



H A S A H O M E H E R E

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**SWASTIKAS, VANDALISM, AND ARSONS—HATE
THE RISE. ARE WE IGNORING ALL THE SIGNS**

**CRIMES AGAINST BOSTON-AREA JEWS ARE ON
OF SOMETHING EVEN WORSE TO COME?**



Top, with his wife, Luna, by his side, Rabbi Avi Buklet speaks at a community gathering after their Arlington home was targeted by an arsonist; bottom, scenes from Coolidge Corner, the beating heart of the local Jewish community.

AFTER A LONG DAY, Luna Buklet was taking advantage of the peace and quiet that had settled over her home at the tail end of a Saturday. Her three young children were finally asleep upstairs and her husband, Avi, was working quietly in his office across the hall. She exhaled and opened a book on the couch in her living room. Moments later, when Luna picked up the faint scent of smoke, she called to her husband. "Avi," she said, "can you check it out?"

Rabbi Avi, as congregants of Arlington's Chabad center know him, was busy tapping away at his laptop amid a sea of open theological books. "Nah, it's fine," he called back to her. But he rose from his desk anyway and stepped outside the front door to check. Standing on his steps, he detected a whiff of charred wood. Avi looked up to the sky. It was a clear, warm night—the kind of May evening that hovers on the threshold between spring and summer. He smiled, thinking of an overeager neighbor already kicking off barbecue season, and walked back inside, closing the door behind him and retreating to his office. He had a lesson to prepare for Hebrew school the next day.

An hour passed before Luna called to him again. She still smelled smoke, and the odor only seemed to be growing stronger. Luna was halfway up the stairs, on her way to their children on the second floor, when the fire alarm in the hallway began to shriek. Avi jumped up from his desk and scrambled from room to room searching for signs of a fire. When he opened the basement door, he confronted billowing clouds of black smoke and the terrifying realization



BLAKE GUMPRECHT/FLICKR (RAMP'S); JEREMY BROOKS/FLICKR (KUPEL'S); JASON GROW (TEMPLE SINAI); COURTESY OF WICKED LOCAL (BUKLETS)

that his home was ablaze. Luna gathered the children and rushed them outside to safety. When a fire truck pulled up several minutes later with its sirens blaring, Avi watched in horror as firefighters began using their axes to hack away at the flaming wall of his home, which doubled as his congregation's synagogue. Only after the side of his house had been reduced to a pile of charred and smoldering shingles did the questions begin. A fireman asked if anyone smoked. Had a grill been going? Were smoldering embers carelessly tossed in the yard? Over and over, the answer was *no*.

At first, Avi didn't think the fire at his home was a deliberate attack. He had grown up in the suburbs north of Boston, and even though he has always worn a kippah—the small skull cap that is a symbol of Jewish identity—he rarely felt targeted anywhere in the United States. Now, though, against his every instinct, Avi began to wonder if someone had intentionally tried to harm his family because of their faith.

It wasn't out of the question. Since the 2016 presidential campaign, hate crimes against many minorities have increased throughout the country. Here in Greater Boston—home to one of the 10 largest Jewish communities in the world—the biggest and most conspicuous jump has been in incidents targeting Jews. The recent wave of anti-Semitism includes neo-Nazi graffiti, attacks on property, and the local mobilization of virulently anti-Semitic white supremacist groups.

The spike in anti-Semitic incidents comes at a confounding time for the Boston-area Jewish community. Less than a lifetime ago, Boston Jews were a marginalized minority. But over the past several decades, institutional discrimination against Jews and societal barriers to inclusion have fallen away. "We thought we were going in one direction," says Elaine Zecher, senior rabbi at Temple Israel of Boston, "and then boom, these people show up." These people—the ones carrying out anti-Jewish acts of hate—include everyone from schoolchildren to avowed neo-Nazis who openly advocate online for the "extermination" of Jews. Many of them are resorting to increasingly bold means to get their message across, and the most unsettling part is that no one knows how far they are prepared to go.

While investigators puzzled over the burning embers, Avi's next-door neighbor appeared holding (Continued on page 129)

Hate Has a Home Here

it has been on so many weekend mornings over the past 40 years. A little farther down the street, at the Israel Book Shop, a small crowd gathered, waiting for Chaim Dovek—son of Eli and Edie, who founded the store in 1956—to open the doors. At Congregation Kehillath Israel—a century-old temple that towers over a tree-lined stretch of Harvard Street—Gordon Bennett, the synagogue's president, came in early to help some of his congregants pray.

It didn't take me long to notice that Coolidge Corner is one of the few Boston-area neighborhoods where hardly anything has changed in a very long time. It is still a quaint village within a sprawling metropolis. And it is also still the beating heart of the local Jewish community.

Even if time appears to have stood still in Coolidge Corner, the city around it has undergone seismic shifts. "People forget," says Sarna, who is also a professor of American-Jewish history, "Boston was a deeply anti-Semitic city." Anti-Semitism, in fact, was pervasive from the day Jews began arriving in Boston in significant numbers in the 1840s, and well into the second half of the 20th century. The Brahmin establishment regarded Jews with suspicion. Local neighborhood bullies assaulted Jewish kids while the police turned a blind eye. Hotels posted signs declaring "No Hebrews." Jewish families had to start their own country clubs, Jewish doctors had to start their own hospitals, and Jewish lawyers had to start their own firms—because they were not welcome in the ones that already existed in this town.

But when things changed, they did so rather quickly. "All of a sudden you woke up and the law firms were—with respect to Jews—integrated," says Justin Wyner, a former manufacturing industry executive who began his business career in Boston in the 1940s. "The hospitals, which wouldn't take Jewish doctors, were also integrated. And the banks, too." The Country Club in Brookline began accepting Jews in the 1970s. By the time Stan Rosenberg became Massachusetts' first Jewish Senate president in 2015, 20 percent of that body was Jewish.

While these institutional barriers have fallen away, though, area Jews have still experienced an increase in hate crimes against them. This makes their experience unique among minorities around Boston. African-Americans here still face de facto

school segregation and structural exclusion from sectors of the city's economy, as well as anti-black bias and violence. By contrast, Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans have seen both exclusion and bigotry almost completely disappear. Some Jews had come to believe that anti-Semitism, like anti-Irish and anti-Italian bias, had also faded into memory. "Twenty years ago, I would say anti-Semitism isn't really a factor anymore," says Nahma Nadich, acting executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council. Now, Nadich says, "I can no longer say that."

The Sunday I visited Coolidge Corner—an idyllic weekend morning in a neighborhood trapped in time—the most significant change I noticed was one I couldn't see: an undercurrent of anxiety—churning beneath the placid surface—that did not exist even a few years ago. Geleman, walking down the prepared-food aisle at the Butcherie, said he couldn't recall any moment in Boston Jewish life comparable to today's. "There have always been incidents—drivers yelling slurs on your way to temple," he explained. "But not to the degree that it was scary." Hilary Goldberg, waiting outside the Israel Book Shop, told me she is exceptionally aware of the rise in anti-Semitic incidents. "My children go to school right around the corner," she said. "I'm worried about their safety." Bennett, standing before the Torah ark at Kehillath Israel, gestured to the 600 empty seats arrayed before us that would be full, in a week's time, for the Rosh Hashanah holiday and said, with evident anguish, "I feel responsible for all these people."

IN LATE AUGUST, just before the academic year began, Rebecca—a senior at Brandeis who asked me to withhold her last name—received an email from the university's public safety director. The cryptic message said that photos of students had appeared on a white supremacist website. Rebecca visited the site and found a long thread on a forum where people she assumed were "neo-Nazis" were sharing photos of Jews, trading anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, and publishing hate-filled missives such as "[Jews] truly are creatures of Satan hell-bent on destroying the White race." As horrified as she was, Rebecca nearly cried out in shock when she came upon a photo of her best friend and then, just beneath it, a photo of herself.

The purpose of the thread, it appears, was to ridicule Jews. While Brandeis security officials have said the forum represents no direct threat, "I kind of feel like there is one," Rebecca asserts, especially in light of the attacks in Pittsburgh and Poway. Eric Ward, executive director of the Western States Center, a civil rights organization, and an expert on hate groups, says it's reasonable to be alarmed by a thread featuring photos and names of specific Jews. After all, he says, "Lists set the stage for targeting."

It is also reasonable to be concerned about possible real-world consequences stemming from online posts, considering that most modern-day attacks on Jews and other minorities have online roots. The Pittsburgh shooter, for instance, had been radicalized by white nationalist rhetoric on Gab, a social media platform that functions like Twitter and is popular on the far right. The Christchurch shooter, who murdered 51 Muslims in New Zealand (and helped inspire the shooter in Pittsburgh), was an active member of 8chan, an online forum where members cheer on mass shooters. Conor Climo—arrested by the FBI in August and now facing trial for allegedly plotting to attack a Las Vegas synagogue, an ADL office, and a gay bar—had joined a neo-Nazi terrorist group online. These Web communities have enabled white supremacist ideology to spread more widely than it ever has before. "In their worldview," Ward says, "Jews are the puppet master pulling the strings of other communities to overthrow white America."

In Boston, home to more than a quarter million Jews, the online activity has turned into growing white supremacist and neo-Nazi activity on the ground. A local group inspired by the neo-Nazi website the Daily Stormer has put up posters denying the Holocaust on synagogues and distributed anti-Semitic fliers in towns with large Jewish communities, such as Newton. The local chapter of Patriot Front—an organization with roots in the same neo-Nazi group that helped organize the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville—has taken a more militant turn recently, engaging in hand-to-hand combat training and openly embracing Nazi symbolism (several of its members flashed Nazi salutes during a protest in Copley Square in August). Last February, three Patriot Front Massachusetts members, including the group's then-leader, were