Pyrrhic Progress

Kirchhelle, Claas

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I was introduced to the field of medical history through the research of my father, William Edward Seidelman. In our home in Hamilton, where my father was a professor of family medicine at McMaster University, I grew up seeing, firsthand, how meaningful and exciting this discipline could be. Indeed, there is no scholar whose work has had a greater influence on my own work than my father. I have loved and benefited from decades of reading his articles, listening to his lectures, and having conversations with him. Although the subject matter and region of my scholarship are different from his, I hope that when he sees commitment and excitement coming through in my book he recognizes his own imprint.

There is no person who has had a greater impact on me and my intellectual and personal achievements than my beautiful mother, Racheline Dayan Seidelman. I am so fortunate to have had her conversation, wisdom, love, advocacy, and sass to rely on throughout my life. When I think of the immigrants at Shaar Ha’aliya, I think of my mother’s own immigration story, the difficult changes that were forced upon her and her extraordinary resilience. And although everyone in my family is an avid reader, my mother’s relationship with books is the one that I most admire. I have learned from her to read broadly, to read critically, and to savor books. I am glad to be giving her an additional book to savor.
Acknowledgments

Everything I am and everything I have accomplished is because of my parents. They showed me and my sisters the value of intellectual and creative pursuits and then they gave us their support when we followed these pursuits on various unusual paths. They gave us a home filled with love, warmth, respect, stimulation, debate, integrity, and fun. Even as I am distanced from this home by years and oceans, I always carry it with me.

This project developed out of my PhD at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; I wrote this under the guidance of my advisors, Shifra Shvarts and S. Ilan Troen. I have learned so much from them—more than I can fully express—and I am grateful for all that they have done to help me.

I went through the PhD at Ben-Gurion University together with my dear friends Nimrod Zinger and Ari Barell. I am better off for their years of friendship, excellent advice, and enriching dialogue. Similarly, Nadav Davidovitch has been a generous friend and teacher to me from the days of our shared office overlooking the Negev desert. Early on in my PhD, it was my good fortune to be introduced to Allan M. Brandt when he spent a few weeks at Ben-Gurion University as a visiting distinguished professor. Allan’s compassion never ceases to amaze me. I am incredibly grateful to him for his kind words and magnanimous expressions of support. I would not be where I am today without his years of mentorship.

Toward the end of my time at BGU, I was fortunate to work as a research assistant to David Ohana and Michael Feige z”l. I cherish those days spent at the Sde Boker campus. My time was divided working serenely under the portrait of Ben-Gurion in the library and snatching breaks outside to take in the Zin Valley’s extraordinary vista. When I needed a diversion from all the quiet, I would visit David’s office as he and Michael shared impassioned (and not at all quiet) exchanges on Israeli history. I learned so much from them about Israel, writing books, and the joys of work and friendship.
But these fond memories are laced with terrible sadness: Michael Feige—a gentle man of peace and humanism—was killed in a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv in 2016. I will always see Michael as a role model for what scholars of Israel should be and how teachers should conduct themselves. I can’t say that I am always successful at implementing the lessons I learned from Michael. But I have them in my mind as examples to try to live up to. One of the last interactions I had with Michael Feige was at a conference in California when he took me aside to kindly ask about the progress I was making on this book. I wish I could have finished it in time for him to read it, but I am profoundly grateful that I had the opportunity to work with and learn from this special man.

I began the process of turning my dissertation into a book while I was teaching at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I could not have hoped for a more supportive and stimulating environment than the Program for Jewish Culture and Society. I always looked forward to the monthly workshops, where I gained an immeasurable amount from the rigorous and lively intellectual exchanges. Over the years, Gene Avrutin, Harriet Murav, Bruce Rosenstock, and Brett Kaplan warmly and repeatedly shared guidance and friendship. Michael Rothberg, Virginia Dominguez, Dara E. Goldman, Jonathan Druker, Zia Miric, Ofira Fuchs, and Jordan Finkin were kind colleagues who I always enjoyed encountering and whose insight during the workshops pushed me to think in different directions. Similarly, my wonderful colleagues in history, Craig Koslofsky, Peter Fritzsche, and Leslie Reagan, shared generous advice and illuminating conversations.

I am grateful to the numerous people at the University of Illinois who took time to read and comment on drafts of chapters that I presented in the history workshop and the Program for Jewish Culture and Society. I was also fortunate to take part in the First Book Writing Group led by the late Nancy Abelmann and Craig Koslofsky. Independent of any workshop, Craig Koslofsky and Dana Rabin generously commented on an early draft
of chapter 4. Peter Fritzsche and Gene Avrutin went above and beyond by reading and responding to the entire manuscript. I am incredibly grateful to them for their suggestions and encouragement. Thank you to Lee Melhado for diligently proofreading an early version of my manuscript and for heroically trying, against all odds, to teach me how to use a semicolon.

I am particularly glad to finally be able to publically express my gratitude to Dana Rabin and Matti Bunzl. Dana’s friendship and mentorship have been vital sources of support to me as I wrote this book. And without Matti Bunzl, all of these important experiences for me in Illinois would never have happened. From the earliest emails we exchanged, he exuded an enthusiasm and warm welcome. In his then capacity as director of the Program of Jewish Culture and Society, he immediately made me feel a part of the program, and he took time to help introduce me to the culture of academia in the United States, which was foreign to me. He was excited about my book project, and he helped me find my way through it. The word I recall Matti saying often is “fabulous.” It suits him.

The University of Oklahoma has been such a surprising and wonderful home to me since I had the good fortune to move here in 2015. I work alongside colleagues whose scholarship and priorities I admire and whose company I enjoy, and I teach students who are bright, intellectually curious, and hardworking. I want to thank the Schusterman family for their commitment to the Schusterman Center in Judaic and Israel Studies and, specifically, for endowing the chair that I now hold. Thank you to our provost, Kyle Harper, for sharing thoughts on the history of disease—which I benefited from and very much enjoyed. Thank you to our dean, David Wrobel, and our associate dean, Vicki Sturtevant, for their exceptional kindness and support. And thank you to my many students who, with their good cheer, have helped introduce me to the fascinating facets of Oklahoma life.
My history chair, James S. Hart, is one of a kind. His kindness and encouragement during difficult periods of this writing process were a special expression of menschkeit. Alan Levenson, the director of the Schusterman Center, has been a welcoming and generous colleague. While I regret that my time here did not overlap more with Noam Stillman’s, I have fond memories of the way he and Dina warmly received me and my family when we first arrived. Thank you to David Chappelle for being such a wonderful friend, sharing time and indulgent discussions, and then closely reading my manuscript at a time when I most needed his feedback. Alan Levenson and Rafie Folsom’s comments on different sections of my manuscript were similarly valuable and deeply appreciated. A special thank you to my fantastic departmental mentor Sandie Holguin for her excellent, supportive, and fun advice. I am so fortunate that Jennifer Davis’s door was always open at the times I most needed her sage and incisive guidance and her uplifting laughter. Even if her office was hidden behind long corridors in a dusty attic, I would still seek her out. Janie Adkins, Christa Seedorf, and Tryce Hyman do such a fantastic job of running the history department and the Judaic Studies center that I would be lost without them. No less important, they make the office a place that I look forward to going to. To all the members of Committee G, I am so grateful for your camaraderie, intelligence, and fabulousness. Indeed I want to thank all my wonderful colleagues in history at the University of Oklahoma. Your guidance, friendship, and advice have helped me bring this project to a happy close.

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The friendship of many people who I love and admire sustained me while writing this book, as it has throughout my life. Beth Hill, Rae Bates, and Ruthie Spinner are my roots from Hamilton. Simona Di Nepi and Miriam Orelle were students with me at the Hebrew University. I am so fortunate to still have them all to turn to and laugh with after so many decades. Simon Lichman, Rivanna Miller, and their whole crew profoundly shaped my perspective on Israel (and humanity) while sharing wonderful conversations and cups of tea. Laura Sola, Wendy Mathewson, and Jenna Zieman made life on Urbana’s California Avenue a magical time. Bridget Love and Sam Temple cushioned our bumpy arrival in Oklahoma with love and pastries (the same thing?). And Becca Waggoner and Myongjin Kim have recently come into my life as I adjust with my family to a happy, settled state in Norman.

My greatest debt is to my families—the Seidelmans and Pincus. My two fabulous sisters, Aviva Dayan and Ayela Seidelman are my role models, sparring partners, and cherished friends. They believed in me and encouraged me through the many years of writing this book. I am so lucky to have them in my life. Their husbands, Ehav Ever and Bari Moscovitz, have added new and wonderful dimensions to our family. (I am especially glad that Bari is now old enough to read this book. It feels like only yesterday that he was a young toddler). Libi, Ellie, Ofri, Elinour, and Renana—my magnificent nieces and nephew have expanded our family in the most wonderful ways. I love you very much.

At some point in my PhD, I was welcomed into the Pincu family. Yehuda, Dalia, Yossi, Yaron, Nir—and later, lovely Chen and my beloved nephews Maor and Beeri—took me in with their boundless love. After long days in the library, Shabbat dinners at the Pincu home—raucous, delicious, and overflowing with laughter—were a restorative distraction. My wonderful parents-in-law, Yehuda and Dalia, have been a particular source of support. They flew across oceans to give love and care to infants, children, and exhausted new parents as Yair and I struggled with the challenges of parenthood and careers. Yehuda and Dalia watched me write
from a careful distance and—with their infinite generosity—always made it clear that they are proud of me. I am so grateful to them.

Most important are the great loves of my life. My dazzling children, Shalev and Gefen, fill my world with abundant joy. I absolutely adore you. And finally, Yair Pincu. Everything about life is better with him in it. When writing this book was hard, he helped push me through. When writing this book was wonderful, he shared my joy. There was not a single moment that he didn’t have my back. I know this and felt this, and I am inordinately grateful.