

Dull commute sparks dentist's productive pursuit

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SPECIAL TO THE CJN

Dentist Harry Rajchgot doesn't miss commuting twice a week from Montreal to Gatineau, where he had an office in the 1990s. But he is grateful that the boring drive gave him time to think.

"During the drive, I thought about my parents and their lives in Europe and post-war Canada and felt the story had to be told," Rajchgot said. "After completing a short piece about my father, I decided to write a book, not realizing what it would entail."

Despite professional and family commitments, Rajchgot made time to hone his skills through courses at Concordia University and the Quebec Writers Federation. He created a humorous blog called *1001 Uses for Dental Floss*, composed Purim spiels, wrote for literary magazines and is the managing editor of *JONAH Magazine*.

It's important to develop outside interests before retirement, so you have something you like to pursue later in life, observed Rajchgot, who graduated from McGill University's dentistry program in

1978. He looks forward to his dental class's 40th reunion in October. Before dentistry, he did a B.Sc. and M.Sc. at McGill and spent two years in Israel. As a staff member at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), Rajchgot attends to patients, many of whom have special needs, at the Montreal Children's Hospital (which is part of the MUHC network). He closed his private dental office in June.

When his father, Frank, fell ill in 1994, he began working on the novel that had flashed to mind during the boring drive to Gatineau. In 2016, he published *Gravitational Fields*, a historical fiction novel that's based on the experiences of survivors, including his parents.

Rajchgot and his wife, Cheryl Everett, are blessed with children from their first marriages. He credits Everett's daughter, Sivan Slapak, with drawing his attention to the Foundation for Yiddish Culture. The organization sought material that emphasized the role of Yiddish in recent Montreal history and Rajchgot's proposal was accepted. The result, *The Sweetness of Life: My Mother's Yiddish Cookbook*, was launched in May at the Museum of Jewish Montreal and is available on Amazon.



Harry Rajchgot ELAINE COHEN PHOTO

surprisingly delicious."

Rajchgot found the collection after his mother's death in 2010. Ester Rajchgot had kept the culinary notes in an invoice book from a former employer. Each entry was attributed to one of her friends. "Most of the women shared similar backgrounds – Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Canada after the war. Interwoven was the theme of nourishing young families and sublimated memories of past fear, deprivation and hunger," said Rajchgot. The ironic title alludes to the sweets they favoured.

Rajchgot was born in a displaced persons camp in Pocking, Germany, after the Second World War. The family then came to Canada, sponsored by a cousin in Saint John, where his younger brother, Percy, was born. By the time Rajchgot was ready for school, the family had relocated to Montreal, where his father worked in the needle trade.

Rajchgot sees *The Sweetness of Life* as a social history focused on his parents and their generation, their escape from Poland to Russia in 1939 shortly after the war began and ultimately adapting to life in Canada. ■

Everett designed the covers for his books.

"The translation of 70-odd recipes (written in cursive Yiddish) took six months," Rajchgot explained, adding that he had to recall the Yiddish he spoke as a child. The script was difficult to decipher and the collection was complicated, because the recipes lacked important details. Only a handful made the book, but the author reports that, "The cheesecake, European-style, was

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