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Canada's award winning trio

MONTREAL - Montreal's Ariel Gerafi, Winnipeg's Minda Chaikin and Vancouver's Dina Acoca are three of a kind.

After all, these teachers stand alone as the only Canadian recipients of the 2010 Grinspoon-Steinhardt Award for Excellence in Jewish Education.

For the past 11 years, the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) has facilitated this annual award. Funded by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation and the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, the honour recognizes teachers across North America who demonstrate a strong commitment to their schools, students, fellow colleagues and community.

In 2010, 48 teachers were honoured by the foundations, the remaining 45 scattered throughout the United States.

"To just be nominated, these teachers have to be excellent educators and they have to be involved also in their community. Everything is taken into consideration," said Helene Kaufman of the Bronfman Jewish Education Centre in Montreal. "[This award] is given to encourage and motivate teachers to continue. Sometimes it's a way to highlight the front line workers in their schools. They're the ones who touch the lives of our children on a day-to-day



From the left: Ariel Gerafi, Minda Chaikin and Dina Acoca were Canadian recipients of the 2010 Grinspoon-Steinhardt excellence award.

basis." For those who work with Montreal's Gerafi, he epitomizes every aspect of the honour. In 1990, he began his teaching career at the Re'ut School in Jerusalem. However, he first made his mark on the students at Montreal's Hebrew Foundation school in 2006, forever impacting the lives of countless children.

"I think he is very eclectic as a teacher. He's able to reach a wide spectrum of abilities and that's an art," said Rabbi Achiya Delouya, the head of school at Hebrew Foundation. "Ariel teaches children, not a curriculum, as such even those who normally are pulled out for remediation or for a special learning program stay in his class. They are mesmerized by his style and content, but more importantly by his connection to their inner self."

"I feel very privileged to know that I was considered a valuable member of the school's staff and this award

encouraged me to do even better. Once I knew I had won, I felt a sense of pride and validation about being a teacher," said Gerafi. "Rabbi Delouya had mentioned to me that he thought this award would confirm what he thought of my connection with my students and parents."

Halfway across the country, while honoured and humbled by the individual award, Winnipeg's Minda Chaikin refuses to take all the credit, as she is adamant that this honour belongs to the entire Judaic Studies team at the Grey Academy of Jewish Education.

As the school's Hebrew resource teacher, Minda is heavily involved with students from grades 1 through 6, often employing a team-teaching approach in the classroom to ensure that students grasp the Hebrew language.

A special-needs teacher at heart, in trying to get the most

out of all of the students, Chaikin has worked with her peers to employ a program called *Chaverim b'Ivrit*, a method designed to make the study of the Hebrew language as inclusive as possible, recognizing every student's strengths and working towards them.

"It was very important to me to create an atmosphere where kids would feel capable of being able to learn Hebrew and feel that it's possible to learn it," she said. "Not everyone has that gift to learn a second language, so you really want to try and open that up to everyone and that's what we try to do."

"It has always been my goal to take into account every student and I tailor their needs

into my bigger vision for the classroom," added Chaikin. "I hope my students feel that when I'm teaching them...I really understand them, and that I help them feel more confident in building skills to learn the language and to read."

For all three teachers, the impact on their students is unmistakable. Dina Acoca, Canada's third Grinspoon-Steinhardt Award recipient, works hard to cultivate a relationship, evidenced by its continuation beyond her classroom.

"I think I connect with my students and that's really important," said Acoca. "My students are constantly calling and coming back to visit. That relationship started out

when they were in Grade 6, and I've always extended myself beyond the classroom to be a role model for them and someone they can come to for advice."

Acoca has been a staple of the girl's grade 6 and 7 classes at Vancouver's Hebrew Academy (VHA) for the past decade.

"When a teacher lives what he or she is teaching, it really makes a difference. VHA happens to be an Orthodox school and all the Judaic teachers are Orthodox Jews and we actually live all the Torah, philosophies and Jewish values that we teach. That's really something that touches students and that they take with them after they leave our classrooms."

A testament to Acoca's impact on VHA is that 2010 marks the third consecutive year she was nominated for the Grinspoon-Steinhardt Award. Taking centre stage with each nomination is her Chessed program. Each Friday, the program connects her classes with the residents of the Louis Brier Senior Citizens Home, truly enriching the lives of the residents as well as her students.

Do mistresses have a right to inheritance?



Charles Wagner

Can you imagine burying a spouse and then being sued for support by a mistress? For those who believe in primacy on marriage and that marriage obligates its partners to fidelity, the idea of rewarding a mistress to a portion of the family's inheritance is unjust. Others argue that financial obligations should flow from the intensity and duration of life partner relationships regardless of the partners' marital status. What do the courts think?

In *Nowell v. Town Estate* (<http://bit.ly/nowell>) the deceased had a 24-year extramarital affair. During the week he lived with his wife, but on the weekends this man spent time with his mistress, gave her gifts worth about \$125,000 and promised to support her. The mistress contributed to the man's work as an artist without compensation. Left nothing in the will, she sued the estate. Do you think she deserved any money? The Ontario Court of Appeal did.

The judges recognized that a 24-year relationship was more than casual and for the last 13 years it was quasi-spousal. The judges felt the mistress should be fully compensated because the estate was unjustly enriched. Mr. Town accepted his mistress' help, did not pay for it, and he benefited financially. The court was influenced by the fact that the mistress made Mr. Town the focal point of her life and that through the years Mr. Town assured his mistress that he would look after her. While this did not create a legal relationship, it proved the nature of the relationship. The court still awarded her \$300,000.

In *Mahoney v. King* a mistress successfully sued a married man for support because the court found that she was a common law spouse. Arguably, a mistress suing her paramour's estate could use this case as a prece-

dent. As a 'spouse' the mistress would qualify as a dependant and would be entitled to support under the Succession Law Reform Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. S.26 <http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90s26_e.htm>, if her paramour did not provide her with adequate support. There are those, like the late law professor James G. McLeod, who disagreed with this decision. He took exception to the idea that a woman who had an affair with a married man who lived with his wife may be a 'spouse.' While Professor McLeod understood the argument of making an unjustly enriched estate compensate a mistress like in *Nowell v. Town Estate*, he felt that to suggest that a mistress was a spouse for support purposes takes away whatever meaning is in the word 'spouse.'

From a Jewish perspective, the idea of having more than one spouse was addressed around the year 1000. Rabbeinu Gershom instituted a *halachic* edict forbidding men to marry more than one woman, a practice that is permitted by the Torah. The issue is one of intense debate in Canada. For example, the government of British Columbia asked its provincial supreme court to address the criminal prohibition against polygamy. Of concern are the polygamous marriage practices amongst certain North American Muslims and Mormons.

The different views of a mistress entitlement to support under the law should tell you that this issue is not a simple one. My short review of these cases should not be taken as legal advice. Based on my experience in dealing with these cases, they often turn on the specific facts. If you have a legal question relating to something similar, you are best advised to seek out competent legal counsel to determine your best course of action.

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Chanukah Celebration

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See upcoming Tribune for more details



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