



Jewish Federation®
OF GREATER METROWEST NJ

WOMEN`S PHILANTHROPY

www.jfedgmw.org/wp | (973) 929-3104

November 2017

Our Story

by Laura Dorf Queller, Vice President, Communications and Marketing

“Who tells your story?” This is the fundamental question asked in the musical *Hamilton*. For Jews, the answer is simple: **We tell our** story. Through a rich oral and written tradition, our story has been told and retold throughout the ages. And as we survive as a people into the 21st century, our story continues to unfold and take shape.

This eNewsletter explores the varied ways in which we tell our story today – through the books we read, the issues we discuss, and the traditions we pass on to our children and grandchildren. We recently celebrated Simchat Torah. On this holiday, we chant the last verse of the Torah and immediately read the scroll again from the very beginning. Simchat Torah reminds us that our learning and storytelling never end. Each time we study Torah, we gain additional insight. And by continuing to chant the Torah anew, we introduce our story to future generations.

Jews have been dubbed the “People of the Book” because of our adherence to the Torah, our sacred text. Although this term was originally coined by Muslims to describe Jews and other followers of monotheistic religions, many Jews have adopted this phrase as their own. In Hebrew, “People of the Book” translates to *Am HaSefer*.

Books of all kinds – ancient and modern, religious and secular, scholarly and entertaining – are featured in this eNewsletter. We’ve presented just some of the many opportunities throughout Greater MetroWest for Jews of all ages and backgrounds to enrich their lives through books and learning. But books do more than impart knowledge to individuals; they also create community. When women analyze Biblical texts together at the Women of Wisdom education series, or discuss best-selling novels in a book club, they form relationships through shared interests. And when Americans in Greater MetroWest and Israelis in Arad read the same book in English and Hebrew and then meet online for a “virtual” book club, they forge bonds across the ocean. Similarly, when young children receive free Jewish-themed books from PJ Library, they not only gain exposure to their heritage, but they also become connected with other children and families in the community like themselves.

Our Jewish story dates back thousands of years. Together, we can learn and pass on our ancient narrative while simultaneously creating new chapters for future generations.

Passing on Our Stories

by Jody Hurwitz Caplan

Sharing bedtime stories with children conjures visions of snuggling with toddlers, exploring new ideas and places, and transmitting life lessons, all while demonstrating the value of reading and learning. Every month our Jewish Federation, in partnership with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, encourages these special moments by delivering free Jewish-themed storybooks from [PJ Library](#) to 3,400 children in Greater MetroWest. This ten-year relationship has been well received in our community; this summer we celebrated the distribution of our 300,000th PJ Library book.



Federation representatives present our community's 300,000th PJ Library book

Rachel Khedouri, the mom of a PJ Library recipient, said, "Every day when I bring in the mail, my son asks whether there is PJ Library mail for him. We read together every night, and he almost always includes one PJ Library book in the pile of books to read."

Victoria Shpilsky shared similar experiences from her household. "The kids get excited every time they see envelopes from PJ Library with their names on it," she said.

"They are eager to read the books the same night. The books are beautifully written and the illustrations are delightful. The content is very entertaining and educational."

This program not only connects children to their Jewish heritage through carefully selected age-appropriate books, but it also connects Greater MetroWest families to one another and to further learning opportunities. Andrea Bergman, Federation's Director of PJ Library and Special Projects, explained, "Our PJ Library families receive a customized e-newsletter inviting them to a variety of events across the Jewish community. It's a wonderful engagement tool that gives people the chance to meet other families like themselves and to learn more about other Federation programs they might be interested in." Recent newsletters have promoted our [Kveller.com/GMW](#) High Holiday Round-Up and [JTot](#) programs, which are designed for

children up to age six and their families to connect and form bonds through joyous spiritual, educational, and social experiences.

“Books are just the beginning,” said Robert Lichtman, Federation’s Chief Jewish Learning Officer, who also oversees the Federation’s Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life department. “We surround the books with community-based activities where we share Jewish knowledge, traditions, values, and practices. PJ Library introduces these concepts on the page to teach children the what and why. And then we go beyond the books to introduce them to the how. For example, we provide coaches to help your family celebrate the Jewish holidays in a way that works for you. The books and the programs engage you, yes. But ultimately our goal is to empower you to pursue your own Jewish journey. Education is empowering. That’s what our Federation does.”

The success of Federation’s partnership with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation has led to additional collaborations with Greater MetroWest. The [Shtick Together](#) program forms small groups of PJ Library families seeking informal opportunities to explore Shabbat together. Each group gathers monthly for a unique and customized Shabbat celebration they have created themselves. PJ Library books are also introducing families to our community’s Jewish Day Schools through [Easy Jewish Family Fun](#). This initiative, supported by a grant from the Avi Chai Foundation, introduces local families to all that our Day Schools have to offer.

Building community through PJ Library is not limited to young families in Greater MetroWest. The newest example of Federation’s PJ Library programming is the [PJ Library Grandparents Connection](#). This newly formed group offers grandparents an opportunity to learn, network, and share ideas while exploring their critical roles as models of Jewish culture and traditions in their families and communities. At the same time, they’ll be helping Federation ensure that the PJ Library program continues to thrive in Greater MetroWest. The PJ Library Grandparents Connection chairs Beena Levy and Ilene Wolff raved, “We are so happily engrossed in grandparenting that we want to share it with others.”

PJ Library is supported by lead donors Maxine and Ted z”l Murnick and the Paula and Jerry Gottesman Family Supporting Foundation. “My husband and I always read to our children when they were young because we thought this was wonderful together-time,” shared Maxine Murnick. “Creating Jewish themed books for young children, when their minds are most open, is a brilliant idea. What could be better for the Jewish future of the Jewish community worldwide than doing something for Jewish children?”

Children living in the Greater MetroWest community with their parents (or guardians) can enroll in PJ Library by clicking [here](#).

[PJ Library](#)
[Kveller](#)
[JTot](#)

[Shtick Together](#)
[Easy Jewish Family Fun](#)
[Grandparents Connection](#)

Sharing Our Stories

by Elyse Deutsch

Women's Philanthropy Book Club

"The books and discussions are stimulating, the people interesting and wonderful. I have made some great friends." This is the feedback we received from Barbara Rood, long-time participant in the Women's Philanthropy Book Club. Her sentiments were echoed by fellow attendees.

About 10 years ago, Janice Weinberg and I decided to form a Women's Philanthropy Book Club. The club started in what was previously known as the Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey, but it has since expanded and now appeals to women all over the Greater MetroWest area.

We meet in the comfort of women's homes, routinely hosting as many as 20 women at a time. Although a core group regularly attends our meetings, we often welcome women who can only come from time to time but who contribute interesting viewpoints to our discussions. As my co-chair Janice said, "Our book club is unique because it's ever changing. This gives the group new dimensions and new perspectives."

Many women appreciate the flexibility that our book club offers, and they enjoy its diverse makeup. Susan Rifkin explained that "our book club enables women of various ages and backgrounds to share their perspectives." And Lisa Rouder said that she learns "something new each time" from this diverse group.

The books we select usually are written by Jewish authors and/or have Jewish themes, such as *And After the Fire* by Lauren Belfer or the next selection, *The Orphan's Tale* by Pam Jenoff, who will be speaking at the JCC of Central NJ in December. But occasionally women simply recommend books that have gotten great reviews and might lead to interesting discussions.

"Our book club provides a forum to discuss our personal views, beliefs, and feelings in conjunction with the books' plots," said Isabel Berg. "Some of our religious observances are different but we share a rich Jewish heritage that binds us. We respect each other and enjoy the camaraderie and noshes!"

And what's a book club without noshes? Eugenie Taub summed it up best. "I get cookies, wine, and a chance to meet new people," she said. "The good read is a bonus."

Living Bridge International Book Club



Local participants in the Living Bridge International Book Club discuss with their counterparts in Arad, Israel

Negev and Judean Deserts, near the Dead Sea, Arad has a diverse population of about 28,000 people that includes Russians, Ethiopians, Bedouins, and native-born Israelis. A Federation program called Partnership2Gether (P2G) aims at creating “living bridges” that connect Jews in Greater MetroWest with Jews in Arad through efforts that promote better understanding between the two communities in ways that are mutually beneficial.

The Living Bridge International Book Club is going on its third year. Bonnie Isaacson, a volunteer in the community, helped initiate the project because of the immediate and strong connection she felt towards Arad and the people she met through P2G. She was instrumental in starting the Book Club “as a way to maintain and further connect our NJ MetroWest community with my love for Arad and its people.”

Book Club members read the same book in English or Hebrew and then join together for a discussion via video conference. The major goal of the book club is to share a mutual passion for reading while also learning about each other. Conversations have centered around Israeli culture and history, and American culture and the diaspora experience. “It’s been thrilling to see how we can connect with each other while tackling topics that highlight both our common as well as our unique perspectives,” Bonnie said.

For Greater MetroWest participants, each book club meeting starts in the morning with a thematic workshop and a light breakfast. This is followed by a 1.5-hour videoconference with Arad. Bonnie reported that the Americans have been thrilled with the virtual discussion format. “It gives people an opportunity to connect on a global and highly personal level to each other,” she said. “It’s fascinating to read the same book and get totally different thinking between the two groups – you gain insights about one another’s experiences and how they may see things through a different lens.”

Our passion for books also binds us with our fellow Jews in Israel. Through its Global Connections department, Federation sponsors the Living Bridge International Book Club, uniting book lovers in Greater MetroWest New Jersey with their counterparts in Arad, Israel.

For more than 20 years, Arad has been one of our Federation’s sister cities.

Located on the border of the

Book selections are as diverse as the participants. Last year the group read an immigrant tale that combines elements of Jewish and Arab folk mythology, as well as a novel about two love stories, written by an internationally acclaimed Israeli author.

Club member Miriam Seiden explained, "Sharing reactions to the selected novels with our Arad book club members adds a whole new dimension and diversity to our discussions and creates a living bridge for all involved."

For further information about the Women's Philanthropy Book Club contact Karen Auerbach Bocaletti at KBocaletti@jfedgmw.org. To learn more about the International Book Club contact Randi Brokman at RBrokman@jfedgmw.org.

Learning Our Stories

by Lisa Lisser

About four years ago, we in Women's Philanthropy decided we needed to get back to basics. We wanted to provide a learning series for the women of Greater MetroWest with a variety of topics that mattered to them and that made a difference in their lives. At that moment, the Women of Wisdom education series was born. We call it WOW. We believed that providing programs in women's homes (with a small couvert, but no minimum donation) would bring people out and build community. And that we did!



Women's Philanthropy members come together for a morning of learning at our Women of Wisdom series

From the beginning, our vision for WOW was to build the series around three concepts: 1. text-based Jewish learning on topics relevant to Jewish women; 2. innovation in Jewish practice/life in America; and 3. cutting-edge work on the ground in Israel. Further, we recognized that college life was challenging for our young adults, so we dedicated one more session to a topic related to issues on campus. In this way, we responded to a need and, at the same time, hoped to educate women about the power of our Jewish Federation.

The relationships we had developed over the years with people whose work we touched through our partnerships, our leadership development programs, and the core work of Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) provided the connections to great speakers who could

show us our Jewish world from their inspiring points of view. All of our speakers, women and men, were connected to us through these personal relationships – from an Israeli women’s empowerment guru who started an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) prep program for girls at-risk, to an American “marketingjewru” who started JewBelong.com, to a female Reform rabbi who is reviving the ritual of mikveh for all Jews through the startup non-profit, ImmerseNYC. The series demonstrates the breadth of the work we impact through Federation and the diversity of Jewish experiences that are available to all of us.

The response has been overwhelming. Women love learning. We love learning together, and we care about issues that matter. It’s all about relationships – one woman inviting another woman to join. One participant, Joyce Litchman, told us that she read about the series in the New Jersey Jewish News and decided to come with a friend. Since that first visit, she has become a regular. She says she “looks forward to the series every year. I learn new things and hear about amazing programs. I especially loved learning about mikveh for today.”

The WOW series provides an entrance to Women’s Philanthropy that is open and welcoming. The camaraderie and conversation among the women, both veterans of Federation and newcomers, is vibrant and continuing. We hold three of the sessions in the morning in private homes throughout Greater MetroWest. Our college-focused session is usually in the evening. You can register for one or all sessions (\$18 for one session, \$54 for all 4).

We are excited to be planning the fourth season of Women of Wisdom, with registration details coming soon to the [Women's Philanthropy webpage](#). Mindy Goldberger is thrilled to be taking the lead as the incoming chair of the program. We have several incredible ideas in place already and are working to ensure that this year is just as engaging as the last three. We can’t wait to roll them out to you. If you have participated in the program before, please join us again this year. And bring a friend. If you haven’t attended yet, now is the time to join us. For more information contact Robin Leitner at RLeitner@jfedgmw.org.

President's Message

by Rebecca A. Gold



Books! Being bookish, bookworms, having your head in a book. These are all terms that define my family – both the family I was born into and the family I have created with my husband, Mitchell, and our boys, Jamie and Jonathan. I grew up with parents and a brother who, literally (no pun intended), read almost all the time. My father could, and my brother can, out-pace me at about five books to one. I was in awe of this ability... and a bit jealous. They spent almost every free minute reading. What rubbed off on me more than the fact that we were expected to be well read, was the respect one should have for books. “Important” books were treasured in the Brody

household. There were special shelves for our Tanakh, the Midrash, the Talmud and our siddurim. There was the requisite blue and white volume of Haftorot we received for our b'nei mitzvah, and dozens of books on Jewish themes, past and present, along with wonderful books about Israel. My parents made sure we loved Israel as much as they did... and we do!

I just returned from a Women's Philanthropy Mission to Vienna, Bratislava, and Budapest with a group of 30 women. Before we left, it came to our attention that the only synagogue of Bratislava needed 70 new siddurim. As a group, we arranged to buy these prayer books as a gift. It was a no-brainer and everyone was delighted to contribute. For me, nothing is more wonderful than receiving a treasured book from someone, so this really resonated with me. It added a very meaningful element to our connection with the Jews we met there. Our visit with Bratislava's Rabbi Baruch Myers (son of long-time Women's Philanthropy member Maxine Myers from our own Greater MetroWest community) and his wife, Chana, shed light on the Jewish renewal the town is experiencing. Rabbi Myers and Chana are an extraordinary team, although the rabbi credits Chana with being the force that pushed him and the community forward, securing funding for their new building and facilitating learning programs, especially for their youth population. Interestingly, while we Americans may experience Judaism in our homes but may not always come together as a community, they have the opposite challenge. They are drawing the Jewish community together, but there is little Jewish activity within the home – the result of the Holocaust and the Communism of the past. However, they are reigniting Judaism through the children, and what they are doing in Bratislava is just short of miraculous.

Our experience reminded me that the work our Jewish Federation does in Eastern Europe through our overseas partner, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), is not just about relief and rescue. So much of what is needed there is Jewish renewal. As you know, for decades since WWII, Jews were not allowed to pray and express themselves freely. Parents and grandparents are still afraid to identify themselves and their children as Jews. The dollars we raise, though, provide for meaningful Jewish experiences – Jewish day and overnight camps, programs for teens, and social experiences that connect the Jewish community. There is excellent evidence that there is success in reigniting the almost extinguished Jewish flame within the souls of our people in this part of the world. This gave me hope and made me very proud of the work our Federation does to make this possible.

Books help connect us to one another and expand our horizons. As is the case with every Mission, we were provided with a suggested reading list prior to our travels so that we could gain insight into the culture and environment of Jewish Vienna and Budapest of the past. The list included books such as Ann Marie O'Connor's *The Lady in Gold*, which told the true story of Gustav Klimt's 1907 portrait of the Viennese Jewish Socialite, Adele Bloch-Bauer, and the semi-autobiographical novel *Fatelessness*, by Nobel Prize winner Imre Kinszki, which told the story of a 14-year-old boy who was plucked from his home in Budapest and placed on a train to Auschwitz. While it's devastating to recount tragic stories of European Jews, it made me proud that we as a Federation stay connected, feel responsible for one another, and take care of Jews wherever they are.

As I begin my second year as your president, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you give and all you do. The fact that you choose to do this through Women's Philanthropy of Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest is not taken for granted, and I look forward to many opportunities to change other's lives, as well as our own, in big and small ways. Maybe we'll even exchange a book or two!