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Shabbat times for Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Rosh Chodesh Av occurs on Monday, 28 Jul 2014
 Candle lighting: 8:22pm on Friday, 01 Aug 2014
 This week's Torah portion is Parashat Devarim
 Shabbat Chazon occurs on Saturday, 02 Aug 2014
 Havdalah (45 min): 9:23pm on Saturday, 02 Aug 2014

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Elizabeth Comper: an appreciation

Nicole Miller, Special to The CJN, Tuesday, July 29, 2014

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Elizabeth Comper at an event for Holocaust Education Week at Forest Hill United Church in November 2011

Elizabeth Comper, who died on June 22, changed the lives of many people and truly exemplified how one person can make a difference. She devoted her life to making the world a better place.

Her death has left a void that cannot be filled.

In 2004, after a wave of anti-Semitic incidents in Toronto and Montreal, Elizabeth told her husband, Tony Comper, CEO and president of Bank of Montreal at the time, that they must do something.

They founded FAST – Fighting Antisemitism Together – along with a coalition of non-Jewish business and community leaders who were dedicated to fighting intolerance in all its forms, with anti-Semitism as a specific manifestation.

The thought that any children in Canada would live in fear was unacceptable to Elizabeth, formerly a teacher at the Beth Rivkah Academy for Jewish girls in Montreal and then the Montreal Protestant School Board for five years. Both Tony and Elizabeth Comper felt it should be non-Jews who eradicate anti-Semitism, the oldest hatred in human history.

They knew the best way to fight hatred was through education. The former Canadian Jewish Congress helped develop their first anti-Semitism education program, which was distributed free of charge to all Canadian schools.

Curriculum experts wrote it to fulfil provincial requirements for grades 6, 7 and 8. Since 2005, *Choose Your Voice* has reached over two million students in more than 19,000 schools in every province and territory in Canada. FAST won the Canadian Race Relations Foundation Award of Excellence 2010.

A new FAST program called *Voices Into Action* is being developed for high schools because there has been a demand for it. This was Elizabeth's dying wish.

FAST is working with OISE-U of T and Ove/Publicis, and the program will be launched this September. Also free, this online and interactive program will encourage students to take action. With the Holocaust as a constant thread throughout the five units and videos, the program meets requirements for many courses.

Elizabeth née Webster was raised Anglican in Etobicoke, Ont., and at 21, she met Tony Comper, a student at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. They married five years later and moved to Montreal. Tony began his career at the Bank of Montreal and Elizabeth started teaching while continuing her education. She earned a BA from Concordia University and a master's in library science from McGill University.

Elizabeth received the University of Toronto Arbor Award, the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews' Human Relations Award, the Canadian Centre for Diversity Human Relations Award and the Scopus Award from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She held the degree of doctor of philosophy (honoris

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causa), conferred by the University of Haifa in 2006, and again by Concordia in 2009.

The Compers were both named to the Order of Canada in 2011 for their contribution to community. Elizabeth's charitable work included fundraising and volunteering for the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care, and 10 years on the board of the Tarragon Theatre, two of them as chair. She played a central role in founding and developing Canada's largest annual arts award as chair of the founders committee of the Elinore & Lou Siminovitch Prize in Theatre. She was a trustee of the Art Gallery of Ontario, a director of the Ontario Arts Council Foundation, and a director of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews.

Elizabeth personally funded scholarships for Aboriginal single mothers entering university, and the Charles and Betty Webster International Study Scholarship at the University of Guelph.

She did fundraising and advocacy for the Reach for the Skye Project for child cancer research, the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research, the March of Remembrance and Hope and the Smile Theatre Company. Tony and Elizabeth Comper sponsored and spoke at events for the Holocaust Education Centre in Toronto.

They contributed to the Centre for Jewish Studies at U of T and founded the University of Haifa's Elizabeth and Tony Comper Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Antisemitism and Racism.

Two years ago Elizabeth was diagnosed with myelofibrosis, a rare and incurable disease of the blood. They established the Elizabeth and Tony Comper MPN program at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, to research and find a cure for blood diseases.

Elizabeth dedicated her life to many humanitarian causes. In the last decade her priority became the fight against anti-Semitism, for which the Jewish community is especially grateful. Through educational materials, her legacy will endure for generations. She embodied the phrase tikkun olam – repairing the world.

Nicole Miller is executive director of FAST, www.fightingantisemitism.com.



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