

## Obituary Page

### KOWENSKI, JOEL, 89

Kowenski, Joel, 89, of Atlantic City, passed away on June 29 surrounded by his beloved family. Born on May 1, 1920, in Poland, he was a Holocaust survivor who lost most of his family during the war. After the liberation, he spent three years in a displaced persons camp in Italy.

He immigrated to the U.S. in 1948 and initially stayed with his surviving family in Albuquerque, N.M. He later moved to New York where he met and married his beloved wife, Cyla, also a Holocaust survivor. In 1953, they moved to Rt. 50 in Laureldale, N.J., where they started a poultry farm.

He was a quiet, loving, and gentle man, who was an avid reader of historical books and daily newspapers. He kept up with current events and

politics, was a Zionist, and had a deep love for the state of Israel. He cared about the people around him, as well as the injustices in the world.

He is survived by his loving wife of 59 years, Cyla; beloved children, Tobey (Eric) Sopher of Egg Harbor Twp., NJ and Hal (Karen Finkel) Kowenski, of Silver Spring, MD; his beloved grandchildren, Martin (Meredith), Jenny, Jacob, and Daniel; and his great-grandson, Aiden.

Graveside services were held Wednesday, July 1, at the Rodef Sholom Cemetery, Egg Harbor Twp. The family asks that contributions in Joel's memory can be made to either the Holocaust Resource Center of Stockton College, P.O. Box 195, Pomona, NJ 08240, or to Jewish Family Services of Atlantic and Cape May Counties, 607 N. Jerome Ave., Margate, NJ 08402. Arrangements were by ROTH-GOLDSTEINS' MEMORIAL CHAPEL, Atlantic City. [www.rothgoldsteins.com](http://www.rothgoldsteins.com).

### ▲ Nose

from Page 3

Blumenbach," an information panel informs. A German natural scientist who died in 1840, Blumenbach "claimed to have evidence that Jews had an especially prominent nasal bone."

Exhibit installations examine the misuse of this and other paradigms in "scientific" teaching, as well as the ways in which they became part of the vernacular shorthand that shapes the way we see others and ourselves.

A section called "the schnoz," for example, shows a collection of 19th century walking sticks whose handles are formed by exaggerated noses. The contemporary artist Dennis Kardon's installation "Jewish Noses" features dozens of larger-than-life-sized casts made from the noses of actual Jews to demonstrate the silliness of such nasal clichés. Also, a modern painting ironically comments on the love and success that are supposed to result if one has a nose job.

"I am often asked whether or not Jews have a 'Semitic' nose," reads an exhibition quote by the historian Sander Gilman, who has written extensively about Jewish stereotypes. "After 54 years of experience, I can only answer that every Jew I have ever met has a nose."

The inclusion of Jackson's picture in the mix highlighted the transformations his own nose infamously went through.

It also reminded me of a book I read some years ago, a vicious anti-Semitic satire called "The Operated Jew," that was written in 1893 by a German doctor named Oskar Panizza.

An attack on efforts by Jews to assimilate into mainstream society, the book is a creepy and extremely disturbing tale about how a Jew named Itzig Faitel Stern tries to rid himself physically of the stereotypical signs of his Jewishness and become a "modern" European.

Foreshadowing Jackson's experiences under the knife, Stern submits to radical procedures, including the straightening and bleaching of his hair, "Extreme Makeover"-style cosmetic surgery and a series of horrendous operations to straighten his bones. He even gets a full transfusion of "Christian

blood."

"It is impossible for me to give the reader an account of all the garnishings, changes, injections and quackeries to which Itzig Faitel Stern submitted himself," the narrator states. "He experienced the most excruciating pain and showed great heroism so he could become the equivalent of an occidental human being."

In the end, it doesn't help. At his wedding to a Christian woman, all falls apart and Stern "reverts" to the ugliest anti-Semitic cliché of the Jew.

Panizza, an early exponent of Nazi-style racial anti-Semitism, set out to "prove" that Jews could never become part of the mainstream modern world, even if they physically attempted to change their skins.

It's not exactly clear what world Jackson was trying to become part of — or leave — with his surgeries and other transformations.

Artistically he was the ultimate crossover, winning fans of all colors, ages, religions, nationalities and sexual orientations all around the world. Over the years, though, he alienated some African Americans by his physical manipulation of identity and apparent ambivalence about his own blackness.

Death, though, appears to have brought Jackson back to his roots — or in any case to a warm embrace by the African-American community.

"We want to celebrate this black man," the actor and singer Jamie Foxx said to cheers at the Black Entertainment Television Music Awards Sunday. "He belongs to us, and we shared him with everybody else."

Foxx added, "It didn't matter what he looked like, it was all about what he sounded like. It didn't matter what his nose looked like — I loved the old nose and the new nose."

Ruth Ellen Gruber's books include "National Geographic Jewish Heritage Travel: A Guide to Eastern Europe," "Letters from Europe (and Elsewhere)," and "Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe." She blogs on Jewish heritage issues at [jewish-heritage-travel.blogspot.com](http://jewish-heritage-travel.blogspot.com).

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