



# Doctor Chatterley's passion

**NOT ENOUGH** international attention has ever been paid to the Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism (CISA). It is one of the foremost institutions devoted to the scholarly study of this malady which, after a slight recession post-Holocaust, is rampant once again. The CISA was founded by Dr. Catherine Chatterley in 2010, and the story of how she entered on this path, which would culminate in her spearheading such a project, is interesting in itself. It began with the close relationship she had with her grandmother, a German Lutheran, whose interest in the Tanach (Old Testament) opened up the saga of the Jewish people to this curious little girl. Later, when she learned through reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, of the specific assault on these same Jewish people under Nazi Germany, in her own words she was "bewildered... and was driven, personally, to understand how this disaster happened. How could the German people perpetrate this kind of crime across Europe and why did people hate the Jews so much that they actually built gas chambers and ovens for them? I just couldn't believe the level of hatred implicit in this event and I searched for information on it as I grew up. It became a serious personal interest. Eventually, I ended up studying the subject at university and moved out of pre-medical science to study history."

The savvy young Catherine from then on carefully tailored her education choices to best facilitate finding answers to her questions. Her undergraduate studies included European History and Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at the University of Manitoba, European Intellectual History at Concordia University in Montreal, followed by a Doctorate in Modern European and Jewish History and German-Jewish Literature, which she completed at the University of Chicago. Experiential education no doubt occurred when she worked at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, recording testimony with Holocaust survivors, while studying for her Masters degree. In Montreal she lived in Outremont, a mixed French and hassidic neighborhood, perhaps a reminder of her early impressions of biblical Jewry.

The newly minted doctor was hired to teach history by both the University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba and for a total of 16 years she did exactly that, at the former from 2002 to 2008, the latter, 2007 to 2018. In 2010 she founded the institute which became CISA, where she is now founding director.

Beginning on a shoestring, she soon received help from one of

Winnipeg's foremost real estate entrepreneurs, Sandy Shindleman, a vehement supporter of Chatterley's vision, who became chairman of her board of directors. The fledgling organization took off, bringing world-renowned scholar/speakers to this prairie city in the center of vast Canada, home to a generous, strongly Zionist, Jewish community. The annual Shindleman Lectures CISA has presented have included such stellar figures as Irwin Cotler, Alvin Rosenfeld, Deborah Lipstadt, Daniel Goldhagen, David Harris, David Matas, Daniel Pipes, Raheel Raza. Recognition of Chatterley's work brought her an invitation to join Prime Minister Steven Harper's delegation to Israel in 2014. Her book *Disenchantment: George Steiner and the Meaning of Western Civilization After Auschwitz* was a National Jewish Book Award Finalist. (Her new book, *The Antisemitic Mindset*, is due to be released soon.) The lectures she's given, the articles she's written, and papers she's presented have earned international recognition, and attending conferences around the world has brought Chatterley in contact with other world renowned scholars.

It was at one of these conferences, at Indiana University in Bloomington, where the 80 or so delegates in attendance acknowledged that a journal was sorely needed for this area of research. Answering the call, in 2016, under the sponsorship of CISA, Chatterley undertook the task of creating one. Published by Indiana University Press, this journal, of which she is editor in chief, is now available in over 3,000 universities and colleges worldwide, and is recognized as the leading academic periodical on the subject.

At this point, enter Tony Comper, former president and CEO of the Bank of Montreal Financial Group. He and his wife were deeply saddened by the growing hatred that seemed to be permeating society; the year 2004 had seen a radical upsurge in antisemitic incidents. They decided to do something about it. In his own words: "My late wife Elizabeth and I founded FAST (an acronym for Fighting Antisemitism Together), in 2005, because we felt that it was important to build a coalition of non-Jewish business and community leaders to stand up and speak out against antisemitism."

They received backing from a coalition of more than 30 influential corporate leaders. Believing the classroom is the ideal incubator for change, they developed two educational programs: Choose Your Voice for grades 6, 7 and 8 (middle school); and Voices Into Action, for grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, (high school) and post-secondary insti-

Dr. Catherine Chatterley, founding director of the Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism

tutions. These educational materials, first on DVD and then online, were provided to teachers at no charge, adapting the content to meet standards across different Boards of Education, in both English and French. The Compers' charitable endeavor has grown to the point where 4.4 million Canadian students have learned about prejudice, human rights, and social justice, through these free curriculum-based teaching resources. Comper says: "To fundamentally change, you need to focus on education of young people and equip them with an alternative narrative to what they are hearing either at home, or in the street, or in the school yard."

When Comper realized FAST was potentially becoming a long term project, he began to look for a way to ensure the work would continue forward. He approached Chatterley with his idea, believing that CISA would be the perfect vehicle for guaranteeing FAST's future. They decided to partner; the official announcement was released to the press just a few weeks ago.

Chatterley has become president and chair of FAST, and is committed to ensuring its sustainability and to meeting its long-term goals. The two organizations, although their mandates dovetail, will remain separate including separate fundraising needs, but the affiliation will allow CISA to promote and support FAST's nationwide human rights curriculum. This will increase the focus on antisemitism, as implied in both organizations' names, and will emphasize the principle that antisemitism is a civilizational problem, not a Jewish one.

As Chatterley puts it: "Antisemitism is part of Western culture. Anti-Judaism is part of Western culture and Islamic culture." In other words, the study of antisemitism belongs in History, not Judaic Studies, Departments. (It was a disappointment for many that the University of Manitoba, where Chatterley taught for 12 years, did not see fit to take the institute into their own history department.) CISA and FAST are a perfect complement to one another and hopefully both organizations will be given the support they need by the Canadian public and beyond. Sandy Shindelman, CISA's chairman, believes that "with today's documented upsurge in antisemitism worldwide, the work of Chatterley and CISA is more important than ever... if that is even possible."

CISA's mandate is to create and promote scholarship and education on antisemitism. The publication of the aforementioned journal with Indiana University Press was an important milestone. Now, Chatterley is venturing into a third growth spurt. With FAST's free online curriculum available to millions of Canadians, the study of antisemitism will be able to reach this same youthful audience. The impact of including antisemitism in FAST's curricula can't be stressed enough. They are designed for all levels of education in Canada including Correctional Services, Adult Education programs, and ESL classes



(English as a Second Language).

Nearly four-and-a-half million students have taken these lessons against prejudice: human rights; the Holocaust and genocide; residential schools; antisemitism; racism; homophobia; sexism and sexual harassment; even cyber-bullying, among others.

As Chatterley puts it, "I am impressed by the broad and inclusive nature of the program and its obvious goal of combating hatred and harassment across the board by using a direct grassroots approach." Further, she says, "As a scholar and educator, I know that the only way we can uproot hatred and antisemitism in our society is through education. What makes FAST unique is that this effort is led by a coalition of non-Jewish leaders."

From intense study of antisemitism and all its ramifications, her career has taken Chatterley to the point where she will be concerned with attempts to root the malady out of the general population. I asked Chatterley about antisemitism in Canada, both past and present. "Jews were disliked as foreigners for their religion and their inability to accept Christianity... and were treated with hostility as economic competitors. The discrimination and exclusion faced by Canadian Jews, until recently, follow from these two primary conflicts, religious and economic... yet... Canada is one of the better places for Jews to live in diaspora today.

Canadian Jews are free from any and all discrimination and enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other Canadians." That said, "Canada has a very high number of antisemitic incidents per capita compared to the United States... and a high number compared to the UK and Germany. The main difference between Canada and other Western societies is that while it has the highest per capita number of incidents, Canada has the lowest number of violent attacks. The steady increase in incidents has been in harassment, most of it online... the internet, social media... ubiquitous use of cell phones."

What better place to start! May the partnering of these two elements, CISA's thrust and FAST's free learning tools, bear fruit – in Canada and beyond.

Regarding her visit to Israel with the prime minister's delegation in January 2014, Chatterley told me, "It was a fabulous experience. We stayed in Jerusalem and I was able to visit Yad Vashem, the Israel Museum, the Old City and the Knesset in session. The most important part of the visit for me personally was the time I spent in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It is a very powerful place." ■