

# ONE OF THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN JEWISH FEMINISTS.

I would love to invite the late Ruby Rich-Shalit to my Sukkah, one of the first Australian Jewish feminists. Ruby was born in 1888, lived to nearly 100 years old and during that time while growing up in Australia later lived in England and France and lived through two world wars. Despite being told she should learn her role as a good housekeeper and cook she aspired for more and through hard work and being given access to great teachers became a successful pianist and was even labelled as the most accomplished pianist that ever visited the Commonwealth (San Francisco Post August 1911). Ruby went on to adopt her nephew after her brother and his wife passed away. She dedicated over fifty years to advancing women's rights, in so many 'first's' such as founding Australia's first birth control clinic in the 1920s and being a Member of the First Council for Action for equal pay in 1929. She founded the Australian Friends of Hebrew University (1936) was elected as WIZO's first Federal President (1937) and the list goes on including establishing a halfway house for women released from prison at the age of 92 (1980). Ruby supported so many causes across including women's rights, family planning, Jewish and international organisations.

The list is endless. And my questions to Ruby would be firstly to ask when she faced the many obstacles in her way, starting with her father in a young age, to the countless others who did not agree with her strong sense of what was fair, equitable and right, how did she persist? Where did she find the courage and how did she learn to disregard so strongly the society at the time in pursuit of the brighter future of which she was so many decades away from? And I would ask Ruby how did she do it all? From founding one organisation in one year to being the president

of another the very following year, what was her secret? How did she deal with becoming a mother to her nephew while in pursuit of these ambitious goals?

Ruby demonstrated that while we may only be an individual, the impact we can have on other individuals, on our community and on society is huge. To be already recognised for her musical talent and then to establish and champion so many causes throughout her life is truly inspiring. I wonder what Ruby would think now of the fact that these causes she fought so hard for nearly 100 years ago are still here today. I wonder how Ruby would celebrate the things we have achieved and the way the dial has shifted slightly though not enough – would she celebrate at all or would she use that inequity to push on and continue to strive for a better future?

Lastly I would ask Ruby – how in the world did you take a picture sitting on that Ostrich without breaking a limb?



**Iara is a third culture kid, a mother of two young boys, has worked in Perth, Beijing and San Jose and grew up in Israel, Brazil and Singapore before arriving in Perth at the age of 8. She is an experienced Director working in Governance, Risk and Compliance in a professional services firm. Iara grew up involved in the Jewish community through Habonim Dror and was a Madricha in the Perth community after going on Shnat. As a full-time culturally Jewish working mother with Brazilian parents, she has lived in over 6 countries and has been a champion of diversity and women all her life.**

**She has Board experience through her role on the Board of the NCJW San Francisco Chapter where she was involved in advocacy in the annual policy campaigning in Sacramento (California's capital) and through her human trafficking awareness campaign involvement. While in the US she attended Stanford Continuing Studies to do courses such as Executive Presence in Women and the New Alpha Leader. In the US she began a working parents mentor program and actively leads a Women Development's group in Australia. Her passion for people, women and children has defined her community and working life.**