosher and more so when she was getting older. More strict every day. Dishes she had, you couldn't count them. Sinks, pots, spoons, everything she had separate. One day she went to the rabbi and asked him if when she died God would think she was a pious Jew. "Well," he told her, "I don't know what kind of a Jew He'll think you are, but certainly He will say you got a very pious kitchen." (Myerhoff 1978: 80)

This brings us back to the point that Jewishness transcends boundaries, including dietary laws. The ordination of the first American Reform rabbis in Cincinnati may shed some light on the issue. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes, "the ordination banquet created a stir: Shrimp were served at what came to be known as the '*terefa* [*treyf*] banquet' because apparently the Jewish caterer thought that 'kosher' food meant only the exclusion of pork products; sea foods were so good they had to be kosher" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1990: 80 n.16). This group is clearly committed to Jewish life, but not to laws of kashrut. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, "*treyf* was an ideological issue" (80). Baycrest residents share in these negotiations of food and laws of kashrut that are daily struggles for most, if not all, observant, religious Jews who live in a secular world.

For the majority of Terraces residents, the observance of Sabbath and kashrut is a return to the roots. As Jenna Weissman Joselit describes, "the observance of the Sabbath and the retention of such distinctive, home-based rituals as kashrut declined sharply from generation to generation, suggesting a brand new, and not entirely positive, valuation of tradition" (1994: 23). An informal survey noted that one hundred percent of residents said they chose to live at the Terraces because it is a Jewish home (David 2000: 11). But this raises the question, what *is* a Jewish home? Is it companionship with other Jews, cultural

celebrations, or the observance of Jewish law? While the residents share one meal a day in the dining room – strictly kosher – many shop and eat *treyf* regularly. While no “outside” food is allowed in the dining room, monthly restaurant outings – organized by staff – include trips to Red Lobster and all-you-can-eat Chinese buffets. Clearly *treyf* food is missed. Throughout the stages of the lifecycle, many have followed different rules under different roofs: as children they followed the rules of their parents’ homes. As adults, they maintained their own homes and new sets of rules. It is ironic that at this stage of their lives they are now bound to Jewish laws which many chose to give up long ago.

Social drama: plugging and unplugging on the Sabbath

In *The Power of Place*, Dolores Hayden refers to Rina Benmayor and John Kuo Wei’s definition of “cultural citizenship,” which is defined as “an identity that is formed not out of legal membership but out of a sense of cultural belonging” (Hayden: 8). Being old and Jewish offers a sense of cultural belonging at the Terraces, but for the non-observant residents, how do the orthodox synagogue and the kosher rules impact that sense of fitting in? While in theory a synagogue builds community, here the synagogue – and the “order” imposed by laws of kashrut, may create a chasm between Terraces residents and synagogue members. When I asked long-time Terraces resident Fela Karmioli if there was ever any conflict between the synagogue members and the residents, she was quick to respond, “Never!” Her initial response was not surprising, as many residents do not want to stir the pot. After a bit of prompting however, she recalled the

story of when a synagogue member alerted the *mashgiakh* about the use of electric urns for the Sabbath Tea.

Since Sabbath laws are observed at Baycrest, only “essential” staff work on Saturdays. This includes kitchen staff, who prepare and serve the daily meal, and consequently, help the Tea Hostesses by bringing out the tea goodies and utensils from the kitchen into the Fireside Lounge. (The Tea Hostesses and the Sabbath Tea will be described in detail in Chapter Six.) At the inception of the Sabbath Tea nearly ten years ago, the Tea ladies used plug-in urns for the coffee and hot water. The urns were prepared by Terraces kitchen staff, unplugged from kitchen outlets and re-plugged into outlets in the Fireside Lounge. Little did anyone realize the unplugging and re-plugging of the urns violated the Sabbath law, which prohibits work. As Abraham Heschel reflects: “On the Sabbath we live, as it were, *independent of technical civilization*: we abstain primarily from any activity that aims at remaking or reshaping the things of space. Man’s royal privilege to conquer nature is suspended on the seventh day” (Heschel 2003:19). Serving tea does not violate the Sabbath – quite the opposite – it is customary for Jews to host friends and neighbours on Saturday afternoons, sharing a cup of tea and a snack or a meal. But when the *mashgiakh* was alerted that Terraces residents were serving tea from electric urns, a social drama erupted. In Fela’s words:

He [the *mashgiakh*] told us, they’re not going to let us run the Tea on Saturday – if we plug in and plug out. Oy I was so mad. I told Frances Levinsky and Edith Kursbatt, [the co-Head Hostesses at the time] “If you will agree to close the tea, I don’t know what I’m going to do. I am not going to disappear the Tea. You’re

gonna have lots of trouble with me. Do everything to keep the tea alive.” So they bought the thermos. Two – one for coffee and one for water. (21 June 2005)¹⁰

The Hostesses were upset and believed the synagogue member was out of line for alerting the *mashgiakh*. As Fela saw it: “[Kitchen manager] Anna-Maria’s not Jewish, but she’s not allowed to plug? We in Poland, had Polish ladies who came – we had no electricity – the coal and wood, you know. So they came and made the fire.... Why can [Anna-Maria] not plug in?” In Europe and beyond, it remains customary for Gentile neighbours to assist observant Jews with otherwise forbidden tasks on the Sabbath, most commonly to turn lights on or off. Furthermore Fela believes the *mashgiakh* embarrassed Anna-Maria by not acknowledging her when he discussed the issue with the residents. “Oy I felt so bad, why he says this when Anna-Maria was right there... I would give him my piece of mind, the *mashgiakh*, why he embarrassed a woman.” In the end, they came to a compromise. “[We] bought the thermoses,” Fela says. “They don’t have to plug in, so it’s OK.”

The Tea Hostesses were not happy however. They missed the electric coffee urns, which kept the drinks hot and required minimal attention. The thermoses on the other hand, hold less liquid, and the drinks lose their heat fairly quickly. Furthermore, the ladies pour the unused coffee and hot water from the carafes back into the thermoses in between serving since there is no pot warmer. Elsie Kay, the hostess who manages the coffee thermos, says the lids are hard to open, especially with her arthritic hands (figure 4.4).

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent tea-related quotations by Fela are from this 21 June 2005 interview .



Figure 4.4. Elsie Kay sitting by the coffee thermos.

The thermoses are far from ideal, but these non-observant Tea Hostesses use them so as not to jeopardize the Tea. “The majority are not Orthodox,” Fela says, “but the voice is loud. Even in Israel, they are ten percent, but the voice is ninety.”

Because they choose to live in a Jewish institution, most residents understand that regardless of their own practices and beliefs, there is a price to pay – be it through food options or degrees of Sabbath observance. Front regions are important to the Terraces’ presentation of itself as a Jewish and kosher home. Even though, as the above examples illustrate, the majority of residents are not observant, they accept those ideals as positive. While the front regions of the facility are univocal in their presentations of Jewishness, residents rely on the back regions to negotiate their identities in a variety of ways. Like taking a second look at everyday buildings on a walking tour, seemingly ordinary spaces

and places invite interpretation and help tell the story of the people who create and manage these streetscapes and homescapes.

This chapter has demonstrated that while we use ideal notions to frame what we see: home and institution, religious and secular, kosher and treyf – the “real” story takes place in between these ideals: Terraces residents live in a place that is partly an institution and partly a home, Bert extends her private home into public space, and Jewish identity goes beyond the observance of Jewish law. Just as a walking tour frames the ordinary and invites participants to take a second look, so do the spatial worlds of the Baycrest home.

The next chapter will examine another kind of framing: the ritual frame. The discussion will move from how institutional homespace is constructed to facilitate “impression management,” to how residents use the public spaces of the Terraces to participate in creative rituals regarding death, mourning and remembering.

Chapter Five: Creating Ritual Space in the Institutional Home

In the last chapter, I have considered how the Terraces residents use front and back regions to negotiate their public and private lives, as they essentially live in two homes. Here I explore an additional layer of negotiation – not through space, but through custom and ritual, as Baycrest dwellers perform their identities as old people, as Jews, and as Terraces residents. This chapter highlights how space in an institution fosters diverse rituals, in this case, two formal gatherings of remembrance that are unique to the Terraces: the Shiva Gathering, and the Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Day of Remembrance) Ceremony. Each of these creative rituals demonstrates Terraces residents' integration of past into present selves that connects to the creation of their sense of being "at home." The Shiva Gathering re-invents the traditional *shiva* (the seven-day mourning period after the death of a relative), which traditionally takes place in a private home, and relocates it to a public space in the institutional home. On the other hand, Yom Hashoah is customarily observed at synagogues and community centres, but the Terraces organizes its own unique ceremony. Here the community is invited into the institutional home, where the resident Holocaust survivors are key players in a special ceremony that was created just for them. The staff-facilitated Shiva Gathering and the Yom Hashoah Ceremony are deeply personal for the residents. They combine the unique resident culture of the Terraces with traditional Jewish custom and observances, and link residents to their ongoing creation of home, as well as to their recreation of family in this new home. Furthermore, these observances bring to light the collective bonds that exist among residents.

Shiva Gathering

At the Terraces, Jewish domestic customs that once were practiced privately within single-family homes – for example, lighting Sabbath and Hanukah candles – have been re-invented in this shared home where residents are part of a new collective group. As I have argued, the Terraces is a complex of spaces: at once a home and an institution, and a mixture of sacred and secular spaces. Relationships also are multi-layered: residents are friends, neighbours, strangers, and family. Furthermore, the negotiation of residents' relationships between their "inside" and "outside" worlds is underscored by life cycle events. A wedding, a grandchild's bar mitzvah, the birth of a great-grandchild – all are celebrated with family "outside" Baycrest. On the other hand, Jewish home holidays such as Shabbat, Passover, and Hanukkah are celebrated "inside" with other Terraces residents. These holidays may be celebrated twice: within the "inside" Terraces home, as well as "outside" at the homes of friends and relatives. This double holiday observance practice is not unique to Terraces culture. Many people who work together celebrate calendar holidays or birthdays with colleagues, and also with family at home. In fact, it is increasingly common for people to have several support and/or social networks outside the home, and for these groups to celebrate holidays and life-cycle events together. Residents of the Terraces are unique however, for at least two reasons. Their relationships with their peers are particularly multi-layered and complicated. Unlike other peer groups who celebrate certain holidays together, but who may return home for more intimate gatherings, Terraces residents share a roof, as well as meals and holidays with their peers. In the reverse of the more general experience to celebrate rites of passage and

religious holidays at home, they leave their Terraces home to observe more private life cycle events such as birth and marriage with family members at an “outside” home.

When a fellow resident dies however, the traditional custom of “sitting *shiva*” is complicated. In this case, the *shiva* generally takes place at the home of the adult children. Terraces friends of the deceased may go to pay their respects, but since they have also lost one of their own, the traditional *shiva* leaves a void. The death of a resident represents a loss that is double-layered: not only have neighbours lost a member of their community; but also, since they lived together in the same “home,” they have lost a member of their collective family. While the traditional *shiva* takes place at the home of the bereaved (or at the home of the surviving relatives), the Shiva Gathering uses aspects of *shiva* to highlight the family relationship, as well as the homespace that Terraces residents share with each other. Consequently, Terraces residents may observe two *shivas*: comforting family members at an off-site “*shiva* house,” and mourning one of their own at their own Shiva Gathering.

According to Ernie Gershon, it all began when he and his wife Laurie, the ever-dedicated Terraces chaplains, realized “There was a gap that needed to be filled for the residents in terms of mourning” (25 April 2008).¹¹ When they first became chaplains at the Terraces, the Gershons met with residents and asked what they needed. Ernie recalls: “The residents had three things: they wanted us to be around, so they could get to know us; they wanted educational programs, to learn; and finally, they wanted some way to mourn. Even then, about fifteen years ago [1993] – they were much more mobile – but

¹¹ On 25 April 2008, I conducted a telephone interview with both Ernie and Laurie Gershon – all subsequent quotations by Ernie or Laurie Gershon are from this interview.

still, they couldn't always get to the funerals and *shivah*." As an early response to the needs of the residents, the Gershons designed and led a Memorial and Healing Service, which was held every three or four months to remember those who had passed away. While the service provided certain comfort, it was problematic for the residents. They felt the delay between the death and the time to mourn was too long. They did not want to mourn a month – or several months – later; they wanted to mourn according to Jewish custom, which follows a prescribed schedule beginning shortly after death. As sociologist Samuel Heilman explains, "In effect, many of the subsequent mourning rituals are an effort to compensate for the swift funeral and burial and to help rearrange the relationship between the dead and the living" (2001: 120). Furthermore, he explains, "Judaism divided the aftermath to the funeral into stages" each with a name and a temporal frame:

The first is shivah (seven days); the second, *shloshim* (thirty days); the third, *yud-beit chodesh* (twelve months); and the last, *yahrzeit* (yearly anniversary). These days mark a gradual coming to terms with the undeniable reality of death, the development of a new kind of relationship both to the deceased and to the community, and ultimately an altered identity for the mourner and the dead. (Heilman: 120)

For the residents, it was important to create a parallel mourning process to line up with their own understandings of Jewish tradition. Moreover, explains Laurie, "the more religious residents felt [the timing of the Memorial and Healing Service] was duplicating *yiskor* – some found it disconcerting." *Yiskor*, the memorial service for the dead, is recited in synagogue four times a year: on the holidays Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, and Yom Kippur. As I have previously discussed, nearly everyone – religious and secular – attends these services. Taking into account the concerns of the residents, the chaplains

gradually phased out the Memorial Service, and the Shiva Gathering began to take shape. They named it as such because residents knew what a *shiva* was, “so they would have somewhat of an idea of what to expect,” explains Ernie. “More importantly,” adds Laurie, “for those who can’t visit the *shiva*, they still needed to mourn.” While it was important for the Shiva Gathering to take place shortly after death, the scheduling was not as precise as the actual *shiva* period; rather, Shiva Gatherings could occur at anytime: some were scheduled during the actual *shiva* period, some shortly thereafter. Scheduling Gatherings during the actual *shiva* period was tricky however, if they were to include family of the deceased. “It all depends on the family and the situation,” Ernie says. Since the mourning family is not supposed to leave the home for the duration of the *shiva*, “participation of the family [during the *shiva* period] requires a less traditional family,” he explains. While the customary *shiva* lasts for seven days, some Reform families observe *shiva* for only three days; thus, there would not be a conflict for Reform family mourners to attend the Shiva Gathering during the latter part of a seven-day period. In any case, the Shiva Gathering (I present a case study below) is not meant to replicate the traditional *shiva*, and although it shares some of the social and functional aspects, it does not include the structural elements and specific customs associated with the traditional *shiva*.

As the historian Jenna Weissman Joselit explains, “A highly elaborated Jewish code of behavior governed the shivah period, from personal expressions of mourning and the conventions of the condolence call to the appearance of the ‘shivah house’” (1994: 278). For the uninitiated, some explanation would be in order before making a visit. At

Baycrest, all staff receive the *Jewish Life at Baycrest* guide, which explains some of the more esoteric Jewish customs including those concerning death and dying. The section entitled “Visiting a Shivah House,” describes what a visitor may encounter when making a *shivah* call: “mirrors may be covered (as one should not be concerned with personal looks at this time); a candle will be burning; and mourners may be sitting on low stools, shoeless – all indications of the bereaved state” (Baycrest Education Dept. 1994: 51). It is also traditional for mourners to rend their clothing upon hearing of the death and to wear the torn garment throughout the *shivah* period. The writer Elizabeth Ehrlich recalls the funeral of her uncle, and her grief-stricken *bubbe*, burying her son:

Suddenly the small hands of our *bubbe* rose. Her crooked fingers grasped the collar of her blouse, on the right side, as was proper, having lost her child. Weeping, moaning, with the shocked strength of grief, she tore her garment, ripped the woven cloth. As mourners rent their clothes in Bible times. (1997: 318)

Contemporary mourners may choose instead to wear a black ribbon, or a piece of torn black material (Marcus 2004: 206). None of these customs are observed at the Shiva Gathering. Instead, the Gathering highlights the social and spiritual functions, such as sharing narratives about the deceased, the coming together of community to offer hope and strength for the bereaved, and spiritual strength through prayer. Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin relay the experience of folklorist Kenneth Goldstein, who shared with the authors the stories that were told during his father’s *shivah*:

The tales ... went through several stages. First, a period of speechless grief gave way to stories of his father as a saint; later they changed to stories of his father as an ordinary man; by the end, stories were told of his father as a trickster, a shrewd and funny man, good and bad by turns. These last entered the family repertoire as stories that maintain his father’s spirit as a vital force in the life of the family. (1987: 24)

The narrative stages reflect the healing process, as layers of pain are peeled away to reveal some kind of comfortable truth. In *Giving a Voice to Sorrow*, Steve Zeitlin and Ilana Harlow explain that telling stories is a way to bring “the departed to life in words” (2001: 11). Furthermore they suggest: “The narrative impulse to tell the life stories of the dead, and thus to conjure up their essence, is a creative act that counters the destructiveness of death” (ibid.). In addition to sharing narratives about the deceased, the Shiva Gathering also meets a spiritual need through prayer. “Congregation is the Jewish antidote to death’s abandonment,” suggests Heilman. “The orderly schedule of prayer balances the disorderly schedule of dying (2001: 130). At a traditional *shiva* house (generally Conservative and Orthodox), prayers are recited twice daily. It is considered a *mitzvah* – a commandment, although commonly translated as “good deed” – for Jewish community members to make a *shiva* call in order to ensure there will be a *minyan* (quorum of ten people required for prayer) so that the Mourners *Kaddish* (memorial prayer) may be recited. Samuel Heilman recalls his father’s *shiva*:

Nothing was quite so jarring as the ubiquitous morning and evening *minyan*. Every afternoon at sunset and every morning at around six-thirty, people would walk into my house for services. The first morning I barely had time to jump out of bed before they came, so I learned to leave the front door unlocked. (Heilman: 132)

Certainly prayer and the opportunity to say *Kaddish* are important aspects of the *shiva* house, bringing formal religious structure into the home. Furthermore, *shiva* not only turns the private home into sacred space – but the home becomes public space as well. A new set of rules turns the home into a gathering place where community members may “walk in,” as they would enter a synagogue. As Heilman remarks,

Nothing so powerfully completes the transformation of the home into a public space as holding prayer services inside it.... Under these conditions, the home becomes a synagogue (literally a place of [religious] assembly), and its door can no longer be a barrier to intrusion or a portal that protects privacy. (130)

In this way, the “*shiva* call” is unlike any other “sympathy” house visit, as I pointed out above, it has its own set of rules based on Jewish law and custom. Here, the order of a typical house visit, as well as everyday home life, are disrupted by religious mourning customs, and thus, a form of symbolic inversion occurs. As folklorist Susan Stewart points out, many anthropological and historical studies have focused on how “symbolic inversions present the world upside down, the categories and hierarchical arrangement of culture in a recognizable disorder” (1993:106). In this way, although the *shiva* has its own set of specific rules, determined by religion, remarks Heilman, “even when mourners observe shivah inside what is to all appearances a familiar place, that place suddenly ceases to be familiar” (129). Zeitlin and Harlow suggest:

Formal religion has often governed our responses toward death, dictating the ways we are buried, the ways we try to comfort the bereaved, and the ways in which we mourn and memorialize loved ones. These traditions tell us how to act and what to say at times when we otherwise might not know what to do or say. They provide comfort. (2001: 7)

While “threads” (see Turner 1982: 64) of *shiva* are woven into the Shiva Gathering, providing residents comfort through community and prayer, which prayers, and when they are recited, vary from Gathering to Gathering. Ernie Gershon calls this “tap dancing.” He says, “Depending on how the flow is going we might wait until the end and do the prayers from the [*Afternoon Service for Memorial and Healing*] book. Sometimes the prayers would be at the middle. It all depends on the flow, you really have to tap dance to figure it out” (25 April 2008).

So while the ordered structure at a traditional *shiva* may comfort the bereaved family, the Shiva Gathering provides an opportunity for residents to take part in a creative ritual that meets their specific needs. On a very practical level, explains Ernie, the Shiva Gathering occurs within a set time frame: usually one hour. "This is very important," he emphasizes, "so residents don't get restless or wonder when it will end." The fixed timeframe of the Shiva Gathering presents a very different scenario from the *shiva* house, which is punctuated with visits throughout the day, in some cases to an extreme, remarks Jenna Weissman Joselit, "transforming this doleful occasion into an exercise in conviviality" (1996: 278). Nevertheless, the more formal aspects of *shiva* do not reflect the needs or the situation of Terraces residents who do not wish to replicate the traditional *shiva*, but rather wish to participate in a version that suits them, as well as highlights their unique relationship to the deceased. For the residents, attending the actual *shiva* could be awkward to get to, not to mention they might feel out of place, not quite certain how to fit in with pre-Baycrest friends and family of the deceased. Furthermore, when older parents live in a retirement community, the adult children may anticipate "a certain amount of alienation" at the *shiva*, imagines a narrator from Heilman's study. "The children often do not know their parents' friends," she says, "perhaps only by name or just to say 'hello.' There is no shared history; these people are strangers" (Heilman: 129). While the family of the deceased may not be acquainted with Terraces residents, they are far from strangers in each other's lives; thus, the Shiva Gathering is an alternative ritual that allows Terraces residents to mourn one of their own in their own space.

At the heart of the Shiva Gathering is the coming together of residents to remember a fellow resident, and to give residents an opportunity to remember the deceased in an intimate, personal setting. Nevertheless, although Shiva Gatherings fill a void, the frequency with which they may occur also presents new challenges. "Because they all live together, [the Shiva Gathering] casts a pall," Laurie explains. "They don't want to focus all the time on people dying; but of course, people are dying," she says emphatically. "At the same time," Ernie adds, "residents are saying, 'I don't want to die and be forgotten.'"

Ernie's last point highlights a final significant difference between the Shiva Gathering and the traditional *shiva*. While both observances serve to comfort the living, the Shiva Gathering provides an extra cushion, some kind of reassurance that residents will not be forgotten by their peers. Those who attend the Shiva Gathering may anticipate how they will be remembered, in the very space where the Gathering will occur.

Shiva Gathering for Esther Goldstein and Harvey Langer

The notice caught my eye as I was waiting for the elevator to visit a resident. A regular 8 ½ by 11 sheet, type-printed in large bold lettering:

Coming together to Remember

Esther Goldstein

And

Harvey Langer

Please join the Terraces' Chaplains and staff for an informal gathering

To share thoughts and memories

Wednesday, June 1, 2005

Terraces/ Wagman Lobby

4:00-5:00PM

Esther Goldstein and Harvey Langer died within approximately one week of each other, so theirs was a joint Shiva Gathering. I knew them both; I always enjoyed casual conversations with Esther in the lobby, and I even visited her apartment once. She was bright and spunky, but she had few friends. She walked to the beat of her own drum, and was one of only two residents who owned a cat. Harvey on the other hand, I got to know on a more personal level, as I had conducted several audio-recorded interviews with him. He was cheerful and optimistic, and well known around the Terraces since he lived there for almost fifteen years. As a result, although he and Esther shared a Shiva Gathering, the residents had more to say and to remember about Harvey. Likewise, my knowledge of Esther does not go beyond our casual meetings.

Harvey was born in Toronto on March 11th, 1916. He was one of six children of Yetta (Naiman) and Joel Langer, who had immigrated to Canada from Poland in the early 1900s. Joel worked in the garment business, first as an operator, then as a designer for Eaton's. "He was so good at [his work]," recalled Harvey, "that he wanted to go into business for himself" (25 February 2004). It was not long before Joel opened a tailor shop of his own. Harvey had fond memories of his parents, his father's store on Avenue Road near Bloor Street, and his mother's baked goods. His mother had come from a long line of bakers and she loved to make treats for her daughter and five sons. Harvey and two of his brothers went to university; they studied medicine, while Harvey studied pharmacy.

Harvey moved to the Terraces in 1991, shortly after his wife, Anna, died. His youngest brother, Michael (Mike), encouraged the move. "A couple of weeks after my wife died he showed up with about ten brochures," remembered Harvey with a laugh. Mike told Harvey he couldn't stay in the house alone, and suggested Baycrest as a top contender. Harvey was already familiar with Baycrest, having been a regular at the Wagman Centre for their exercise programs several times a week, so it was not a difficult decision. He was very happy with his life at the Terraces, "I owe it all to Mike," he grinned. His bachelor apartment was full of old knick-knacks: from a 1970s era toaster oven still in the box, "never been used!", to a collection of well-read sports magazines and old newspapers, to a ukulele, which belonged to his wife. Harvey and Anna did not have children, so unlike other residents whose adult children frequently were able to help them with their shopping, or who were generally around to look out for them, Harvey was incredibly independent. He had been a bachelor for many years, cooked his own meals (his specialty was chickpea soup with crushed matzoh crackers) and did his own laundry. He remained close with his surviving brothers, especially Bernie and his wife, Ryna, who made sure that Harvey was taken care of as his health began to deteriorate. Sadly, Harvey spent his last months in palliative care at the Baycrest Hospital. Despite his ailing health, he was always up for a visit and a chat, stayed up to date on all the sports news, and always wore his trademark moustache, baseball cap and a smile.

When Harvey and Esther died – as when any resident dies – fellow residents learned of their deaths by a printed announcement, delivered by resident volunteers to individual mailboxes on each floor. While the system of notification is the most efficient

way to relay the news, some residents, like Edith Kursbatt, find the notices unsettling. She believes it is a cold-hearted method to communicate the news that someone close to her – or that is in her circle – is gone. Furthermore, she views the notice as a reminder of her own imminent death. To tactfully inform residents of a death is challenging, partly because it is important for Terraces residents to receive the information in a timely manner. Jewish funerals generally take place within twenty-four hours of the death (Robinson: 188), so residents need time to make arrangements if they are planning to attend. Usually they travel by taxi, with reserved funds from the Residents' Council, set aside for anyone who wishes to attend a funeral or a *shiva* house.

On the afternoon of June 1st, 2005, I joined twenty residents, along with Terraces director Sheila Smyth, social worker Heather Lisner-Kerbel, and chaplains Ernie and Laurie Gershon in the Wagman Lobby for the Shiva Gathering of Harvey Langer and Esther Goldstein. Ryna Langer, Harvey's sister-in-law attended as well. We met in the back area of the lobby, near the Wagman entrance and quickly settled into the couches and chairs that were set up in a circle so that we could all see each other. Sitting there – in the public “living room” of the Terraces – it occurred to me that this was the most appropriate space for a Shiva Gathering: it was accessible and the space belonged to everyone (as opposed to floor lobbies). It was spacious and comfortable. One drawback was that it was very noisy that day. There had been a leak in one of the building's skylights, and workers were rolling carts with tools and equipment across the tiled floor. As people arrived and sat down, the surrounding noise was disruptive to the point of chaotic – I worried that we would not be able to hear each other – a challenge at the best

of times. The mood seemed somewhat awkward; there was a sense of uncertainty of how the next hour might play out. Finally Laurie Gershon checked her watch and broke the ice: “We are here today to remember Esther Goldstein and Harvey Langer.” Her tone was friendly, not too serious, warm and encouraging. She asked if everyone could hear her. Several people could not, so she turned on the microphone and the portable speaker. While using a microphone impedes the intimacy a Shiva Gathering attempts to create, it is also a necessary – and expected – piece of equipment at mid- to large-sized gatherings at the Terraces. An outsider may find the amplified sound jarring, but it is par for course. That day especially, the microphone was needed because of the extra noise in the lobby. Blurring the lines between *shiva* and Shiva Gathering, neighbours and family, she continued: “While *shiva* is for family, both Harvey and Esther made the Terrace their family – it’s your family whether you like it or not.” Residents around the circle nodded in agreement, and the notion that Terraces residents re-create themselves as family seemed more poignant just then. Both Harvey and Esther came from large families (five and seven siblings respectively), but neither had children – unusual for Terraces residents – so it was somewhat of a coincidence that they shared their Shiva Gathering.

With the microphone in her hand, Laurie explained that we heal through mourning, and that remembering our friends and loved ones helps this process. “We all have memories of Harvey and Esther,” she said. “Let’s go around the circle and share stories and memories.” While at a *shiva*, storytelling is a natural event, rarely is it so staged. Nevertheless, the order of the Gathering retained an air of improvisation; Ernie and Laurie “tap danced” according to the flow and responses of the residents and staff.

Mostly, the memories shared were about Harvey, as he was more extroverted and more well-known around the Terraces – partly because of personality, partly because he had been there a long while, and partly because of his gender. Because women residents outnumber the men eight to two, it is difficult for male residents to go unnoticed. Laurie suggested they begin with memories of Esther. These were more general: “She was friendly and sharp,” said Edna Lester. “She had a cat,” Dorothy Moses offered. “A good person,” volunteered Ruth Hanff. “She never said a bad word about anyone.” Nods all around. Despite the fact that memories of Esther were vague and slightly superficial, she was remembered fondly and naturally. As we made our way around the circle, not everyone spoke, but even those who did not seemed engaged and responsive. Later I discussed with the Gershons what would happen if they went around the circle and no one had anything to say about a particular resident. “If someone was not well-known it can be pretty tough,” said Laurie. “Each Gathering is different,” added Ernie, “and if there isn’t a lot to say we end up relying more on the prayer book.” Of course it also helps if the Gathering commemorates two people.

It did not take long before the microphone made its way around the circle and was back in the hands of Ernie, who did not hesitate to offer his first memory of Harvey: “When I think of Harvey, the first thing that comes to mind is his extensive collection of baseball caps.” People smiled at that, and it helped to have an image of the man they would be remembering. Although Ryna did not bring pictures of Harvey, Ernie said that sometimes family members bring pictures to Shiva Gatherings to help trigger memories. I imagine that is why his first memory was so visual. He passed the microphone to Riva

London, one of Harvey's neighbours from the second-floor, who began: "Harvey was one-of-a-kind." She and Harvey both grew up on Palmerston Avenue among many Jewish immigrant families in downtown Toronto. While they did not know each other as children, they often shared stories and nostalgia for growing up both in that era and that neighbourhood. Dorothy Moses took the microphone next to say Harvey had a knack for making people feel at ease with a joke or a smile. Eva Heffner agreed, recalling the time she signed up to go on a fieldtrip to a Blue Jays baseball game. "I didn't know from baseball," she said. "But Harvey explained the game and made me feel comfortable," she said with a laugh. Another resident, Danny Gilbert recalled Harvey's love for sports. "He always knew the scores and who was playing. Baseball, hockey, tennis – didn't matter what – Harvey loved them all." When it was Elsie Kay's turn, she remembered Harvey rushing to the elevator whenever it opened on his floor on the way down to lunch. "Hold it!" he'd yell comically, making everyone laugh.

Shtefen

When it was my turn to speak, I told of my visits with Harvey, especially his last months in palliative care. He was always happy for company, and even when he was not feeling well enough to talk, we sat together comfortably in silence. Then I told the group about *shtefen* – the mysterious baked treat of his childhood. Harvey was born March 11, 1916, "the day before Purim," he always said. As Barbara Myerhoff explains, for the older Jews, "it was customary to commemorate the day of one's birth on the closest Jewish holiday, thus submerging private within collective celebrations" (1978: 208). Purim, one of the most joyous Jewish holidays, celebrates a Jewish victory, when biblical

Queen Esther and her cousin Mordechai intercepted Haman's plot to kill all the Jews of Persia. A popular bakery treat associated with the holiday is *hamantaschen*, traditionally prune- or poppy seed-filled triangular-shaped cookies that are said to resemble Haman's hat. Another Purim treat, according to Harvey, is *shtefen* – but unlike well-known *hamantaschen* – beyond Harvey's fond recollections, little is known about his childhood treat. Harvey's mother always made *shtefen* for Purim, which also fell near his birthday, so as a memory food it held a double meaning. She occasionally made it at other times of the year, but not necessarily to mark special occasions, confirming to Harvey that it was a special Purim treat. Harvey described *shtefen* as a beet strudel, but "instead of poppy seeds," – a traditional Eastern European sweet filling – "it had red beets that had been cooked, strained... [and] mashed; raisins [were] added, and lots of honey" (25 February 2004). The filling also included crushed filberts (hazelnuts). As if the filling was not sweet enough, the strudel pastry was covered in honey before it went into the oven. Talking about *shtefen* always brought a big smile to Harvey's face, as he recalled how sweet and sticky it was. I was intrigued by *shtefen* – I had never heard of it, or anything like it. When Harvey first described it, I wondered if it was a dish known only to his family. I informally surveyed residents if they had heard of such a dish. No one had. I spoke to several colleagues – scholars of food and folklore, and Jewish studies – they too were perplexed. When I met his brothers during a hospital visit, they remembered it well; however, they did not share his enthusiasm for it. They confirmed that it was always made around Harvey's birthday/ Purim, but beyond that, they could not add to Harvey's memories. My closest lead came from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's suggestion via

email that it could be related to traditional Eastern European Jewish *eingemachts* – jams/preserves made from root vegetables, such as carrots and beets (31 January 2005). I found a recipe for beet preserves in Robert Sternberg’s *Yiddish Cuisine* (1998: 293). According to Sternberg, beet preserves (*burekeh eingemachts*) were a “specialty made by Ukrainian Jews for Passover” (ibid.). This only added to the mystery, since Harvey’s parents hailed from Poland; and although Purim and Passover are spring holidays, it seemed like a stretch. Nevertheless, I used Sternberg’s recipe as a base to re-create *shtefen* for Harvey. I substituted ingredients based on what Harvey told me, using honey for most of the sugar (eight cups!), omitting the lemons and ginger, substituting hazelnuts for the almonds, and adding raisins. For the strudel, I simply used store-bought filo pastry, although looking back, I wish I had the kitchen confidence to make a traditional yeast-based strudel pastry dough. In any case, my plan was to make the *shtefen* for Harvey on his birthday. By that point, he was already in the hospital, but he was still feeling fairly well. Our birthdays were only two days apart, and Harvey’s personal support worker, Caroline, also shared a birthday that week. Together we threw a party in Harvey’s hospital room. I brought the *shtefen* and I couldn’t wait for Harvey to try it (see figures 5.1 and 5.2). He ate it slowly and thoughtfully, and when I asked if it was similar to his mother’s *shtefen*, he responded carefully, honestly: “It’s been over sixty years since I’ve tasted her *shtefen*,” he remarked, “so it’s hard to compare.” No doubt. We all laughed.



Figure 5.1. *Shtefen* just out of the oven.



Figure 5.2. *Shtefen*, cut and ready to eat. Of course the black and white photo cannot do the brilliant ruby-coloured filling justice.

When I shared the story at the Shiva Gathering, everyone laughed as well. The mood was sweet and upbeat. As the hour came to an end, the chaplains led the group in a traditional memorial prayer in Hebrew and English: *El Malei Rachamim* (Lord of Many

Mercies), which Heilman describes as “among the most common prayers at funerals, which asks to send the spirit of the dead on its way and appeals to God to accept it upon its arrival at its divine destiny” (2001: 95). There are variants of the prayer, explains Heilman, but what they all have in common “is their insertion of the name of the deceased into the prayer, which thus personalized the request” (ibid.). Together we say, “May they rest in peace. *Amen*.” The circle is quiet. Ernie says,

“Let us all have fond memories.”

“That’s how they continue to live, we hold them in our hearts,” adds Dorothy Moses. Laurie says that Dorothy’s brother died the previous weekend. Everyone around the circle expressed her sympathy. Dorothy, emotional, smiles and nods. Ryna Langer had been silent throughout the Gathering, but as we came to a close she looked around and gently said: “You became his family, and I mean this in all sincerity. He did love you all.” The circle was quiet.

“Thank you for coming, for sharing,” Ernie said.

Elsie interrupted, “You’re not supposed to say that.”

“I stand corrected,” Ernie replied, explaining that since attending a traditional *shiva* is a *mitzvah* – commonly translated as a good deed, although it literally means an obligation – it is not customary to thank people for attending. In fact, according to tradition, the mourner does not acknowledge when visitors leave, but instead visitors bid farewell to the mourners with the traditional saying, “May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem,” or the abbreviated version: “May you be comforted,” (Heilman: 150-151).

While Elsie's comment reflected her reading of the Gathering as a *shiva*, it is not a *shiva* house. Some time after my fieldwork, the residents took this to heart and officially voted to change the name from Shiva Gathering to Memorial Gathering. According to social worker Shawn Fremeth, the residents were no longer comfortable using the word *shiva* since the gathering inevitably took place after the seven-day mourning period, and it was decidedly *not* a *shiva* (14 September 2008). Rather, as I have demonstrated, the Shiva Gathering borrows functional elements of the traditional *shiva*, but the mourners do not follow traditional *shiva* rituals, such as wearing a pinned piece of black torn material, sitting on low stools, and covering mirrors. Instead, the Shiva Gathering is distilled down to the essence of *shiva*: the gathering of friends and family, providing comfort for the mourners, to remember the deceased. Finally, the Shiva Gathering reinforces the notion that Terraces residents have re-created themselves as a family who share a home.

The Shiva Gathering gives residents reassurance that they will not be forgotten. The fear that they will not be remembered is connected with "a certain feeling of abandonment," which is familiar in retirement homes, explains Ernie Gershon. As Jenny Hockey points out, "residential homes have traditionally accommodated large groups of people of the same age who are given care by professionals in exchange for pay rather than family members out of love or duty" (1999: 108). Coming in, some residents may feel abandoned by their families; inevitably they may worry that they also will be forgotten by family members – and everyone else. This became clear to me by Edith Kursbatt's reaction to the death of a close family friend. Joan was a like a second

daughter to Edith. She had been a dear friend to Edith's late daughter, Irene, who had died from lung cancer in 1996. After Irene's death, Joan took on certain daughterly duties such as taking Edith on shopping trips and checking-in with regular phone calls. It was a great shock when she died – she was relatively young – in her mid-60s, and in good health. Edith was devastated. “No one's left who knew me *before*,” she said softly. Joan was one of the few people who had a window into Edith's life before she moved to the Terraces. Since Edith came from England, and then Montreal, she did not have much of a social circle in Toronto. Her son lived in Northern Ontario, her grandchildren and their families in the United States. Joan was the last person in Edith's everyday world who held the link between her past and her present experiences. As such, her death represented a double loss. In pondering the meaning of the past on our present lives, Yi-Fu Tuan expresses: “I am more than what the thin present defines” (2005: 186). This holds particular resonance for those who live at the Terraces. At a glance, there is little to distinguish residents from one another regarding their former lives. Although material items in individual apartments – furniture, photographs, art works – offer clues about how residents may have lived pre-Terraces (see Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Halle 1996), for the most part, only close friends visit private apartments. How they lived previously (as well as private aspects of how they live presently) often is only known either by people who knew them before, and/or by the narratives residents tell. Barbara Myerhoff writes of “survivor's guilt.” The old people at the Center “were a distinctive breed, survivors all” (1978: 22). As she explains, the Center members – like so many Terraces residents – “were survivors twice over, once due to their escape by

emigration from the unnatural ravages of the Holocaust, and again later by living into extreme old age, surviving their peers, family, and often children” (ibid.: 23). While in Edith’s case, it was her parents who made the decision to leave Russia for England, her survival into old age, outliving her family, friends, and even her daughter, have been constant challenges. In the words of Myerhoff, “That the more recent losses were the natural, inevitable results of the mere passage of time did not necessarily make them more bearable” (ibid.). Joan’s death was especially difficult for Edith to absorb because she was the last witness to Edith’s past life.

Outliving loved ones may be the harshest reality of living into old age. However, even as physical witnesses disappear, the narrative process of remembering and sharing the past with the present creates new witnesses, albeit through the transmission of memory. As the authors of the *Grand Generation* explain, “Self-integration is, of course, only one reason for recovering the past. Sharing it is another. These two functions work in tandem.... Without witnesses the expressions are like one hand clapping” (Hufford, Hunt and Zeitlin: 64). These narrative memories create witnesses by proxy. Joan may have been the last witness to Edith’s past: the dinner parties she took such pride in hosting; her beautiful furniture; the company she kept. Joan knew first-hand that Edith’s husband, Ivor had been an engineer, that they began to raise their family first in Oxford (UK), and later in the prestigious Westmount neighbourhood of Montreal. As empty-nesters, Edith and Ivor moved to Toronto, where they lived in posh Forest Hill before moving to the Terraces. Because Edith did not have many friends at Baycrest, Joan’s role as witness was especially significant. Nevertheless, through life review, Edith creates a

narrative to share with her peers. The term “life review” was coined by psychiatrist Robert Butler in 1963 (Zeitlin and Harlow: 61). As the gerontologist Marc Kaminsky explains, “[life review] is the construction of the self they wish to be remembered by. And this bestows poise and intensity; it allows them to live more fully as they face the knowledge of their death” (1993: 88).

For Edith, because her family lives far away from the Terraces, these narratives are even more important because they validate her individuality and her life before moving to the Terraces. For other residents, past and present lives may be more intertwined, as regular visits from family members help to create a seamless narrative.

The need for witnesses and the sharing of life narratives is especially meaningful for the collective Terraces community. Barbara Myerhoff maintains that such “re-membering” calls attention “to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one’s life story, one’s own prior selves, as well as significant others who are part of the story” (1992: 240; also quoted in Zeitlin and Harlow: 61). Life review brings together various aspects of a person’s life, and shapes it, “extend[ing] back in the past and forward into the future.... Without re-membering we lose our histories and our selves” (Myerhoff 1992: 240). Terraces social worker Shawn Fremeth facilitates a weekly session, “A Bintel Brief” – named for the popular Yiddish advice column that had its heyday in the *Forward* newspaper in the early- to mid-1900s. During the hour-long program, residents discuss topics that range from personal love stories and work experiences, to immigration and holiday memories. Usually he begins the session by reading a story or an excerpt from an essay on a particular theme. On 19 October 2003, I sat in on a session about grieving,

healing and mourning. What follows is based on my field notes from that day: "I don't normally read material like this," Shawn warned. The story was about a woman who was battling cancer. "It's sad, but hopeful," Shawn said somewhat nervously. Nevertheless, he went ahead and read the story – it was sad because she died, and hopeful because facing death helped her to strengthen family and friendship bonds, and to ensure her legacy. The story led into a discussion about what it means to face death, as well as how to cope with losing loved ones. One resident, Tillie Binder wept softly. We sat in a circle in the Fireside Lounge so everyone could see each other.

"You never forget," said Tillie.

"That's why we go for yiskor – to remember," Lawrence Sandy said.

I thought about the collective loss in the room. Fourteen residents were sitting around the circle. In addition to being a full-time social worker at the Terraces, Shawn also facilitates the Baycrest Bereavement Group so this is a topic he is familiar with. "We can get stuck in grief," he says, opening up the discussion to the residents. Mrs. Rabovsky says it takes longer than two years: "That's how long it's been since my husband died, and it still hurts." Nearly everyone agrees that it takes years. And yet, the group does not linger on any sad stories. They share, they assess, they move on. Next they are discussing Jewish law and the mourning customs that ease the pain of loss. "You have to go on living," offers Faye Fischler. Shawn points out that while there are prescribed customs for mourning, it is important to recognize that everyone heals at her own pace. One woman recalls finding comfort at her mother's *shiva*. "It helps to grieve in a group," she says. Mina Lauterpacht, who is blind and brings her knitting with her wherever she goes,

agrees, "It helps to be with people." Nods around the circle. Ann Rosner said after her husband died, she became very ill. Shawn says, "I feel like the mood here is solemn." To which Judy responds, "We're all here now, let's live." Yes, the group agrees. Fela says many of the Terraces residents come as widows. "We understand each other, we have all lost someone we love, but we continue to live and to make our lives meaningful," she says. According to Barbara Myerhoff: "The prospect of death for many of these elderly was often less fearsome than that of dying without having had an opportunity to unburden themselves of their memories" (1992: 241).

Like Barbara Myerhoff's Center elders, who "required witnesses to their past and present life," (1978: 33) Terraces residents wish to remain "visible," as they strengthen their bonds with one another, narrating and sharing aspects of their lives. In doing so, they not only imagine that their peers will understand their sorrow (and their joy), but also they hope they will be remembered when they are gone – at Shiva Gatherings for example. While Shiva Gatherings focus on remembering residents both as individuals, as well as members of a re-created family who share a home, another observance, the Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Day of Remembrance) Ceremony also takes place in the Terraces home. Like the Shiva Gathering, this performative ceremony integrates the past into the present lives of Terraces residents, honouring resident survivors by highlighting the collective history shared by residents. But while the Shiva Gathering is a re-invented domestic ritual resituated in the public space of Terraces, the Yom Hashoah Ceremony is a re-invented institutional observance, re-situated in the institutional home. Furthermore,

the Terraces invites the larger community (Jewish and Gentile), including school children, to bear witness, and in turn, implores these witnesses to “never forget.”

Origins of Yom Hashoah

Of all ways to commemorate the destruction of European Jewry, perhaps none – save narrative – is more endemic to Jewish tradition than the day of remembrance.
-James E. Young 1993: 263

According to anthropologist Harvey Goldberg, among countless issues raised by the enormity of the Holocaust, are some of the “personal” and “practical” matters relating to Jewish custom. As he points out:

Often, those wishing to say kaddish annually for relatives who died in the gas chambers do not know a date of a family member’s death and can only recite the kaddish on occasions of communal memorial, such as festivals when yizkor is said or on the tenth of the Hebrew month of Tevet, a fast day marking the siege of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C.E. (2003: 221-2)

Designated as the official date to mourn Holocaust victims, whose *yartzeit* (anniversary of death) is unknown, Yom Hashoah serves a practical and personal need for Jews to remember individuals, as well as the collective victims who perished in the Holocaust. The cultural history of this solemn date, however, is a story in itself, explored in detail by Holocaust scholar James E. Young (1993: 243-285). As Young and others have pointed out, choosing a date for Yom Hashoah was not without controversy, since days of remembrance and commemorative fast days have long been observed at different times throughout the Jewish calendar, and it was difficult to come a consensus regarding a new day specially for Holocaust victims (Young 1993: 243-285; Robinson 2000: 128-29; Klagsbrun 1996: 139-141). “Like historical incidents related in narrative,” writes Young,

“the Jewish holidays, festivals, and fasts also acquire meaning according to their places on time’s grid” (264), so designating a suitable day proved to be challenging.

The Israeli Parliament (known as the Knesset) chose the Hebrew calendar date: 27 Nisan (five days after Passover) in 1951 to coincide with the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This is significant because it illustrates Israel’s effort to create a post-Holocaust identity of fighters, not victims. As Young explains, “In keeping with their vision of a new, fighting Jew and their rejection of the old, passive Jew as victim, the founders would prevent this day from entering the commemorative cycle of destruction altogether” (268). The cycle refers to the day that had previously been suggested by the rabbinate: the Tenth of Tevet, which, as mentioned above, already existed on the Jewish calendar as a date of mourning. For the “New Jew,” explains Young, the aim “was never merely to find a new world view... but to select which governing views to advance and which to abandon” (266). It was time to replace the “old” ways of commemorating with something new. While 27 Nisan was accepted in 1951 as the designated date, as *Jewish Days* author, Francine Klagsbrun points out, given that Jews were only just starting to come to terms with the Holocaust, “For the most part, the resolution was ignored” (1996: 140). The Knesset continued to debate its name, the appropriateness of its chosen date, and added new elements of its mandate. Still, the public remained uninterested, “it seemed that the day of remembrance had been forgotten by all but survivors and partisans,” writes Young (270). The Knesset responded by creating a law for this holiday observance in 1959, with a few changes from the previous incarnation. Originally it had been called Holocaust and Ghetto Uprising Day [Yom Hashoah Umered Hageta’ot], but

some thought the Ghetto Uprising was too specific, so it was renamed Day of Remembrance of Holocaust and Heroism [Yom Hashoah Vehagevurah] (ibid.). In North America, most know it simply as Yom Hashoah. Furthermore, by law, two minutes of silence would be observed throughout Israel. At the sound of a siren, “all traffic on the roads shall cease” (quoted in Young: 271). Klagsbrun describes the stand-still as incredibly moving, to hear the wail of the siren and to witness all activity stopped for a moment of silence: “People look like figures in a wax museum” (141), while Young, reflecting on his own experience describes “the wail growing tighter and thinner, like a taut thread, binding all together, until it unwinds” (280). After the siren he wonders “where they were, and if they remember the moment we shared” (ibid.).

Outside of Israel, it is not so dramatic, and the observance itself did not really catch on until a second turning point in 1961, with the highly publicized trial of the infamous Nazi, Adolf Eichmann. Though the trial took place in Israel, Jews everywhere – who were only just coming to terms with the devastation that took place in Europe – were following it; according to Klagsbrun, “the trial opened discussion about the Holocaust that has continued to intensify with time” (140). Today Yom Hashoah is observed worldwide. While there were challenges in choosing the date, “Beyond its place on the calendar,” writes Young, “Holocaust remembrance is enacted by a variety of observances encompassed by the day, including commemorative ceremonies and speeches, moments of silence, and mass-media programming” (265). Most often these take place in public spaces: synagogues, community centres, and schools. Because it is a fairly new observance, performed rituals are constantly evolving, and vary from group to group. But

there appears to be a basic structure for the public ceremonies, including a *yartzeit* candle-lighting ceremony (usually with six candles for the six million Jews who perished); the reciting of the Kaddish; a recitation of a Yiddish poem or song, and singing the Hatikvah, Israel's national anthem. Often these public ceremonies honour Holocaust survivors who live in the community, by inviting them to light the candles and participate in the service in various ways. At the Terraces, the ceremony has special significance, as it honours its own resident survivors, who are the key participants in the service. Whereas other services may invite Holocaust survivors as special guests, here the survivors invite the community to join them in their home as they remember their past and look towards the future.

Yom Hashoah Ceremony at the Terraces

By the very act of remembrance, oblivion and the limitations of the present are defied, death is made irrelevant, and a plane is established on which the dead do indeed meet and mingle with the living. The ceremony is transformed from a memorial of death into an affirmation of life.

--Theodor Gaster, quoted in Heilman: 222

Gaster's words are about *yiskor*, but they hold particular resonance – especially the last line, about the ceremony's transformation “from a memorial of death into an affirmation of life” – for the Terraces Yom Hashoah Ceremony. When the community comes together to remember the Holocaust, resident survivors sit at head table facing the room. They are the embodiment of the ceremony: the victims we remember and the survivors before us. The eyewitnesses of the darkest time in Jewish history, they mourn their family and friends, and the community mourns with them. They are the living memory of events that even today are difficult to comprehend. “As late as 1993,” writes Francine

Klagsbrun, "at the dedication of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., Elie Wiesel said, 'It is not because I cannot explain that you won't understand, it is because you won't understand that I cannot explain,'" (Klagsbrun: 139). A similar statement is expressed in the Terraces Holocaust Survivors Group collective poem, "Who Could Understand?" (David 1995b: 23). It begins:

Even the North American Jews – they can't understand.

Nobody can feel what we lived through.

They wouldn't understand because we ourselves can't understand.

We lived through everything we did and we don't know how.

We lived through everything and it hurts to talk about it.

I personally cannot understand how I went through it.

The Terraces Yom Hashoah Ceremony is not only a ritual of remembrance, but also it is a dialogue between survivors and the community to continue to build a bridge of understanding of the events of the Holocaust.

On April 15, some three weeks before the 2005 Terraces Yom Hashoah Ceremony, Paula David, who has been organizing it since 1988, calls a meeting with the resident survivors to discuss the upcoming ceremony. "It's your *yartzeit*," she says in her deep voice that is both comforting and matter of fact. *Yartzeit*, as noted previously, is the anniversary of death. Musing on the actual translation: "a year's time," Samuel Heilman speculates "that it is not the dead alone for whom this 'year's time' is marked; it is no less for the living and in particular the bereaved" (194). "I want you to feel strong," Paula David tells the group of survivors, looking carefully at each of their faces. Paula has

worked closely with the resident survivors for over twenty years. At the time of my fieldwork, she was the coordinator of the Holocaust Resource Project. She facilitates the Terraces Holocaust Survivors Group, and also spearheaded the Second Generation Children of Survivors Support Group, which consists mostly of outside community members. While Paula is a social worker by profession, she also is a visual artist, and the programs she facilitates – and the resulting products – often reflect her creativity, for example, the Holocaust Quilt that hangs in the Terraces Lobby, and the publication of the Terraces Survivors Group *Collected Poems*, which David edited and illustrated. The Yom Hashoah Ceremony is no exception, as Terraces resident survivors perform memory, remembrance, and mourning rituals, collaboratively and creatively with the community. Like the Shiva Gathering, it mirrors “official” observance/ custom, but it has its own variations, giving it special meaning for the residents. That day, Paula explained what the ceremony – pageant-like – would entail. She waves to the front of the room and tells them there will be a head table set up, where they all will sit.

“If you have a walker, we’ll park it out of the way,” she says. “Shawn [social worker] or Bobbie [therapeutic recreationist] will take your arm and walk you to your seat.” She continues, “A *yartzeit* candle will be placed in front of each of you. Bobbie or Shawn will come to you with a flame to light it. You will say your name, and what camp you were at, or ghetto – Some people don’t want to name these places; if that’s the case, just say where you’re from.”

There is some buzz in the room as some residents exchange tidbits of their lives. Most of them know each other well through the Survivors Group, but there are also a few

newcomers. The Terraces Yom Hashoah ceremony echoes elements of *shiva*, *yiskor*, and *yartzeit*, and like earlier discussions of “home,” also highlights certain dichotomies: individual/communal, private/public, Jewish/Gentile, old/young. Unlike the Shiva Gathering, which remembers mostly through impromptu narratives, the Yom Hashoah service is more scripted: a performance of remembrance – as well as an opportunity to pay tribute to the Terraces resident survivors. Likewise, the spaces of these two events reflect the same dynamic and conservative elements: the Shiva Gathering brings chairs and couches together in an informal fashion, while the Yom Hashoah Ceremony space is highly structured. Step-by-step, Paula describes what will take place that night. It will be very emotional, and it is helpful for the residents to know exactly how the ceremony will unfold. There is no room for improvisation; structure is crucial. The cantor, Gordon Lindsey, will sing; the students from Ventura Park (a local public school) who had participated in a multi-visit Holocaust-related intergenerational program will be there to read some poems, light a candle, and to sing a song that they wrote. “Would anyone here like to stand up and read a poem?” Paula asks the group. No one seems particularly enthusiastic. “As everyone gets older, it’s harder to read,” she says sympathetically. “You can let me know later. You’ll have plenty of time to practice beforehand,” she reassures them. “What about a Yiddish song? The Partisans’ Song?” she asks, referring to the iconic resistance song, which is often sung at Holocaust memorials. Chana Fish says one of the ladies who could not make it to the meeting has a beautiful voice and knows all the Yiddish songs – but she cannot remember her name. “Mit a husband,” she says. With a husband. Since there are not many “mit a husband,” it did not take long to figure out

whom she was referring to: Dora Borenstein. "OK," laughs Paula. "I'll ask Dora-mit-a-husband."

Paula tells the group the ceremony will be a little bit different this year. In the past it had been in the evenings in order to accommodate working family and community members. But the timing was not ideal for resident participants, who needed time to debrief, unwind and relax before going to bed. Upon hearing about the change, some residents express concern that their family members might not be able to attend but Paula assures them they would have plenty of time to make arrangements. Later that day, Paula and I discuss the impact of previous evening ceremonies. "It's always so emotionally grueling," she explains, and by the evening most residents had already expended most of their energy. Furthermore, although the ceremony functions to nurture and support resident survivors, it can also trigger brutal memories. The evening ceremony did not leave enough time to socialize and debrief before going to bed – some residents either could not fall asleep afterwards, or suffered a fitful sleep or had nightmares. A ceremony in the afternoon on the other hand, would allow the rest of the day to debrief and to sort through the range of emotions. Mostly the residents seemed pleased with the time change. Immediately following the Ceremony, the survivors would be invited for tea – "only survivors," emphasizes Paula, "not friends who are residents," she says. Gatherings, especially when they involve food, always draw big crowds at the Terraces; and with crowds, there are usually commotions as well. Paula wanted to ensure that the survivors would have a respectful, calm environment, where they could discuss their feelings if they wished, or simply sit in relative silence. "It will be difficult," Paula says,

“it may be horrible, but we are all here to support each other.” Fela pipes up, “How can a memorial be horrible if we’ve survived the war?” she asks, and others agree.

On the afternoon of May 5, 2005, the service took place in the Terraces Auditorium. I arrived early to help Paula with the set-up. Maintenance staff had set up the room – tables and chairs in a long row at the front. There were two hundred chairs set up for the audience (figure 5.3). This was Paula’s fourteenth year organizing the ceremony and she knew exactly what needed to be done.



Figure 5.3. At the ceremony, resident survivors will sit at the long tables set up at the front of the room. The rows of chairs in the foreground are for the audience. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

What it looked like

Long tables with white tablecloths were set up horizontally at the front of the room. Three large black “mourning ribbons” were pinned to the middle and on each end of the table. Like the torn piece of clothing worn by mourners at a *shiva* house, these ribbons symbolize the collective mourners of the ceremony: audience and participants. A

banner hangs on the wall behind the tables, “Holocaust Memorial – Yom HaShoah – We Remember Never to Forget.” Thirty-one Terraces survivors would sit behind these tables, facing the audience, a card in front of them indicating the place where they survived (figure 5.4). Their names are on the back of the cards, so survivors can easily find their seats. As representatives of diverse Holocaust experiences, it is significant that the cards contain only geographical information of where they were. As each resident sits behind a card, the collective history trumps individual stories. Each survivor is metonymic for all who did *not* survive. And yet, each individual is recognized and honoured as well. The cards represent the diversity of Holocaust experiences – not all were in the camps, but the trauma they experienced reflects what Paula David describes as their “special and unique sense of self” (1999: 2).



Figure 5.4. The tables, cards and yartzeit candles set up before the Ceremony. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Furthermore, David suggests, “it is essential to be aware and open to the range and depth of pre-war experiences of the survivor as well as to their varied trauma uniquely experienced” (David 1994: 2). “Here’s who we call Survivors,” Paula announced at the earlier planning meeting: “If you were in Europe, any country that the Nazis occupied. If you were in hiding or had to go to Siberia.” She says this to validate their experiences. Many were in camps, others in exile or hiding. Some experiences spanned years and several places. Each card reveals glimpses, not of time or detailed experiences, but geography. Here are some examples of the cards:

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Maidanek, Ravensbruck

Warsaw Ghetto, Auschwitz, Mauthausen

Siberia, Stalingrad exile

Russian Exile, Bergen-Belson

Lodz Ghetto, Auschwitz

Budapest Ghetto

Hiding

Romanian Ghetto

While these only represent a handful of the thirty-one cards, they show the diversity of Holocaust experiences the residents endured. Terraces resident survivors come from various countries and cultures. The cards signify the literal myriad of places that are now tied to one place. As I take a short break from setting up, Mina Hauer – a resident, a survivor – wanders in. She sits down and we talk for a bit. She and her family – parents, brother, sister-in-law and their baby – were sent to a concentration camp in Transnistria.

Only Mina, who was a young thirteen years old at the beginning of the ordeal, and miraculously, her tiny nephew – survived. Mina recalls they were forced to walk to the camp, “I don’t know how many miles,” she pauses. “I want to forget.” By a twist of fate, her older sister, an early Zionist, had moved to Palestine and was spared the fate of her family. After many years apart, the two sisters ended up living at the Terraces – though they never seemed close. Mina walks over to see who she will be sitting next to, and is unimpressed that it will be someone from Romania. “Nothing happened there,” she says. I can’t help but smile, her words reflecting what I had already noticed: there is a curious competitiveness as many survivors tally up their experiences. Another poem, “The Survivor” from the Terraces Survivors Group *Collective Poems* (David 1995b) highlights exactly this:

It was worse in Siberia:

I went to work – thirty degrees below zero,

No clothes and two little children.

Just a little bread – a potato was a fortune.

We walked miles, it was hard to get up the hill.

And I was afraid to go down because it was slippery.

It was worse in Auschwitz.

There was no food – only snow.

There were guns and guards and dogs and executions.

It was worse in Buchenwald.

Everywhere there was the smell.

Everywhere there was the fear.
There was nothing to do, I could only wait.
And every day I waited to die.
It was worse in Bergen-Belsen,
No children could survive.
You couldn't hide,
There was nowhere safe.
Any survivor – every day was a miracle,
Sometimes in my dreams – I dream I don't know how I did it.
Whatever we did, we had to be strong.
You must be strong.
Wherever there was a Jew was a miracle.
Somehow I survived.

As Paula David notes, “The [Collective] Poems are a tangible testament to the members’ strengths and survival capabilities, and the Group hopes that the collective nature of the Poems will speak on behalf of other survivors unable to articulate their feelings” (David 1995a: 6). While many of the Poems depict survival, this afternoon the survivors will mourn those who were lost. Attached to each place card is a piece of ripped black cloth, symbolizing the collective mourning for all those who perished (figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5. Cards with black mourning ribbons. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

These are different from the large black ribbons which adorn the table. Those ribbons are stark, but decidedly decorative, neatly cut and tied. They may trigger an association with the ripped black cloth of mourners, but similar to mourning wreaths, they are not culturally specific. The ripped cloth on the card, on the other hand, refers specifically to the Jewish custom of rending the garment upon hearing of death. Nowadays, it is very common for Jewish mourners to wear a pinned piece of black cloth to their clothing during *shiva*. As Jenna Weissman Joselit points out, rending the garment lost favour, “despite its touted therapeutic value,” and “gave way to the more modern, resolutely genteel custom of discreetly substituting a black ribbon... for a glaringly ripped blouse, tie, or suit jacket” (1994: 281). Pinned on the card, it is as if all who suffered in Eastern Europe are mourning as well; individual names and facts are irrelevant. Behind each card is a second piece of ripped cloth. Once each resident takes her seat, she will pin it onto her clothing. The ribbons are material aspects of remembrance. Here individual mourning becomes public, and a reminder to all of their personal grief. Although Yom Hashoah is a

reinterpretation of *yartzeit*, one of the unique elements of the Terraces Ceremony, as seen by the mourner's cloth, is that it incorporates aspects of *shiva* as well. In front of each card is a *yartzeit* candle (figure 5.6), which each individual will light (or will be lit by Shawn or Bobbie) when her name is called.



Figure 5.6. Close-up of the yartzeit candles in front of the place cards. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Lastly there is a small table set up near the podium where Paula David will stand. The "tablecloth" is a *tallis* (prayer shawl). A glass vase with thirty-one white and red roses, stands next to a row of five yartzeit candles. Unlike the small candles in front of the place cards, these candles are in a tall jar (figure 5.7). Traditionally these longer burning candles (seven-day) are lit during shiva. This is another instance of the blurring of yartzeit, shiva, and the Terraces Yom Hashoah Ceremony.



Figure 5.7. Yartzeit/ shiva/ Yom Hashoah candles at the front of the room. Photograph by Shawn Fremeth.

Yom Hashoah Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony – 5 May 2005

Paula David makes the opening remarks, “The Terraces has more survivors in one place than anywhere in Toronto – if not in Canada. On this day of remembering, we should be proud to have so many survivors.” I am sitting near the back so I can see that almost all two hundred seats are full. Residents, family and community members, school children and Baycrest staff seem to be sitting unusually straight. The mood is pensive, sad, somewhat uncomfortable. Residents in the audience are dressed up for the occasion – skirts and pearls and a visit to the hair salon. Everyone shows the utmost respect. The survivors were seated before the Ceremony began; some look out at the audience, others keep their heads bowed down. After the opening remarks, one by one, social worker Shawn Fremeth and therapeutic recreationist Bobbie Cohen take turns bringing a microphone and a rose to each survivor.

"My name is Lea Nadler. I come from ghetto in Romania," she says, accent thick. Shawn lays the rose in front of the place card, and lights the *yartzeit* candle. Each resident speaks, few words, lots of emotion.

"I survived as a Gentile," a voice says quietly.

"I come from Poland, and I survived in Stalingrad and Siberia," says Fela, strong, defiant. She wears a striking black sweater with sequins and white geometric shapes. Her hair expertly blow-dried, lipstick and blush – unusual for Fela – she looks beautiful and proud. Many wear black, even though, notes Jenna Weissman Joselit, "wearing black was never a particularly Jewish practice" (1994: 281). Skirts and blouses, special jewelry, a hat. A few women wear a traditional lace head covering. As is typical at the Terraces, the women outnumber the men: there are only two gentlemen in the group. When the microphone is passed to Yolan Guttman, who survived Auschwitz, a man behind me whispers to his neighbour, "She's a hundred and three."

Candle Lighting

"I lit the candle with fire from my heart" --Terraces Holocaust Survivors Group

So many threads of traditional Jewish mourning customs were incorporated into the Yom Hashoah observance. While the black cloth worn by the survivors was subtle and may have gone unnoticed by an "outsider" eye, the performative nature of the candle lighting indicated to all that it was a noteworthy element of the ceremony. Candle lighting can be a marker to frame both religious and secular rites of passages, often involving life and death. Lighting and blowing out birthday candles indicate a new year for the living; on the other hand, it is Jewish custom to light a candle upon learning of

death, and again at the start of *shiva*. Unlike the ritual of blowing out birthday candles, the *yartzeit* flame must die out on its own. Thus, if, as Samuel Heilman suggests, the lingering light represents the eternal soul (2001: 137), then the act of blowing out birthday candles is an affirmation of life on earth. The Jewish custom of lighting candles however, bridges the dead with the living. Each year after death, a candle is lit once again for *yartzeit*, explains Heilman: “a sign that the dead has returned on this anniversary for a brief call on those who mourn, or as other commentators see it, a sign that it has emerged out of the darkness and now is in the light of paradise” (137). Aside from death customs, candle-lighting is significant in other aspects of Jewish culture: in many homes, candles are lit to frame the beginning and ending of the weekly Sabbath, and Hanukkah candles are lit for each of the eight nights of Hanukkah. Outside the home, candle-lightings are common at contemporary Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations – calling on significant friends and relatives to each light a candle during the evening festivities.

Of all the rituals that are performed throughout the ceremony, the candle lighting (individual and collective) is the most explicit, and some might argue, the most memorable. In fact, the *yartzeit* candle is the visual and material symbol of the ceremony: a photograph of a *yartzeit* candle adorns the printed program cover with the following words underneath:

As I light this Candle, I vow never to forget the lives of the Jewish men, women, and children who are symbolized by this flame. May the memory of their lives inspire us to live so that we may help to insure that part of who they were shall endure always.

There are two instances of candle lighting at the Terraces Yom Hashoah Ceremony. The first is the lighting of the individual *yartzeit* candles. Although they are lit on stage in front of an audience, lighting these candles seems to be a private act, as each candle “belongs” to the survivor who sits in front of it. Furthermore, lighting *yartzeit* candles is usually something that is only seen and done at home, in private. By lighting the candles on stage in front of an audience, Terraces resident survivors make their private worlds public, as they collectively light their candles, exposing their sorrow for all to share. The ritual of the *yartzeit* candle-lighting, and the power of the short narratives of the residents – where they came from, what they endured – are so powerful. Throughout, the audience remains visibly moved and silent.

After the candles are lit for/by the survivors, Paula David returns to the podium to call on participants to light the six remaining candles, which are lined up on the separate table, on a makeshift *tallis* tablecloth at the front of the room (figure 5.7). The symbolism of the *tallis* is two-fold: it is a symbol of prayer and belief, and it is also customary for an observant Jew to be buried with his *tallis*. Calling on various community members to light these candles, this act becomes public and represents the collective and public mourning and remembering, as opposed to the individual and private action of lighting the single *yartzeit* candles.

“On behalf of the one-point-five million murdered children,” Paula calls upon three school children, whose class had collaborated with the Terraces Holocaust Survivors Group. The three children each light a candle. Next, Paula calls upon a community member, Joe Gottdenker, “a child survivor, as well as the child of survivors”

to light a candle for the survivors who were unable to participate, who “didn’t have the strength” – emotional or physical to confront their experiences in such a public display. This includes Margo Engel, elegant and strong-spirited; she was just a little girl at the time. Though she is one of the most able of the residents, one of the “young-old,” she did not want to subject herself to the raw intensity of the ceremony. “It’s too much,” she said afterwards. Called to light the next candle, is the Terraces Maintenance Supervisor, Chris Gabriel, on behalf of the “Righteous Gentiles” – those who endangered their own lives by sheltering, helping, and ultimately saving Jewish lives. Finally, Paula call on Terraces resident Joseph Jurman, to light a candle on behalf of the Israeli soldiers.

The Pledge of Acceptance from the Second Generation, Kaddish, music and poems

When all the candles are lit, Paula calls on Mr. Gottdenker once again to read the “Pledge of Acceptance from the Second Generation.” As Paula explains, the Pledge: “to never forget the legacy of the survivors,” had been recited in Hebrew, English, Yiddish, French, Russian and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) at the closing ceremony of the World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 1981. It begins:

We accept the obligation of your legacy.

We are the first generation born after the darkness. Through our parents’ memories, words, and silence, we are linked to that annihilated Jewish existence, whose echoes permeate our consciousness.

We dedicate this pledge to you, our parents, who suffered and survived. To our grandparents, who perished in the flames. (Baycrest 2005b: 7)

Without sounding cliché, it is difficult to describe how powerful it was to hear the Pledge read out loud, in front of some thirty survivors and their peers. The survivors were looking straight ahead, thoughtful, strong, serious.

Everyone stands when silver-voiced cantor Gordon Lindsey sings the Kaddish (Mourner's Prayer). Always poignant, but especially so in this context, in the words of Barbara Myerhoff: "The continuity of remembrance is assured for the dead by the children's Kaddish prayers. And a community of mourners, an *Edah*, is created among those who recite the Kaddish, thus continuity is provided between all who have ever grieved for a loved one" (1978: 224). When the residents recite the Kaddish on Yom Hashoah, they collectively remember the victims who died at the hands of the Nazis, as well as remembering each time they have said Kaddish for individuals they have lost throughout their lives. The power of reciting this prayer, muses Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, is that it "call[s] up in paradigmatic fashion memories of the many contexts in which [it] has been performed" (1989: 330). As the Kaddish fills the room, I try to imagine the many memories that are recalled, the countless people who are remembered by this collective prayer. The multiple generations in the room also allow the residents a glimpse into the future, some kind of reassurance that they too will be remembered. The room is filled with raw emotion. Many of the survivors – and nearly everyone in the audience – are crying. Intense grief and sadness thickens the air.

The mood lightens somewhat when Dora "mit a husband" Borenstein is called to sing "In a Lithuanian Village" in Yiddish. Her voice is lovely and high-pitched, very

theatrical, full of nostalgia. Some residents smile, many continue to cry. Fela Karmioli, Mira Jafine, Mina Lauterpacht, Mina Hauer – all strong and sharp as nails – I had never seen them cry. “Beautiful, just beautiful,” said the gentleman behind me when Dora finished the song. So touching, so moving, to hear Yiddish, the tune, the voice. In this context, Yiddish transcends language. Gerontologist Marc Kaminsky recalls his grandmother’s explanation of Yiddish:

Not only a *mame-loshn*, a mother tongue, but a motherland. Because land we didn’t have, we couldn’t own, but Yiddish, and the things we could carry away with us in Yiddish, this nobody could take from us. So if I go back to my motherland now, if I go back *there*, it’s to sit down in the middle of a good conversation with a few people who aren’t *here*. (Kaminsky 1993: 88)

Towards the end of the service, Dora is called back to sing the Yiddish resistance fighters’ anthem, “The Partisans’ Song,” which previously I had only read about. “The old,” write Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin, “are a ‘primary source’ of culture and tradition in their families and communities” (1987: 74). To hear this anthem performed in this context is nothing short of extraordinary. Many of the survivors sing along through their tears.

While the ceremony was expectedly heavy and emotional, the group of school children in attendance represented hope, linking together the past, present and future. Throughout the course of the school year, these Grade Six students had participated in an inter-generational program with Terraces survivors; together they created a series of readings and poems based on their experiences. When the children are called to read, you can almost hear a collective sigh of relief. Nervous at first, a boy and a girl stood together side by side. They take turns reading several original collaborative poems, as well as a

letter the class composed for the Survivors Group. For many of the survivors, the presence and participation of the children are what make the Ceremony bearable. The children are the product of their survival. They are the future, those who will remember, and who will light candles one day as well.

To end the Ceremony, all rise to sing the Israeli national anthem, Hatikvah.

At the tea reception after the Ceremony, there is a heaviness in the room, but a feeling of triumph as well. While the Ceremony followed the basic structure of other Yom Hashoah services, it is so unique because of the active participation – and sheer number – of the survivors who attend. But this was not always the case. In an unpublished paper, Paula David describes how several resident survivors approached her after the 1992 Terraces Yom Hashoah Ceremony. They wanted to be more involved, to share their feelings and experiences, “but were not sure they could handle either the organizational aspects or the expected emotional strains involved in coming together on a regular basis” (David 1994: 1). Paula developed a support group, and since then, the group has worked together to create content and to share ideas about the presentation of the Ceremony, as well as to “ensure that as many places and people as possible will be included and recognized for the remembrance ceremony (ibid.: 8). I end this section with one more collective poem written by the Group: “Yom Ha’Shoa Holocaust Remembrance Day,” a moving account of their thoughts and feelings regarding the Ceremony:

The ceremony was beautiful.

It made me so proud that I was there.

I didn't think I could do it.
I would shake too much and cry.
If I started to cry with all the people watching,
My heart would roll away with my tears.
I don't cry at public affairs,
Only when I am alone at night
And my memories push into my head.
I cried,
But it was alright because I was with my friends,
And safe with the remembering.
When the Cantor said Kaddish,
I thought of all my family.
I was the only one left,
And I knew I had to stay standing.
When the children sang the songs from my family,
In our language,
My tears were good tears.
Thank G-d for the children,
They are the hope for why I survived.
It was very important that so many people came to remember,
Because everyone lost.
I lit my candle with fire from my heart,

Wondering how I am still here to do this.
I know when I looked at all the people,
I survived, so I could be strong.
I can never forget for one moment,
I didn't sleep that night.
But I wanted to stay safe in my bed with my memories,
Alone.
Tonight we knew we weren't alone,
We want to thank everybody for Yom Ha-Shoa,
Because only we know how important it is.
We are the Survivors (David 1995b: 35)

The poem was written in the meetings that followed the 1993 Yom Hashoah Ceremony (David 1994: 8). Building on the core participation of the resident survivors in the Ceremony, the regular meetings of the Survivors Group and the creation of their *Collective Poems* are a key element of the debriefing and healing process of the Yom Hashoah Ceremony. As Paula David remarks: "What historically was viewed as an emotional ordeal that residents felt obligated to participate in to pay tribute to the memories of their lost relatives, has changed its tone since the Survivors Group has become the core of the Ceremony" (1994: 9). The collaborative work of the Survivors Group provides a forum for survivors to express themselves outside of the emotionally charged ceremony. Some ten years after the poem was written, many of the resident survivors are slowing down. Paula says many of the original group members have died:

only four were left in 2005 (including Fela Karmioli), and interest in maintaining the group is waning. Nevertheless, they remain committed to participating in the Yom Hashoah Ceremony, as Fela says, “so that no one should ever forget.”

Death, mourning, remembering

The Terraces Yom Hashoah Ceremony and the Shiva Gathering are creative rituals that help residents cope with death, mourning, and remembering on personal and collective levels. In her working definition of ritual, Barbara Myerhoff suggests, “Ritual is an act or actions intentionally conducted by a group of people employing one or more symbols in a repetitive, formal, precise, highly stylized fashion” (1992: 129). Myerhoff also points out that ritual is separated from ordinary life through framing. Outside of the Terraces, *shiva* and Yom Hashoah commemorations are rituals in their own right. Inside the Terraces however, each of these gatherings reframes elements of traditional Jewish mourning customs to be relevant to the lives of the residents. Anthropologist David Kertzer suggests that the power of ritual is grounded in “a particular social group and in shared psychological associations and memories,” (quoted in Zeitlin and Harlow: 108). Furthermore, he points out that people create new rituals out of pre-existing symbols (ibid.). Yom Hashoah reconciles collective Jewish history with personal experiences; whereas the Shiva Gathering re-creates the traditional Jewish mourning custom of *shiva* to meet the needs of the Terraces residents. Each of these gatherings relies on individual and collective memory to bring meaning and energy into their present lives.

As Harvey Goldberg explains, “The concern for the perpetuation of memories reflects not only the individual facing his or her own demise, but the tremendous

dislocations that have affected Jewish communities over the course of the past century and a half" (2003: 221). Terraces residents re-create elements of family and community through their shared Jewish history and culture, as well as through their shared experiences of growing old; nevertheless, much remains that separates them, including religious beliefs, health, and where they came from. By giving residents an opportunity to bring to the foreground their individual experiences, Baycrest staff facilitate the confirmation of each person's self-worth and sense of unique identity.

Creative rituals like the Shiva Gathering and the Yom Hashoah Ceremony help residents to face death, mourning and remembrance in a supportive, familiar environment. Both programs contribute to the sense of family, culture and community shared by the residents, and rely on a combination of spontaneity, creativity and traditional Jewish culture. The Shiva Gathering came out of a need to acknowledge that residents have created a "home" and a "family" at the Terraces. The traditional shiva, which is observed in private home space, does not allow residents to mourn for one of their own at "home." The Shiva Gathering, observed in the public space of the institutional home, fills that gap. In this way, the Shiva Gathering strengthens the bonds between residents, and also provides a unique opportunity for family members to take part in the community their loved ones created. On the other hand, Yom Hashoah customarily is observed "outside" in public institutional spaces: synagogues, schools, community centres, museums – but here the Terraces invites the community "inside" into the institutional home, and highlights the individual in the collective. Both observances rely on traditional Jewish mourning customs, but both use these customs creatively to

meet the unique needs of the residents. Finally, these programs build bridges between community and the Terraces, the Terraces and family, and also strengthen bonds within the Terraces community.

Now I turn to the final chapter, which moves from staff-facilitated initiatives, to examine a unique program created and carried out by the residents, *for* the residents: a weekly Sabbath Tea.

Chapter Six: Performing Home – Setting Tables for the Sabbath Tea and the Ideal Tables of *The Jewish Home Beautiful*

The creative rituals discussed in the previous chapter were facilitated by staff members and steeped in Jewish tradition. They were performed collectively and yet were deeply personal to the Terraces residents. Through each of these gatherings, participants reaffirmed and strengthened their identities not only as Jews, but also they maintained their shared sense of community and family that comes from living together in a collective home. This final chapter moves from collective Jewish ritual expressions to a special group performance of a weekly Sabbath Tea, developed, implemented and run by residents *for* the residents. While other resident-organized gatherings exist: bridge or mah-jongg games, or “underground” Bingo, the Tea is an opportunity to socialize around a visit and food rather than a game. In the absence of being able to comfortably entertain more than one person in their apartment, women in the complex reconstruct earlier patterns of home visiting in the public space of the Terraces Fireside Lounge. Through their performance of the Tea, the women take ownership of the public homespace while they act out what it means to be a Jewish woman at “home.” But because the Tea takes place in the Fireside Lounge – a Baycrest “front region” that is also kosher – the Hostesses must adapt their own notions of tea and hospitality to suit the institutional kosher ideal. In this way, the Tea is also an attempt to create a *heimish* (“homey,” unpretentious) “private” gathering in an otherwise institutionalized “public” environment. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first presents a history, issues, and “snapshots” of the Tea. The second takes a close look at the material culture of

hospitality, specifically, table settings and ideal notions of Jewish domestic culture by examining the 1940s publication *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, a specialized guide to Jewish holiday customs, recipes and table settings. While at a glance the lavish table settings of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* and the disposable settings of the Sabbath Tea appear to be drastically different, in fact, the material objects are secondary; instead, what counts is the notion of home and the spirit of hospitality with which the offerings are made.

Tea, coffee, memory

While tea in Britain is a daily practice, an “established cultural pattern deeply entrenched in the daily life of English people” (Hazan 1980b: 498), tea drinking is likewise associated with many elderly Jews, particularly those from Eastern Europe. In fact, Robert Sternberg’s *Yiddish Cuisine* devotes a special section on “Tea,” claiming it “was the universal drink of the Yiddish-speaking world,” and always sipped from a glass (1993: 300; see also Myerhoff 1978: 67). As Sternberg points out, “The glass was extremely important because only by looking through the glass could you tell if the tea was as strong as you liked it” (301). Also, while British tea is commonly taken with milk, lemon is preferred for “Jewish” tea. When I discuss tea habits with Fela Karmioli, she has much to share. “And we would drink with sugar cubes,” she says. “A cube like this, in the side of the mouth,” explains Fela, pointing to her cheek, “and [you] drink a whole cup of tea with the cube inside the mouth” (21 June 2005). Sternberg recalls his grandmother and her cronies all did the same (300), and I have sweet memories of watching my own *Bubbe* drinking her tea with a sugar cube in her mouth as well. Fela says sugar was

expensive, but it was used everyday regardless. She and her parents and her brothers all drank tea, with sugar cubes, several times a day. With a joke for every occasion, Fela recalls one that her parents used to tell about tea and sugar cubes:

One man was living on the first floor, and [meanwhile] in the basement, somebody brought out the sugar. He [the man from the first floor] got guests and he had no sugar. And they're drinking, they're looking. "Drink, drink," [the host said,] down below you have sugar!" Down below – he was thinking "down below" [in the basement], and they thought "down below" in the glass! (21 June 2005).

Fela laughs as she tells the story, explaining that the man was too embarrassed to admit that he did not have sugar for his guests, so he sheepishly said the sugar was "down below," hoping they would think the sugar was already in the glass. The guests, expecting the sugar, and taking his word for it, kept sipping and did not want to challenge their host. The joke became part of the Przysuski family folklore. If ever they did not have sugar for their tea, Fela's parents would say, "It's down below!" As Fela talked about tea customs, her narrative moved from family life in Poland, to some of her life experiences in Europe after the war. In her study of an uprooted group of Jewish families that once shared a home in Algeria, anthropologist Joëlle Bahloul describes how memory is shaped by a past that is "meticulously re-created [by what was] *experienced* in daily life" (1996: 28). For Fela, the remembrance of drinking "a *gleizel* tea," (glass of tea) with lemon is what Bahloul calls, "a concrete experience [that] is structured in terms of two main fusing dimensions: domestic space and family time" (ibid.: 29). Furthermore,

suggests Bahloul, "Memory draws the boundaries of the family and domesticity by shaping within them local, regional, and international events" (ibid.). Fela's initial memories about drinking tea were focused around her childhood home, but they soon moved to her post-war experiences. "[At home] we would like to have a glass of tea," she says. "I didn't like coffee," she adds. "I don't know why. Just tea with lemon" (21 June 2005). After she mentions "coffee," there is a narrative shift. Tea is her childhood in Poland, whereas coffee is Paris after the war. "I guess it was 1948," she begins. "It was still rations. Let's see – milk, meat, coffee. In Paris, coffee was everything," she says. As Fela explains, she, her husband and two young sons lived in Paris for one year. They used food ration tickets to buy their groceries. Fela would sell her coffee to buy extra milk. "I had two little children," she explains, "You have rations, but not enough milk. So to buy on the black market was expensive" (ibid.). She never had a problem selling her coffee, so she always had enough milk for her children. When Fela and her family moved to Canada several years later, she tried coffee for the first time. "All my life, I didn't drink," she says, but after her first cup she was hooked. "Oy!" she exclaims, "I couldn't live without the coffee." We are sitting at Fela's kitchen table, with hot mugs of Nescafé coffee. Fela takes hers with so much milk, it is more like milk-coffee, whereas mine is a little stronger, but still very light. Although Fela enjoys coffee at home, at the Sabbath Tea she drinks simple hot water – also popular with many of the residents. "Now I don't like tea," she smiles. "You see how it's changed?" (ibid.). Tea, coffee, milk-coffee, hot water – for Fela, each drink she recalls is associated with key moments in her life, as well as shaped – as Bahloul suggests – by local, regional, and international events.

The Story of the Sabbath Tea

The Sabbath Tea began in 1995, when then 81-year-old resident Edith Kursbatt decided that Saturdays at the Terraces were often lonely – especially for residents who did not have family nearby to visit. As Edith explains:

It was very evident to me and my late husband that there had to be some sort of social life between residents, since there are no programs on the Jewish Sabbath. Which meant that those who were physically unable to go out with family or friends, or those who had no family to visit them, are alone. It was evident that something had to be created to bring them down from their rooms into a social atmosphere. (29 January 2004)

At the time, Edith had recently moved to the Terraces with her husband, Ivor. As I have pointed out earlier, coming from England, and then Montreal, not only did Edith not feel much of a connection to the other residents, but also, her family – children and grandchildren, lived far away: in Arizona and northern Ontario. I found it somewhat surprising that Edith initiated the Tea, as often she attempts to distance herself from the other residents. I vividly recall my first conversation with her, back in 1996, when I was conducting research for my undergraduate project about women's religious lives at the Terraces. When I mentioned that I was also interested in immigration stories, she was aghast. "Oh dear," she scoffed, with her distinctly British accent, "*I'm* not an immigrant. There are plenty of immigrants here who you could speak with, but *I'm* not one of them." While indeed Edith came to Canada as an immigrant from England, the term "immigrant" is not something she identifies with. To Edith, "immigrant" means *Eastern European* immigrant, a native Yiddish speaker, a "greenie" – all of which she is not. She is however, the daughter of immigrants, thereby making her a "second generation Jew." As Deborah Dash Moore explains, while immigration is a key event that defines the "first

generation,” the children of immigrants “relate only indirectly to that point of reference. ...they do not see themselves defined by it” (Moore 1981: 9). Accordingly, although Edith did indeed have an immigrant experience – from England to Canada, she was quick to differentiate her experience from the others, the *real* immigrants. About half the Terraces residents are “second-generation.” These Western-born Jews, children of immigrants, are a generation who sit on the fence between fierce Jewish pride and assimilationist values. Always aware of how she is perceived, Edith carefully chooses her words, her accent is practically affected, Hollywood-style British. Proud to be Jewish, but not an immigrant. Sophisticated, assimilated, that’s Edith. In the end, she allowed herself to participate in my project, and we have remained friends ever since.

While the Sabbath Tea was initiated because of a lack of programming on Saturdays at the Terraces, visiting with friends and family on Saturday afternoons is grounded in Jewish tradition. As historian Marion Kaplan explains, “For those who observed the Sabbath, this was an occasion for formal family ‘visits’ (1991: 122). Kaplan’s book, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* documents Jewish family and leisure life in Imperial Germany. She points out that Sabbath visits had their own set of rules, and stood out from regular visits between the same groups during the week. “The difference was the religious meaning of the day and the presence of husbands,” she writes. “There were formal rules as to how long one stayed and how much one ate; they also decreed that the visit would be reciprocated in due time” (ibid.). For observant Jews, visits on Saturday afternoons were common (and still are) after synagogue services. At the Terraces, although many of the residents (including Edith) are not observant, because

Sabbath is observed in the larger Terraces home, a social Tea is acceptable, as well as something that many residents identify with. In this way, the Sabbath Tea provides sociability for residents on a day when no programs are provided, as well as re-creates a popular domestic custom, which Edith and her contemporaries once practiced in their own homes. “A cup of tea, and some cake in the afternoon of the Sabbath,” says Edith, “is very common amongst Jewish people” (29 January 2004).

Because of Edith’s life experiences, from growing up in London’s East End, to rearing her own family in Oxford, she brings British know-how to the Sabbath Tea. A natural hostess, elegant and eloquent, with a crown of white hair, Edith has experienced a lifetime of entertaining friends and family – and strangers. As mentioned earlier, Edith grew up in a restaurant. Her parents, Jacob and Rose Sager, ran an eatery out of their home on Brick Lane – “it was off Whitechapel Road. We were London E1,” Edith recalls. Like New York’s Lower East Side, the East End of London was teeming with Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the 1880s through the 1930s. When Edith talks of her childhood memories, she is often unhappy, saying it wasn’t a “normal” family-life. Her parents worked around the clock, and her home didn’t really feel like “home” since it also was a public restaurant. “I always resented the fact that my parents didn’t have a private home,” she says. The restaurant was *glatt* Kosher, which means they prepared food according to the strictest definition of Jewish law. It was also open all day, serving, as Edith recalls:

Mostly men coming in from their workplace, coming in for breakfast in the morning, and then of course... for the dinner hour, which was mostly during twelve and one o’clock... And then there was tea hour in the afternoon, and of course there were late diners in the evening, just a few. But mostly it was the men

who came in the evening, single men who lived close by and had a room in somebody's home. (11 March 2004)

Her parents struggled in the early years. As Edith explained, "They had not been long in England, and were trying to learn English as best as they could" (ibid.). For the most part, the clientele was made up of Jewish male immigrants who had fled Eastern Europe after the First World War, at the tail end of the large wave known as the "New Immigration" (see Hyman 1991: 222). While Edith's parents remained in England, for many others, Britain was a "stopover," before continuing on to the United States – or Canada. Edith and her younger sister, Gertrude (Gertie), "were never in the restaurant – our parents didn't want us there," she explains. It was "not an atmosphere" for children – or women. Edith describes it as a male space: "In those days," she says, "ladies didn't go into restaurants... It was not the custom amongst our people, for ladies to do that." Edith's sense of propriety remains strong – this is evident by the rules and regulations that she created for the Sabbath Tea. To serve the Sabbath Tea, Edith came up with a system and insisted that the hostesses follow her "special rules." She explains, "It was necessary to have me in charge and be responsible for how this went along," (29 January 2004). Edith's rules ranged from safety: "People could not walk with a separate cup of anything hot...they could easily be knocked over by someone... and we did not want any accidents," to hospitality: "Two ladies [would be] at the doors that opened into the Fireside Lounge, wishing everybody a good Sabbath," (ibid.). Furthermore, "Two ladies would attend to each table. One would serve the hot drink, while the other would pass around the cake" (ibid.). That Edith started the Tea is interesting on many levels,

especially given her upbringing: living in a home that was “public” – she would have had lots of experience negotiating “home” in the public and kosher space of the restaurant.

Starting the Tea “was a little bit involved,” Edith says. Since it was not an official program, Edith had to devise a plan to fund it. Originally Edith thought the Tea would be for a small group, “if I could get fifteen to twenty people, though I doubted it, it shouldn’t be a very costly business,” she explains. At first she approached staff member, therapeutic recreationist Mara Swartz. In Edith’s words:

I explained what I wanted to do: to have simply coffee or tea and plain hot water. And serving a piece of cake or a cookie. And I said I would like to have two ladies working together, depending on the number of tables we’d have. One would pour and the other would pass the cake or cookies around. (29 January 2004)

The initial idea was well received. Baycrest would provide support staff to manage the food orders for the Tea, as well as to set up tables for the Tea. While Edith could assemble a volunteer hostess crew to set the tables and serve the cake or cookies, she still needed to secure funds to pay for the nosh – without food, the Tea would not succeed. One of her favourite sayings, which she learned from her father is: “You can’t have a naked cup of tea.” Mara suggested approaching the Residents’ Council (“the Council”) President, Moe Starr.

The Council is made up of a board of residents – each of the eleven floors of the Terraces has a Council representative who is elected by peers for a two-year term. The Council also has a president and a treasurer, and meets once a month in the Boardroom at the Terraces. While the Council President chairs the meeting, Terraces Director, Sheila Smyth co-runs each meeting; for it is also a designated time for residents to speak frankly

with the management. Topics at meetings run the gamut: from requests for a shuffleboard court, to discussions about building repairs, safety, and programs. Each year, the Council holds a large fundraiser: the Family Barbeque. Staff, residents, and their families are invited for a barbeque lunch and entertainment – usually with live music and special activities for the children. Funds raised and held by the Council are mainly allocated for taxi fare for residents to attend funerals and *shivahs*. When Edith approached Moe Starr about receiving Council support for the Tea, he liked the idea and brought it up at the next Council meeting. The Council approved and agreed to sponsor the first few weeks of the Sabbath Tea. No one knew it would become a seasonal weekly event and a much beloved program at the Terraces. The “Tea season” would coincide with the Jewish holiday calendar, from just after the High Holidays (September/ October) to just before Passover (March/ April).

The very first Tea was a huge success. “We didn’t have enough to go around,” Edith recalls. She was expecting maybe twenty-five people, and close to seventy-five showed up. Popular as it was, it did not seem economically possible for the Tea to be a weekly event. The Council could not afford to fund it indefinitely, and since it was a Saturday program, Baycrest would not fund it. Soon however, residents began to make donations for the Tea to carry on, “a most wonderful surprise,” Edith says. She insists that she never solicited funds; however, it became an unspoken rule that residents who attended the Tea would make donations in order for it to continue. Some made weekly donations of a dollar or two, while others donated a lump sum for the season. The rule was unspoken, partly because on the Sabbath it is unlawful to exchange and handle

money. Residents may make their donations during the week, but it is not uncommon for people to bring a couple of dollars each week to the Tea. When the hostesses go around to each table to wish everyone a “good Shabbos” (good Sabbath), they also discreetly collect envelopes. Like the elderly Jews from Jack Kugelmass’s study of the Intervale Jewish Center, the Tea Hostesses also turned a blind eye, *makhn zikh nisht visndik* (pretending not to know) about certain unorthodoxies in order to keep it running. As Edith’s co-Head Hostess, Ella Gilbert once explained to the tea volunteers: “They have rules for *kashrut* here – we have our own rules here. We don’t ask for donations, but we need them” (Fieldnotes: 11 November 2003). Or as Fela puts it: “They give us, we take – we don’t ask questions” (21 June 2005). In order to keep track of who made donations, the Head Hostesses would jot down the person’s name and apartment number on the envelope. Over the next couple of days, she would write and hand deliver thank-you cards for the donations, “whatever the amount,” Edith says. Despite the “discreet” collection, Edith stands by the official stance that the Tea is free and open for all to attend, “We wouldn’t want to deter anyone from attending,” she says. While the Tea needed funds from the Residents’ Council to begin, it soon became self-sustaining from resident donations. The largest donation to the Tea came from the family one of the original Tea Hostesses. After her death in the late 1990s – she lived to be over a hundred - her family donated several thousand dollars to the Tea fund. Such a generous donation underscores the significance of the Tea. In spite of the contribution, monetary funds for the Tea continue to remain a concern – and somewhat mysterious. It is unclear to the hostesses whether there is a separate Tea fund, or if it is all lumped together with the

Residents' Council fund. One November afternoon, early in the 2003 Tea season, Ella Gilbert, who at that time was the co-Head Hostess along with Edith, explained to the hostesses: "The Tea runs on donations – not from money from the Residents' Council." When someone asked how much is in the Tea fund, Ella said she did not know. Edith also did not know. Ella threw her hands up in the air, "I don't think it's fair," the group nodded in agreement.

Making It Happen

Here's how it works: The Head Hostess gives the Tea donations the Terraces administrative secretary at the Terraces Service Desk. Residents drop off rent checks there, as well as money from fundraisers they may participate in, such as jewelry or bake sales. Proceeds from fundraisers are earmarked either for the Tea Fund, or the Residents' Council Fund – although there remains a blurry line between the two. The Tea sustained itself for several seasons because of the one generous donation, but by 2005 funds had been dwindling. It costs one hundred and twenty dollars to run each Tea. This amount is deducted from the Baycrest Internal Cost Centre by Sharon Bizouati, the Kitchen Manager of the Terraces. The cost for the Tea includes the bakery items, as well as the tea, coffee, creamers and sugar. While the Tea remains unique as a resident-run program, it also receives in-kind support from Baycrest staff: housekeeping to set-up the tables and chairs, kitchen staff to order and receive the goods (because of the strict kosher regulations that govern the kitchen, all outside food orders must be signed off by the Kitchen Manager), and a staff liaison from therapeutic recreation. Since the nosh is not prepared in-house, it is ordered from a local kosher bakery. Once a month, therapeutic

recreationist Rivka Gellis meets with the Head Hostess to choose an assortment of treats from the bakery's offerings: cherry cake, cheese Danish, *rugelach* (little cookies rolled with chocolate or jam and/or nuts), apple strudel or Buffalo buns (rectangular-shaped rolled cinnamon-raisin yeast Danish, largely unknown outside of Toronto). Usually the Head Hostess chooses only one item per week, for example, cherry cake. The goal is to serve something different each week. Rivka fills out a monthly requisition form for Sharon, who is then responsible to ensure that the order comes in each week. Usually it is a smooth process, but not always.

“Everything it's money.”

In 2004, Fela Karmiol took over as the Head Hostess of the Tea. One afternoon she looks at the sad cookies and frozen squares of marble cake that she is supposed to serve at the Tea that day. “Garbage,” she says, shaking her head. “I’m going to Sharon and give her a little bit of hell,” she says in an animated way that only Fela can. She is spirited but angry. “Everything it's money,” she says (Fieldnotes: 28 February 2004). In addition to managing the kitchen operations, Sharon also books rooms at the Terraces for special events, such as weddings and bar mitzvahs. While residents are mostly satisfied with life at the Terraces, from time to time they feel frustrated by the services the Terraces provides to the outside community. As I discussed in Chapter Two, although the building is primarily a residence, it also serves its surrounding Orthodox Jewish neighbours with the small synagogue, as well as rooms for catered affairs. Furthermore, rooms may be booked for conferences or lectures for the larger Baycrest staff community. The room rentals and catered affairs are an additional source of income for

the Terraces, and the larger Baycrest Centre. Occasionally, Terraces programs or mealtimes may be changed in order to accommodate these events. Thus Fela's comment, "everything it's money," implies that for money, the needs of the residents have been overlooked. It is likely that the Tea order was at the bottom of the priority list, and hence, forgotten. In order to hastily ensure that the residents would at least have something to eat with their tea, Sharon must have pulled together whatever she could from the freezer. As a result, today the hostesses are disappointed and morale is down. Fela and her sidekick, Sara Rotbard, along with Mira Jafine discuss the situation mostly in Yiddish peppered with English. At one point, Sara exclaims: "They are putting us in the grave before we die!" Faye Fischler sits on her walker, her back hurts. "Oh, God," she says, nodding towards the group, and gesturing towards Fela in particular, "she doesn't stop talking." The ladies are grumpy and not looking forward to serving frozen leftovers today, but nevertheless, there is humour among them. "I'll pass out and you pass the coffee," Mollie Davis says deadpan.

While residents often make light of their health and health problems, there are serious moments as well. On the afternoon of November 22, 2003, ninety-year-old Ella Gilbert tells the hostess crew that she will be stepping down from her role as Head Hostess. "I have something to tell you," she says. The ladies are sitting around a table, there is a note of seriousness in the air. Ella announces that she has been diagnosed with uterine cancer. But not to worry, she says. "I'm an old person. In older age it's OK. Maybe I'll be OK and it'll be contained" (Fieldnotes: 22 November 2003). The women seem slightly unfazed. All in their mid- to late-eighties and nineties, cancer has in some

way touched every one of them. Elsie Kaye says she has survived cancer. "I went through it too," says Faye Fischler. Few words are exchanged but there is a sense of triumph in the room. Collective strength. Some are cancer survivors, others have lost loved ones – husbands and children – to the disease. Different experiences, prevailing strength. Her tone becoming more cheerful, Ella says, "I've always looked at things in a positive way." "You are very brave," Mira tells her. It does not take long before the discussion shifts from cancer and courage, to the arrangement of the cakes and cookies on the platter, and the importance of presentation. How it's presented is as important as what is presented, Ella explains. "The cookies gotta look nice on the platter," she says.

Physical and emotional challenges of aging

A few weeks later, on a cold December day, Edith and Faye stand in front of the long table by the wall, cutting cherry cake, which they will place upon platters with doilies. Ella is not at the Tea today. After the sad news about her cancer, she fell and broke her wrist. Her cancer surgery was postponed. Edith and Faye argue: "Look at how that's cut – look what you did; what kind of hostess would serve like this?" Faye complains. Mollie, out of earshot, says, "Too many cooks spoil the broth." Edith is clearly upset, not so much because she was criticized, but rather because she is frustrated with herself for being "sloppy." It is the physical effects of old age – arthritis, poor vision – that caused her less-than-perfect cake cutting, and she is angry that she cannot control it, she later tells me. She explains how exasperating it is to know how she *used* to do things, to *want* to do those things, but not to be able to control the signal from her brain to the tangible action. As noted in *The Grand Generation*, there are "a number of crises

facing all of us as we grow older: loss of physical vitality, the threat of isolation and loneliness, the shortening of the future, and the loss of stimulating and meaningful engagements” (Hufford, Hunt and Zeitlin: 29). For Edith, her decreasing hand-eye coordination makes simple tasks increasingly difficult: from cutting and arranging cake, to pouring a cup of tea. She has developed resourceful solutions, however, to cope with these challenges. For example, when pouring milk for her tea at home, she does not pull out the spout of the carton. The first time I saw her do this, my instinct was to correct her, “Wait,” I called out, “you didn’t open the spout.” Edith smiled and explained she keeps it like that on purpose, so the milk comes out just a little bit – it is her safety control.

Edith and most of her peers live in a constant paradox. It is a Jewish good wish to say, “May you live to be one hundred and twenty” – but is it a wish or a curse? In his memoir, *In My Father’s Court*, Isaac Bashevis Singer recalls his mother bestowing this blessing on an already old and frail woman. “God forbid!” was her response, “What good would such a long life be? The work becomes harder and harder – my strength is leaving me – I do not want to be a burden on anyone!” (1966: 34). This desire, to not want to be a burden, was a common refrain of so many Terraces residents. Sometimes when Edith would ask me for help, a trip to the grocery store, the mall, or even once, an appointment at a downtown hospital, she would break down a little bit, upset with herself for not being able to get there on her own. Countless times I would hear residents say ironically, “This they call the ‘golden years’?”; while Edith frequently remarks that it’s taking too long to get to her “final destination.” She is anxious to get there, she explains, to relieve the loneliness that occurs from outliving her close friends – both at the Terraces and from

before, as well as her husband and even her daughter. Another mixed blessing of living to old age – in fairly good health – is that although the faculties may be intact, the physical ailments people suffer make daily life uncomfortable. As Basha, from *Number Our Days*, shares: “Every morning I wake up in pain. I wiggle my toes. Good. They still obey. I open my eyes. Good. I can see. Everything hurts but I get dressed.... About tomorrow I never know. After all, I’m eighty-nine. I can’t live forever” (Myerhoff 1978: 1).

When I first met Mollie Teitchner, a dynamic Terraces resident, well into her nineties, and a regular Tea “customer,” she told me a story of being a young girl in Europe, and her relationship with an old neighbour, *Bubbe Rosa*. Bubbe Rosa would taunt Mollie about her youth: “You are young and beautiful now, but just you wait,” she’d say. “One day you’ll be old like me.” Mollie recalls laughing and thinking it was not possible that she’d ever be that old, or look like *that*. “I’m telling you this now,” Mollie said, repeating the same narrative many times over the course of my fieldwork “and one day, you’ll tell the same story to a young lady when you are old like me.”

One day at the Tea

This section takes the reader through a typical Sabbath Tea. It is a composite, based on eleven separate fieldnote entries that span a one-year period from November 2003–November 2004.

Setting up the room

The Fireside Lounge, where the Tea takes place, is a room adjacent to the main Dining Room. During the week, it is used for meetings, resident gatherings or programs. Sometimes it is rented out for conferences or lectures; in the evenings it may be rented out for family affairs. As its name suggests, there is a fireplace – although I have never

seen it in use. On sunny days, the room is bright and warm, with huge windows that look out onto landscaped grounds. To prepare for the Tea, a staff person from Maintenance sets up ten round tables with chairs for eight or nine; two long “prep” tables, where the ladies can cut the cake and arrange the platters; and two trolleys, one with the coffee thermos and coffee pots, the other for the plain hot water thermos, and tea pots. Mira Jafine sits at a table, folding napkins in preparation for the Tea (figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1. Mira Jafine folds napkins for the Sabbath Tea.

It is just after 1:30 and the Tea Hostesses have begun to prepare for the guests. The doors will officially open at 2:30, but the ladies will not begin to serve tea and cake until 3:00. I always enjoy the hour of preparation before the guests arrive. The ladies attend to their jobs. Sometimes the room is quiet, sometimes they chat amongst themselves in Yiddish or English. Today I overhear snippets of conversation: from commentary on a series of

Toronto Star articles about abuse in Toronto nursing homes, to news of which of their peers is in or out of the hospital. Always the hostesses are impeccably dressed. Skirts and blouses, jewelry, and hair recently set. Many Terraces residents get their hair done on Friday in order to look nice for the Sabbath. Here is a generation of women who have made a ritual out of weekly visits to the beauty parlour (see Furman 1997). This is still the case at the Terraces, at their on-site salon. Regardless of whether residents are religious or secular, "Shabbat [Sabbath]," as Ruth Hanff says, "is a special feeling" (22 June 2005). "I love it," smiles Rebecca Hoch, after she describes her Shabbos ritual of lighting the candles and make *brochas* (prayers) for the wine (or in her case, grape juice) and bread each week. "But I won't say I'm fanatical, I just like this part of it – but I won't say I won't go in the car if my daughter-in-law takes me out on Shabbos on Saturday¹²... I'm a hypocrite you see, but I do like this part" (7 May 2004). Rebecca speaks so warmly about Sabbath home rituals, and has many fond memories of her family and home. "I always go back in my mind to my younger days," she says. "Sometimes I think about when my husband did it... but sometimes I go back to when my mother made kiddush (prayer over the wine) and sometimes I go back to when I made kiddush in our own home" (ibid.). Consequently, as Jenna Weissman Joselit points out, for many American Jews, Sabbath was linked to domesticity and family time, more so than public worship (1994: 259). Furthermore, "at the grassroots level of American Jewish life," writes Joselit, "*shabbos* [Sabbath] was not experienced in devotional terms but in domestic, culinary, and sentimental ones" (ibid.).

¹² For observant Jews it is forbidden to drive on the Sabbath.

The ladies are so graceful as they move about the room. Everyone has a role: from folding napkins, to preparing the platters, to setting the tables (figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2. Mina Hauer sets a table for a Sabbath Tea.

The tables are set with Styrofoam cups, little white plastic plates, folded paper napkins, and sometimes forks. The ladies use their walkers to transport these things to each of the tables (figure 6.3). “It’s almost automatic,” Frances Cugelman remarks. “You do what’s necessary,” says Sara Rotbard. While the other hostesses prepare for the Tea, Freda Baum is busy finding chairs with armrests, and dragging them over to “her” table, the same one she serves each week. “There she goes again,” Molly says as Freda begins to lug the chairs across the room. Barely five-feet tall, short white hair, Yiddish accent and an impish smile, “I have to keep my customers happy,” Freda says. Each table has a “centerpiece” of a basket set upon a coloured napkin (figure 6.4).



Figure 6.3. Elsie Kaye uses her walker to transport plates of lemon slices to each table.



Figure 6.4. Centrepiece basket on a yellow napkin: creamers, sugar, Sweet 'N Low, stir sticks, and a plate of lemon slices.

The small wicker basket is filled with sweetener and sugar packets, creamers, and stir sticks, along with a small plastic plate with lemon slices. On this particular day Edith oversees the operation. “Mina, where are the rugelach? I told you to put five on a plate.” “There are no rugelach,” Mina replies, annoyed. “I meant ‘nothings,’” Edith corrects herself. “Nothings” are little Jewish cookies, also known as “air” cookies, or *kichel*. They contain very little sugar, and thus are popular with the diabetics who come to the Tea. Meanwhile, Mollie Davis and Sara Rotbard cut honey cake into pieces, which they arrange artfully on a platter with doilies (figure 6.5).



Figure 6.5. Sara Rotbard (R) and Mollie Davis arrange honey cake on platters.

At one point, Danny from Housekeeping steps in and says: “Be careful with the cake this week. Last week I spent two hours cleaning the cherry off the carpet.” “It’s true,” Fela says, “last week they were grabbing cake and making a mess.” When they are finished

setting up, the ladies sit for a break (figure 6.6). “I have no strength,” Sara Rotbard says, exhausted. This is “down-time,” when the hostesses kibitz and rest up before the Tea; it is also a time when the Head Hostess might make announcements, or give a pep talk to the volunteers.



Figure 6.6. Once the tables are set and the cake is cut, the Tea Hostesses take a break before the guests arrive.

One week, Edith and her co-leader Ella Gilbert spoke encouragingly to the hostesses: “The Tea is a success because of the devotion of our volunteers,” Edith tells her crew. “Some were ninety-five when they started,” she says, implying that age is irrelevant. Ella joins in, “We’re pleasing the people,” she says encouragingly. “We did beautifully last week,” she remarks. “a hundred and twenty dollars.” The hostesses smile, nod, and clap their hands. There are about a dozen regular hostesses. Most have been volunteering with the Tea for several years. At the beginning of each “Tea season” the Head Hostess calls a meeting to recruit new volunteers. Unfortunately, most residents would prefer to attend

the Tea than to serve it. As Fela says, “It’s hard work. You run with the tea and the coffee the whole time” (21 June 2005). This is especially challenging for residents with walkers. “Ten years ago it wasn’t like this,” recalls Fela. “Now, they have walkers. I can still walk without a walker. OK,” she says. “Even the new residents,” she sighs, “they are already three quarters dead.” Nevertheless, the volunteer hostesses continue their work. “Girls,” says Ella, “everything has been running, *kineinehora* [popular Yiddish saying, literally, “no evil eye”] so beautifully – just keep up the good work!”

The Walker Parade

Although the Tea does not officially begin until 3:00, residents begin waiting in the hall outside the Fireside Lounge about an hour before. It is a fairly narrow hallway, and some residents – the early birds – line up their walkers like chairs against the walls and sit, waiting for the doors to open (figure 6.7).



Figure 6.7. Residents sit on their walkers in the hallway, eager for the Tea to begin.

Other residents wait in the more comfortable lobby down the hall. At 2:30, Fela says "I'll let them in now," as she opens the doors and the walker parade begins. Fela and Sara stand at either side of the doors, "Good Shabbos," they say. "Shabbat Shalom" – Yiddish and Hebrew greetings respectively, smiles and nods. Residents slowly fill up the room. Like a high school cafeteria, some tables are instantly filled with talkative friends, while other tables draw a mix of people who may not be looking for anyone specific, just some kind of company. Some are loners with few – if any – friends. During my fieldwork experience, I did not notice overt personality conflicts between residents, but I did notice some patterns regarding residents who were often alone. Either they were strong personalities, somewhat brazen, or they were less healthy and/or abled than their peers. When I discussed this informally with social worker Heather Lisner-Kerbel, she remarked, "Many residents don't like to be around those who don't seem well – as if they'll somehow 'catch' it." We were talking specifically about Rachel Kaplan, who is always alone. While she attends several programs a week, and sits in the main lobby during the day (rather than alone in her room) – her near blindness, and her difficulties hearing make it challenging for other residents to communicate with her. One-on-one she is delightful, funny, lucid, smart and interesting. She has the voice of a cartoon character with a Yiddish-New York accent (Rachel moved to New York after the war and lived there through the late 1970s.) But her peers do not have the patience to have a conversation with her. She is so near-sighted that she is not able to recognize anyone who is not directly in front of her, and it is necessary to speak in a very loud voice with her as well. It is especially lonely for Rachel because she *wants* to be around people, makes an

effort, but her attempts are futile. Consequently, Rachel is alone most of the time – even at the Tea, where though she sits at a table with others, she is not included in conversations. The lack of patience demonstrated by her peers is disheartening. Rachel is aware that people don't speak to her because of her impairments; she is sad about it, but accepts it, and continues to attend programs to battle her loneliness. On the other hand, Ruth Hanff attended the Tea several times before deciding it was not for her. "It really didn't give me the feeling of Shabbat" (22 June 2005). Ruth thinks the Tea is a valuable program, "It is important to get together," she says. "We live here and this is our community" (ibid.). But whereas Rachel prefers to be "alone" in a crowd, Ruth prefers to be alone in her apartment. Like Rachel, she has a hearing impairment so it is difficult to join in conversations. "I'm sitting there like a dummy," she says. "It felt very uncomfortable for me to sit with other people, and it is becoming more difficult. Much, much more difficult. [The Sabbath Tea] stands for a good thing, but it's not for me," Ruth insists. Despite her words, Ruth occasionally attends the Tea and converses with her peers.

By 3:00, a lively buzz fills the room (figure 6.8). The hostesses, in teams of two, begin to serve. They serve the same tables each week regardless of who sits where. The two tables that remain consistent are the "Hungarian" table, and "Freda's" table. As mentioned earlier, "the Hungarians" are one of the most distinctive subcultures at the Terraces. Separated by language, culture and history, these residents generally stick together. They have their own social club, and often do not socialize with the other residents. Many of them do not speak English very well, if at all, nor do they speak

Yiddish. As such, it was a testament to the success of the Tea that this group faithfully attends each week. They always sit at the same table at the back of the room however; so even though they attend the Tea, they still separate themselves from the other residents. The women who sit at “Freda’s” table are mostly Canadian-born: Bert Davis is a regular, along with Pearl Meyer, Evelyn Frankel, Dorothy Moses and Yetta Freedman. They are all in relative good health, and rarely miss a Tea.



Figure 6.8. Tables are filled and a lively buzz fills the air.

Serving Tea

For the most part, Tea guests do not sit at the same tables each week. The hostesses, in pairs, however, attend to the same tables – regardless of who sits where. At serving time, each of the pair has a specific role: one brings around the tray of goodies, while the other pours the coffee, tea, or hot water (figure 6.9). Most residents take their tea “Jewish style,” clear with a slice of lemon. Many also enjoy plain hot water and lemon, or “half and half” – half tea or coffee and half hot water. When they are tired the hostesses sit off to the sides on their walkers and chat with each other. On either side of

the room are the trolleys with the coffee and tea stations. Elsie Kay is the “coffee lady,” while Mira Jafine is in charge of the tea and hot water. One of the hostesses brings an empty cup to the “tea station,” with the intention of filling it with hot water. “Not in a cup!” Mira says. Sara overhears and joins in reprimanding the hostess: “No one is allowed to walk with tea!” – or any hot drink – in a cup. “It could spill,” she says. Frances listens and nods in agreement. Fela looks around the room and suddenly calls out, “Frances, your table is waiting for coffee and cake. I have to watch each table, oy!” Frances attends to her table right away, though her steps are slow and steady – like most of the other hostesses, she normally uses a walker, but not while serving.



Figure 6.9. Esther Haberman with a tray of goodies; Mina Hauer follows with a pot of coffee.

Over by the coffee station, Mina Hauer brings her coffee pot for a refill. "They make me crazy," she says, nodding towards her table. "The coffee's not hot enough." Her accent is thick: part European, part Yiddish. She wears a silk blouse, pressed slacks, dark sunglasses, and perfectly set hair. She always looks glamorous and reminds me of someone who might have lived in Miami Beach or California – somehow she seems out of place in Toronto. She calls me "darling," and is often seen socializing with the few male residents of the Terraces, kibitzing and playing cards.

During the Tea, the hostesses remain in their roles. Although they have friends among the guests, they do not sit at their tables, remaining "on duty" for the duration of the Tea. They chit-chat with each other, and keep an eye out for the needs of the guests. Serving is tiring, so in-between they sit on their walkers and take in the action.

Winding Down

On a sunny day in March, one of the tea guests began to sing. It is Mrs. Abramovitch. Her voice is high and shaky. Unique. Haunting almost. "We call her 'the singer,'" says Mollie Davis. I am intrigued and soon learn that Mrs. Abramovitch (Faige) is known for her singing. She tells me her father used to perform in Yiddish theatre in Poland. She knows dozens if not hundreds of songs by memory. While she sings there is a slight hush in the room, as guests are trying to figure out who is singing. Some join in to sing the familiar Yiddish songs, while others continue with their conversations. At around 3:45 the Tea begins to wind down. As the room clears out, the hostesses sit down for a hot drink and a piece of cake. Mostly everyone has left save for a few friends who

kibitz in Yiddish. Fela joins them, always the entertainer, telling a story – or a joke – that soon has everyone doubled over in laughter. The hostesses sit down to enjoy a piece of cake and a hot drink. “Oooh, that’s nice,” Frances says, sipping her hot water with lemon. “Not bad,” Mollie says, assessing the apple cake. Everyone is tired. By 4:00 the room has cleared out, and the hostesses are left to clear the tables. Esther Haberman rolls a big garbage can around to each table, and the ladies all pitch in to throw away the garbage. Elsie Kaye collects the lemon plates on her walker and places them on the long table where the cake is. When there is leftover cake, the hostesses bring pieces up to their rooms, in little plastic containers which they bring down especially for this purpose. Sometimes they bring extra goodies over to the Health Centre, to the nurses and staff on duty. The baskets of sugar, creamers and stir sticks all are recycled for next week, transported to the long “prep” tables on walkers. The tablecloths are removed and placed in a pile (figure 6.10). The hostesses say goodbye and slowly make their way up to their rooms.



Figure 6.10. Tea is over and tables are cleared.

Serving the Sabbath Tea is a lot of effort for these women, and builds on a lifetime of women's work (see Strasser 1982; Shapiro 1995: 13). As wives, mothers and household managers, the Tea Hostesses re-create notions of private domestic culture, creating meaningful space, and community at their Baycrest home. The next section takes a closer look at the material culture of hospitality, namely, table settings.

Table settings and hospitality

Edith stepped down from her role as Head Hostess of the Sabbath Tea in 2004. Her health had deteriorated to a degree that she felt she was no longer able to attend the Tea, even as a "guest." When Fela took over the Tea, Edith was pleased to see the program continue, but she often expressed that it was not the same as when she was in charge. She thinks the hostesses are no longer as careful about serving as they once were. "This is a home, it should be like a home," Edith sighs. About one hostess in particular she says, "She just throws the cake at the tables, like she's doing them some kind of favour" (Fieldnotes: 2 June 2005). When Edith was the Head Hostess, she took great pride in arranging the platters. The Tea Hostesses would travel to each table with a platter and serve each guest a piece of cake. When Fela took over, one of the changes she made was that each hostess would bring a small platter to each table, but would leave it there, for the guests to help themselves. "It's not that it had to be the English way," Edith says about the changes. "It's not that at all. It's *how* she says it, *how* she does it" (29 January 2004). On the other hand, Fela thinks her approach is more *heimish* (homey). Clearly, these women have different styles and approaches to hospitality – Edith's version tips the scale on formality, whereas Fela is more interested in keeping it casual. Despite their

different approaches, they each try to create an atmosphere of home, and to instill the spirit of hospitality into their public lives at Baycrest. Although hospitality is universal, it has a special meaning in Jewish culture. As writer and Yiddish maven Leo Rosten points out:

One of the outstanding *mitzvas* and virtues, among Jews, is hospitality. It was drilled into me, as a child, how wonderful it is to be a host, and how alert and attentive one must be to the needs and “good time” of anyone who enters one’s home. The food offered a guest must be as abundant as and costly as one can possibly make it – even if (as was often true) a family had to “go without” for many a day to come. *Hachnoses orchim*, an important, recurrent Hebrew phrase for hospitality, was Abraham’s salient virtue. (Rosten 2003: 279-280)

For the Tea Hostesses, serving tea and cake within the restrictive boundaries of the Terraces presents challenges, but nevertheless they expend a great deal of energy to make it happen each week. Consequently, claiming public space as homespace is difficult, but empowering. “It’s hard work,” says Fela. “You run with the tea and the coffee the whole place.” Some women, like Edith, had to give it up. Still strong, Fela has no plans to stop any time soon. Here of course, the hosts and guests all live in the same “home,” yet for the duration of the Tea, guests and hosts have clearly defined roles. One of the aspects that sets the afternoon apart is the setting (and clearing) of the tables. This act can be seen as a ritual frame (see Goffman 1974).

The hostesses go through great pains to set the tables according to an aesthetic standard that would make Martha Stewart proud. That the cups were Styrofoam and the plates plastic, were essentially unimportant. The hostesses did not seem to be concerned with material objects, but rather, they focused their energies on presentation. As Ella once said, “Remember, the cookies gotta look nice on the platter.” Between the 1880s and the

1950s, Eastern European Jewish immigrants, eager to Americanize, were especially concerned with etiquette and social niceties. These “matters of manners and morals” were used “as vehicles of acculturation,” suggests Jenna Weissman Joselit (1990: 21). To illustrate her point, she refers to the published response to a question about table etiquette in the Yiddish newspaper, *The Forward*. As Joselit notes, Abraham Cahan, the well-respected newspaper editor likened “etiquette to a ‘veritable *shulkhn arekh*’ (literally a ‘set table,’ the title of the Jewish compendium of ritual law,” directly connecting secular codes of behaviour with assimilation (ibid.). Wrote Cahan, “It is remarkable how these rules are learned here and observed in every house, like something holy...” (quoted in Joselit: 21). For Edith, Fela, and the Sabbath Tea Hostesses, these rules seemed paramount as well. Where they learned the rules is not known, but perhaps they were familiar with some of the popular guides and manuals of Jewish domestic culture that were published in the 1930s and 1940s. With titles such as *The Rites and Symbols of the Jewish Home*, *The Jewish Woman and Her Home*, and *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, these publications “became widely consulted household staples” (Joselit 1990: 50), not unlike the popular (albeit not Jewish) “home” and “lifestyle” magazines that are so widely available today.

The Jewish Home Beautiful

First published in 1941, *The Jewish Home Beautiful* urged every Jewish woman “to assume her role as an artist, and on every festival, Sabbath and holiday, to make her home and her family table a thing of beauty” (Greenberg 1955: 13-14). The book, part instructional for holiday table settings, part guidebook for Jewish customs and holidays,

and part script for a dramatic pageant, is an ode to domestic Jewish culture, as well as a plea for Jewish women to preserve religious customs and tradition at home. In the Introduction, Greenberg claims:

Jewish mothers of today have not lost their desire to introduce beautiful pageantry into their homes. But they have turned to foreign sources for their inspiration. The attractive settings offered by our large department stores and women's magazines for ... non-Jewish festive days have won the hearts of many of our women who either through lack of knowledge or of imagination have failed to explore the possibilities of our own traditions. (1955: 14)

Chapters include narrative and dramatic versions of the pageant, production notes, and directions for setting the tables, as well as instruction regarding domestic rituals – music, prayer, and food – that accompany each holiday. The book was geared primarily to young brides and young mothers, encouraging them to take pride in domestic traditions, while emphasizing the modern Jewish home as well. Although the Sabbath Tea Hostesses were not necessarily familiar with the book, they would have been young brides when it came out, and thus would have been the intended audience. Also, their spirit of hospitality matches with that of the authors.

The tables are the stars of *Jewish Home Beautiful* (figure 6.11). Not only as stages for Jewish rituals to be performed: lighting the Sabbath candles and presenting holiday foods, but also these were tables of mass consumption. Writes Greenberg: “These beautiful settings of tables covered with the finest in linen, silver and food, reflect the painstaking love with which all of us should approach our task” (1955:14). Artistic and aesthetic expression for Jewish material culture was at its peak, along with newfound spending practices that were the result of economic and cultural integration into American society.



Figure 6.11. Elaborately and beautifully set Shabbat table from the pages of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* (Greenberg and Silverman 1955:63).

As Andrew Heinze's thoughtful study reveals, the role of Jewish women as managers of household expenses "smoothed the transition to a new way of life and emphasized the importance of new products to the cultural adjustment of Jews" (Heinze 1990: 105).

This brings us back to the notion of women's work, and the vast experience of the Sabbath Tea Hostesses. In fact, as Heinze points out, "The dynamic role of women in Jewish domestic life was summed up in the concept of the *baleboste*" (106). There is no English equivalent of this term, explains Heinze, but it is a Yiddish adaptation of a Hebrew word which means "owner of the home," furthermore, it "implies the control of a household" (ibid.). I remember my *Bubbe* once called me a "little *baleboste*" – with great pride – after I showed her my exemplary sweeping skills. With *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, the authors hoped to make *balebostes* of a new generation of Jewish women.

Along with the emphasis on domestic skills and Jewish tradition, a close look at the suggested table settings in *The Jewish Home Beautiful* underscores the significance and merging of Jewish home culture with a new aesthetic sensibility. Take for example, the Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) entry:

Table is set for dinner for six people – attractive china, silver, glassware, goblets and wine cups. The color scheme should adhere to white as much as possible, white tablecloth and napkins, white flowers for the centerpiece, white candles in the handsome silver candlesticks. (68) (see fig. 6.12)

The precision for aesthetic detail and popularity of color-coded meals had been fashionable in America since the early 1900s. As Laura Shapiro notes, “color-coordinated meals were praised for being artistic as well as pragmatic, but what they represented most of all was the achievement of an extraordinary degree of control in the kitchen” (84). Combining this domestic mastery and trends, along with imparting Jewish customary knowledge was what made *The Jewish Home Beautiful* so successful.



Figure 6.12. Beautiful Rosh Hashanah table setting (Greenberg and Silverman 1955: 20).

Recipes were also included in *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, consisting of traditional holiday foods, such as the fruit or poppy-seed filled *hamantaschen* cookies for Purim, or potato pancakes (“latkes”) for Hanukah; as well as other dishes, like the “menorah vegetable salad,” or the “individual candle salad,” which are not traditional, but whimsical – and truly inspired by the holiday. The directions for preparing the “menorah vegetable salad” explain how to create a dish that looks like a menorah – the nine-armed candelabrum that is lit during the eight days of Hanukah. The instructions suggest using asparagus tips to represent the candles, and mashing egg yolks with butter, “rolled into tiny balls, with a point at one end” to represent the tip of the flame (Greenberg and Silverman 1955: 101). This decorative salad is more about aesthetics and presentation than about taste or tradition. Other recipes are Eastern European Jewish standards, like chicken soup and chopped herring, while others yet, though traditional, introduce a modern take on the preparation. The rugelach recipe, for example – delicious jam-filled rolled cookies – explains: “Here is a raised dough recipe minus the bogey of countless hours of rising and endless kneading. The method is not traditional; in fact, it is quite modern, but as long as the finished product is just like mother’s, does it matter?” (121).

Through recipes and holiday table demonstrations, *The Jewish Home Beautiful* combined modern Jewish domesticity and traditional Jewish holiday practices, emphasizing a new Jewish aesthetic and celebrating Jewish domestic customs through table settings in an age of modernization and consumption. By juxtaposing this 1940s guide with my earlier ethnographic account of the contemporary Sabbath Tea, I have

bridged the significance of hospitality and domesticity in Jewish culture through time and space. For the young Jewish women of the 1940s, hospitality and the aesthetics of table setting were ways to maintain tradition while tapping into the consumer culture of their time; for the older women of the Terraces, hosting the Sabbath Tea not only celebrated Jewish custom and hospitality, but also created a link between established Jewish domestic practice, the creation of home, and easy sociability between friends and neighbours. Each week, as I watched the hostesses clear the tables, and literally throw the settings away, it became evident that table settings were in fact a spatial issue. For all the fancy tablecloths, china cups and crystal glasses in *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, for the Tea Hostesses, these material objects no longer held the value they once did. As Gerald Pocius learned from his study of the space and material culture of Calvert, Newfoundland, "Incorporation of new objects into a culture did not necessarily mean that they would have a negative impact, and in fact, they were often accepted because they appropriately coincided with existing values" (2000: 11). When I first started to think about the Sabbath Tea, I felt that the women were forced to compromise their aesthetic ideals in order to serve the Tea in the public, kosher space of the Terraces. I knew that many had lovely teacups and serving pieces in their apartments, and I resented that they could not use their own pieces in their own "home." As I thought about it more and more, it became clear that in spite of the disposable nature of the plates and cups, the "existing values" of the Tea and table settings are *not* the material objects and consumer products, but rather the creation of home through hospitality – whether the cake is served on a plastic plate or a china platter. The domestic ideal is not material, but rather spatial. Fela

Karmioli sums it up like this: "You see, these people coming. And they are sharing friendship, they're getting closer. And they're sharing a tea and cake and it's a wonderful social afternoon" (21 June 2005).

Conclusion: Feeling at Home

This thesis has shown how people integrate their many selves: religious and secular, past and present, communal and individual, caregivers and those who need care. All of these come together in ways that allow residents to create a sense of “home” where they live, even if that is an institution. At the Terraces, “home” is distilled to its essence: people, self, narratives, and an understanding of the past into the present. Home, then, is not the physical place – not the institution and not the private apartments – but how these spaces are created and imbued with meaning. As Gerald Pocius suggests, even without artifacts, these things continue. Home is about process. “The past,” he writes, “lives in memory, and centers around the activities of human beings in particular places” (1991: 28). Feeling “at home” for Terraces residents combines community and interpersonal relationships, shared age and ethnicity, personal and collective memory, and ritual performances. This thesis has shown that Terraces residents create home in four ways: 1) by how they use and claim ownership of both front and back, and public and private spaces of the institutional home; 2) by the material culture which they use to personalize their private spaces; 3) by their performance of domestic and creative rituals in public and private spaces; and 4) by their social relationships and shared ethnic and cultural identities (Jewish and elderly).

The historian Deborah Dash Moore remarks that 1950s second-generation Jews felt “at home” in New York City by creating Jewish communities: “They turned to their neighborhoods to translate what Jewishness meant into a livable reality and to their public institutions to give expression to the varied content of Jewish ethnicity” (1981:

233). This sense of “home” is understood not by private dwellings, but by “Jewish associationalism” that is underscored by the social networks that make up these neighbourhoods. Similarly, the Terraces is a neighbourhood, where residents (neighbours) are connected by their shared social and cultural identities: age and ethnicity. While it goes without saying that age is the main reason for moving into the Terraces, equally important is the fact that it is a Jewish institutional home. As I discussed earlier in this thesis, an informal survey noted that one hundred percent of the residents chose to live at the Terraces because it is a Jewish home (David 2000: 11).

When I asked Ruth Hanff to define “Jewish home,” she responded as follows:

Here at the Terrace – I’ll tell you something: I *feel* so Jewish. Nobody has to tell me this is a Jewish home. For me it’s kosher and a Jewish environment. The other [retirement homes] don’t convey the spirit of this place. It’s a Jewish place. Definitely Jewish. How can you describe it? It’s – I’m not Orthodox. I’m not *frum* [observant]. But that doesn’t matter. I’m not less Jewish because of it. I feel so Jewish.... I can’t even define it. It’s just Jewish. (Hanff: 6 May 2004)

Ruth struggles to define “Jewish home,” but articulates that it is conveyed through “spirit.” It is a “feeling,” she says, several times. Interestingly, she does not mention material objects, even though to an insider, these would be the most obvious markers of a Jewish home. Her statement that she is not “less Jewish” because she is not Orthodox acknowledges the diversity of Jewishness at the Terraces, while implicitly suggesting that she is *comfortable* with her own degree of Jewishness within the Jewish institutional home. The idea of comfort underlies Ruth’s feeling of Jewishness, of being an “insider,” and of being “at home.” For Ruth and others at the Terraces, Jewish identity, home and comfort are key elements that contribute to their living and aging well.

In Home: The Short History of an Idea, professor of architecture Witold Rybczynski sets out “to discover... the meaning of comfort” (1986: vii). In explaining why he pursued this project he recalls that the subject of “comfort” came up just once in his six years of architectural education (ibid.). It was not until he and his wife were building their own home, that he began to realize what had been missing from his training (to the detriment of his clients’ wishes) – partly because “comfort” did not mesh with modern architectural ideals. In writing the book, Rybczynski discovers that indeed comfort is a necessary facet of domestic well-being, as well as a cultural construct that has developed over time. “It has a past,” he notes, “and it cannot be understood without reference to its specific history” (230). In comparing the historic continuum of comfort to the layers of an onion, Rybczynski writes: “new ideas about how to achieve comfort did not displace fundamental notions of domestic well-being. Each new meaning added a layer to the previous meanings, which were preserved beneath. At any particular time, comfort consists of *all* the layers, not only the most recent” (231). This description of comfort, like Jewishness, aging, and the meaning of home for the Terraces residents, brings the past into the present.

As Terraces residents construct their present homespace, they do so while connecting with their past. “A Jewish home,” says Rebecca Hoch, “means continuing Jewish customs. If you break away from these customs, it’s no longer a Jewish home.” (7 May 2004). While I expected to see Jewish ritual objects in the residents’ homes, I was somewhat surprised that so many residents continued to use them. In Jenna Weissman Joselit’s overview of Jewish domestic culture from 1880-1950, she suggests that over

time and through different physical settings, “the home played host to changing notions of Jewish domestic culture” (1990: 23). From a historical perspective, she attributes changing attitudes towards Jewish home-based rituals in part to patterns of immigration and assimilation. Furthermore, her discussion of domestic matters focuses on “family solidarity” and how home-based rituals may or may not be transmitted from generation to generation. Because Terraces women were now living on their own after having raised their families in their previous homes, initially I imagined these Jewish ritual objects were displayed for aesthetic and/or sentimental reasons. This was not the case. Rebecca and others at the Terraces continue to light Sabbath candles alone in the privacy of their homes; not for the next generation, but rather, for continuity in their own lives. Here the fluidity between home, Jewishness and aging becomes clear, as these rituals imbue their homes with meaning. As Rebecca Hoch describes her Friday night ritual of lighting the candles and chanting the Kiddush, she sings the prayer out loud: “*Yom hashishi. Vayechulu hashamayim vecha-arets...*” She smiles: “I sing it in my father’s – *olav hasholem* [may he rest in peace] – tune, not my husband’s,” she says somewhat sheepishly (7 May 2004). As I mentioned in my thesis, when Rebecca sings the Kiddush, she is brought back to the various homes she has lived in throughout her life: her childhood home, her married home, and even the apartment she and her sister shared shortly after they both became widows. Prayer and other expressive forms, explains Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, have remarkable power to recall various memories (1989: 330). Rebecca’s memories are brought to the foreground not only by prayer, but by objects as well. “We each had our own candles,” she reminisces about living with her

sister. “She had the beautiful big, round-based brass – all solid brass – Jacobean candles that were twisted.... They’re beautiful candlesticks – but my sister in England got the silver – beautifully carved with four legs,” she says with a tinge of regret. “Anyway, we all got one. Mother had a lot of candlesticks” (7 May 2004). These “memory objects” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989) are significant to Rebecca and others, not only because they connect residents with their past, but also they continue to enrich the present lives of those who use them.

Edith Kursbatt has very few “memory objects” in her apartment. In fact, she says she gave most of her possessions away to her children and grandchildren before she moved to the Terraces. “I believe it’s nice to pass these things on to children and grandchildren *before* you die,” she says matter-of-factly. It should not come as a surprise then, that the décor of Edith’s apartment is quite minimalist (see figure 7.1). She explains: “When you come into a retirement home and you’ve had a large apartment or a large home before, there is not too much that you can take into these apartments” (4 May 2004).



Figure 7.1. Edith’s kitchen table/ living room.

While material items are not especially important to Edith's creation of home, she feels "at home" through hospitality. Of course, this should not be surprising since Edith began the Sabbath Tea, but she places great value on being hospitable in her own private home as well. She recalls what she was looking for in an apartment before moving into the Terraces: "I was very particular about having what I call a living room, because that is where you have people... come share with you a cup of tea.... You can sit and chat over what used to be but is no more – that's the pity," she laughs. "And sometimes, new things are very worth while. And so it's a new life beginning" (4 May 2004). Although Edith's apartment looks sparse, she creates a sense of comfort and hominess through hospitality. As Rybczynski points out, décor has very little to do with comfort. In describing the beautiful French *hôtels* of the seventeenth century: "there was hardly a sense of hominess in these houses.... they lacked the atmosphere of domesticity that is the result of human activity" (1986: 43). Home, or "hominess" – that sense of home, what is *heimish* – is not found in décor or aesthetics. Rather, it is how hospitality and sociability breathe life into domestic spaces. In all my visits with Edith – the formal interviews as well as the informal drop-ins – it was never five minutes after I had stepped in that the kettle would be on. Her hospitality deeply contributed to her sense of identity, as well as to her self-esteem. It made Edith feel good to make others feel at home – both in her private apartment, as well as during her time as Head Hostess of the Sabbath Tea. Over tea, biscuits and the occasional meal, we shared stories – including several reminiscences of her legendary dinner parties – and meaningful time together.

While my approach was ethnographic, the study of home – and the creation of home – is an interdisciplinary pursuit. By exploring how older Jewish residents of an assisted-living facility create home in an institutional setting, we are opening up a discussion beyond folklore and ethnography. In 2005, around the time when I was wrapping up my fieldwork, I presented an early chapter of this thesis at “Home: A Visual Studies Conference,” hosted by the Graduate Program in Visual Studies, University of California, Irvine. Attending this interdisciplinary conference, with papers that ranged from home movies and postcolonial literature, to architecture and urban planning, to Jacques Derrida and Hannah Arendt, confirmed for me that “home” – seemingly simple in its ubiquity – is in fact one of the most complex words in our language. The definition is constantly shifting, as it is framed and re-framed. “Home” is impossible to pin down: a physical place, a feeling, a nation, a memory, an ideology. Dolores Hayden’s metaphor for “place” seems apt for home: “a suitcase so overfilled one can never shut the lid” (1995: 15). Although this thesis was a close study of the residents of an ethno-specific institutional home, many of the issues that come up are no different than the issues we deal with in our private homes. Home is not located in one place, but many. It is at the intersection of public and private worlds, and it is created in front and back regions. It is understood through spaces, and performed through creative rituals, memory, narrative, and hospitality.

The Home Conference at the University of California, Irvine, opened up possibilities of interdisciplinary dialogue that could help fill in gaps in various types of research. For example, I was approached after my paper by an architecture student who

remarked (much like Rybczynski) how odd it seemed that despite her vast theorizing and planning of “home,” she had never actually conducted research with *people who live* in homes. We discussed the possibilities of collaborative projects combining ethnographic research with planning and design in order to better understand how we create comfortable living spaces.

In terms of working specifically with the elderly, this thesis has demonstrated that interviewing (fieldwork and ethnography) gives us an insider’s perspective, making it possible to have a sense of how residents understand their living spaces, and how they create home in an institution. If we are looking to create spaces where seniors can age comfortably over many years, the first step is to learn from those who are experiencing aging first-hand. This might occur by opening a dialogue between architects, planners, social workers, and residents about what can be done for residents to continue to age well and in comfort – from physical space to meaningful social and cultural programming. Additionally, further research is in order in the field of creative ritual and the meaning of home for older adults. While it might seem that older women no longer perform domestic rituals, the actions of the residents prove otherwise. Jewish ritual and hospitality continue to be important throughout a life. For the elderly Jewish residents of the Terraces their creation of home gives them a feeling of being “at home.” Musing about the past, David Lowenthal writes, “We are at home in it because it *is* our home – the past is where we come from” (1985: 4).

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