



Scrolling Through the Past

“Beauty, nobility, and nostalgia” of Torah gift blesses Religious Studies students, faculty

FOUR HUNDRED-SOME YEARS AGO—perhaps even as a certain English playwright by the name of Shakespeare wrote his famous works—somewhere in Morocco, Hebrew scribes toiled carefully and meticulously over a roll of parchment that would become a Torah scroll.

Over the past four centuries, the scroll has been read, revered, and protected. It saw the horrors of World War ii in North Africa, and provides a vivid testimony to the preservation of God’s people, and his Word. Now, it is housed in TWU’s archives, waiting for the next chapter of its story of preservation and inspiration to be written.

The ancient Sephardi manuscript made its way from Morocco to Langley, bc, thanks to the generosity of Kenneth and Barbara Larson, who gifted the artifact to the University. “When people study Hebrew in an academic environment, there is a much deeper appreciation and excitement,” Kenneth says. “The ancient scribes copied the Torah with such care to maintain its accuracy—to make sure that God’s word was not only honoured and preserved, but used.”



And used it will be, says Chair of TWU's Religious Studies Department Kent Clarke, Ph.D.

"Much of a scientist's work is facilitated by the purchase of expensive scientific instrumentation," Clarke says. "For Religious Studies, that's exactly what's happening with this Torah scroll—it becomes an important piece of scientific equipment."

Having the scroll takes Clarke from a place of teaching hypothetically or theoretically to teaching practically. "When you look at a high-resolution digital image, you can zoom in and see the text," he says. "But with the actual scroll, you can see the peeling of the ink, how the ink is raised off the page, or the exact way scribal corrections were made."

Valued somewhere upwards of \$250,000, the scroll contains the complete Torah—the first five books of the Bible—and consists of 65 panels of carefully prepared and refined calfskin.

A trip to the Holy Land with their family inspired the Larsons to consider how they might mark their 50th wedding anniversary in a significant, meaningful way. "We were looking for something unique to give in honour of that milestone," Barbara says.

Part of the Larsons' donation includes the installment of a special Torah room designed by their son, Christopher, in TWU's Alloway Library. The room is slated for completion this spring.



Once completed, the Torah will be on display for students, and the broader public, to view and to study. “It’s such an enhanced learning environment,” says Clarke. “It puts TWU among the great universities that have antiquities collections. We’re making a mini museum on campus, and students will be able to do everything at TWU that they could do at a larger university.”

Considering the nature of the persecution of the Jews—from the various exiles they endured, and the Holocaust—not many scrolls of this nature that have survived.

“As Christians, we’re grafted into the Jewish tradition,” says Kenneth. “So preserving these ancient manuscripts ensures we protect and honour God’s word.”

Clarke agrees. “We’re people of the Book,” he says, “just as the Jews were, and are.”

by *Wendy Delamont Lees*

Photography by *Wendy Delamont Lees*