

Berkshire JEWISH VOICE

A publication of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, serving the Berkshires and surrounding NY, CT and VT

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Pittsfield, MA
Permit No. 19

Vol. 34, No. 2

Shevat / Adar / Nisan 5786

February 9 to March 22, 2026

jewishberkshires.org

Resilience and Renewal: Forging the Jewish Future



Aviva Klompas

PITTSFIELD – On Thursday, March 12, at 7 p.m., Jewish Federation of the Berkshires will present “Resilience and Renewal: Forging the Jewish Future,” featuring educator, writer, and advocate Aviva Klompas.

This in-person event will be held at Temple Anshe Amunim, 26 Broad Street in Pittsfield. Register on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

In a moment marked by war, rising antisemitism, heartbreak, and profound uncertainty, Jewish communities are searching for language, meaning, and direction. Klompas will offer a timely “Jewish state of the union for our time,” sharing frameworks to help communities process the challenges of the past two years and reflections on how we can summon the courage, clarity, and collective strength needed to meet this moment. The program will invite participants to reflect, connect, and envision a resilient Jewish future grounded in shared responsibility and purpose.

Aviva Klompas is the co-founder and CEO of Boundless, which partners with community leaders to revitalize Israel education and take bold collective action to combat antisemitism. She previously served as Director of Speechwriting for Israel’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations and as a senior policy advisor in the Ontario government, supporting efforts to resettle Syrian refugees in Canada.

A prolific writer, Klompas has contributed to *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Jerusalem Post*, and other international publications. She is the author of *Speaking for Israel*, reflecting on Israeli diplomacy and her work at the United Nations, and *Stand-Up Nation: Israeli Resilience in the Wake of Disaster*, which explores Israel’s longstanding work in international development and crisis response.

American Maccabee: Theodore Roosevelt and the Jews

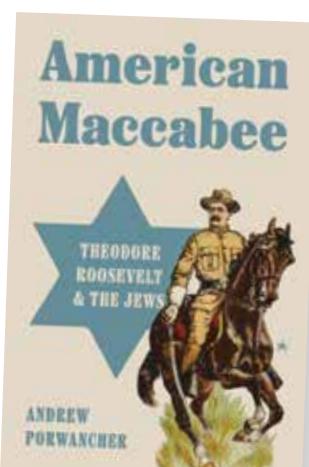
A “Bully!” program with Professor Andrew Porwancher

On Thursday, March 26, at 7 p.m., historian Andrew Porwancher will discuss his book, *American Maccabee: Theodore Roosevelt and the Jews*, which explores the complex and often surprising relationship between the 26th US president and the American Jewish community during a pivotal moment in U.S. history.

The program will be presented via Zoom. Register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

Porwancher will examine how Roosevelt, a scion of the Protestant elite, became an unexpected ally to Jewish immigrants arriving in large numbers at Ellis Island. From his early political career in New York, Roosevelt forged relationships with Jewish communities that were unprecedented for a future president. He spoke frequently on the Lower East Side, advocated for reform in sweatshops where many Jewish laborers worked under dangerous conditions, and publicly praised the heroism of the Maccabees, holding them up as a model for American Jewish life.

The program will also address the contradictions in Roosevelt’s record. During his presidency, he was confronted with the brutal persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe, which sent waves of refugees to the United States, even as antisemitic and xenophobic sentiments were growing at home. Drawing on new archival research, Porwancher will present a nuanced portrait of a leader whose engagement with Jewish issues reflected both moral conviction and the limitations of his time.



Inside

Rededicating Ourselves.....	2
Gratitude as a Centering Force	3
Your Federation Presents	4-13
Local News	14-16
Sar-El Lifts Spirits	19
Lost Jewish Worlds	20

AMERICAN MACCABEE,
continued on page 6

Do The Right Thing!

**“People look approvingly on their own ways,
but God probes motives”** (Proverbs 16:2)



You may, with a clear conscience, join us online on Thursday, February 12 at 7 p.m. for *Do the Right Thing*, the first show in the 2026 season by our friends at The Braid, the Go-To Jewish Story Company. With humor, heart, and rising stakes, this show explores the Jewish tradition of questioning power and speaking up, especially when doing the right thing means standing alone. For more info, see the story on page 4.

Happy Purim 5786!



Here’s an invitation to a “Purim Festival under the Patronage of Lady Reading”, organized by the Maccabi Society in Haifa in 1937. The image is by Yosef Bass. On the lower right part of the poster are the event’s details in Hebrew and English: “Dances accompanied by a Romany orchestra and a military jazz orchestra... prizes for successful masquerades.” For Purim parties and events in the Berkshires, see our Local News section starting on page 14.

OP-ED

RABBI REFLECTION

Rededicating Ourselves to Combating Both Antisemitism and Assimilation

By Rabbi Neal I. Borovitz



Historically, the greatest threats to Jewish survival have been antisemitism and assimilation. The first quarter of the 21st century has been a moment when we are facing challenges to Jewish continuity from both of these forces at the same time.

Two of the most celebratory festivals on the Jewish calendar, Purim and Chanukah respectively, commemorate moments in which the Jewish People successfully defended against these forces. Both the Book of Esther and the Books of the Maccabees are stories of Jews successfully standing up to tyrants. Both books tell a story of overcoming threats to Jewish communal survival.

The Book of Esther, which we are commanded to re-read annually on the forthcoming festival of Purim, is the only book of the Bible in which God is not explicitly mentioned. (Though no name of God appears in Song of Songs, both Jewish and Christian commentators over the ages see the entire book as an allegory of the love relationship between God and a covenantal People). The only *mitzvot* associated with Purim are the commands to hear the reading of the Scroll of Esther and to celebrate the victory over Haman. The heroes of the story, Esther and Mordechai, are clearly described as assimilated Jews. The book's acceptance of intermarriage stands in opposition to the position found in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah which, like Esther, are set in the time of the Babylonian exile.

The 1st century CE rabbis who included Esther in the Bible canon declared that certain Jewish books, including Maccabees, were to be "forbidden literature." There is no Hebrew edition of Maccabees that has survived. It is only through Christian sources in the earliest Greek and Latin Bibles that the actual text of the Chanukah story is available to us.

I hold to the theory held by many Jewish Biblical scholars that the Book of Esther reads more like a diaspora novella than a historical report, in contrast to the Book of Maccabees which is considered by Jewish and Christian scholars to be historical.

To me, the fact that there is clear evidence that the Chanukah story found in Maccabees is historical, while the Purim tale is most likely fictional, choosing to include Esther rather than Maccabees seems on its surface to be an unusual choice.

However, if we put ourselves into the seats of the post 70 CE academy of rabbis who are credited with the codification of the Hebrew Bible and were the first generation of rabbis who created the Mishna and Talmud, perhaps excluding Maccabees, was intentional, because of the concern that the full story of Maccabees, which was an inspiration for both the rebellion against Rome in 66-73 CE and the later Bar Kochba rebellion of 135 CE, could encourage future



The earliest depiction of people wearing costumes on Purim, from Sefer Zemanim (the Book of Holidays), in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah. Original in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. From northern Italy, ca. 1470.

rebellion. It is likely that the popularity of the celebration of Chanukah led these early rabbis, instead of placing The Book of Maccabees in the canon, to retell the Chanukah story through the creation, in Talmudic, Midrashic and liturgical literature, of a story where God has the prominent role in a winter solstice Festival of Lights.

Chanukah and Purim share an important place in the communal life of Jewish communities over the last 2,000 years. They are both stories of hope that Judaism and the Jewish People can survive the efforts of those who seek our disappearance through either annihilation or assimilation.

Chanukah is the story of a group of Jews who revolt against a Hellenistic culture which "ONLY" wants the Jews to assimilate, and forsake their particularistic practices. It is in fact as much an internal Jewish civil war as it is a war against the occupying force of Antiochus. However, the story is told in a manner that inspires zealotry. This past year, I re-read both the Book of Maccabees and the account of the war with Rome of 66-73 CE by the Roman Jewish historian Josephus, which awakened me to the danger we face from divisive strife within both Israeli and American Jewish communities.

In the Purim story, the threat is clearly defined as a defense against an enemy who seeks Jewish annihilation, despite the fact that the Jews described for us in the story are already highly assimilated. Pleading with Esther as he pleads with her to intervene with her husband the King to stop Haman, Mordechai warns her that antisemitism is a societal cancer against which no Jew, no matter how accepted he or she is in the larger non-Jewish world, is immune.

Assimilation and antisemitism remain for us today real threats to Jewish survival, individually and communally. Purim is a moment in which we American Jews – and particularly we the members of the Berkshire Jewish community – can take pride while rededicating ourselves to the efforts to combat BOTH antisemitism and assimilation. We must meet these challenges while taking to heart the lesson of our ancient rabbis who reinterpreted the story of Chanukah, so as to not allow our desire for religious liberty and pursuit of our rights lead us to a zealotry of superiority.

Rabbi Neal Borovitz is the Rabbi Emeritus of Kol Dorot, a Reform Jewish community in River Edge, NJ, where he served from 1988-2013. Rabbi Borovitz is an active leader in community affairs. He is a past chair of Jewish Community Relations Council of Northern New Jersey; the North Jersey Board of Rabbis; former Vice Chair of Jewish Council for Public Affairs, as well as the founding chairman of the Jewish Learning Project of Bergen County. He is a frequent contributor to the Jewish Standard of New Jersey and the Times of Israel. Rabbi Borovitz continues to teach adult education at Kol Dorot and at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City and has been an active member of The Berkshire Minyan in Great Barrington for 20 years.

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OP-ED

IN MY VIEW

Gratitude as a Centering Force

By Dara Kaufman / Executive Director, Jewish Federation of the Berkshires



Dara Kaufman

I recently took a day off and spent it at Kripalu. For those who may not be familiar, Kripalu is a retreat center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and a national leader in yoga- and mindfulness-based education.

I often say that a Federation year feels like a marathon. Slow and steady in some moments, a mad sprint in others, but always moving forward. Day after day, we do the work of building joyful community, strengthening Jewish identity, providing vital help to those in need, and ensuring the strength and security of Jewish life. Federation never stops, even when the path becomes winding and uneven, as it increasingly has over the past few years. We do this work together because it matters.

This year, however, that marathon stretched longer and further than usual. In addition to my Federation responsibilities, I served on the Massachusetts Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism. The work required frequent travel to Boston and hearing some very heavy testimony about the realities of antisemitism across our Commonwealth. By the time I arrived at Kripalu, I was tired, weighed down, and in need of a moment simply to stop and breathe.

Appropriately, the word Kripalu means compassion. I spent the day practicing meditation and yoga, attending classes, and intentionally slowing down. I focused on creating space for self-compassion and reconnecting with the immense gratitude I feel every day, for my life, for this work, and for this community.

Gratitude can feel complicated in a world filled with uncertainty and struggle. Rising antisemitism, ongoing challenges in Israel, and the weight of daily headlines can feel overwhelming. And yet, we are surrounded every day by acts of generosity, courage, and hope that remind us that goodness persists even in difficult times.

I often say that a Federation year feels like a marathon. Slow and steady in some moments, a mad sprint in others, but always moving forward.

Your generosity helped us raise a record-breaking \$1,496,995 in our 2025 Annual Campaign. I am deeply grateful to our Super Tzedakah Chairs, Leslie and Roy Kozupsky, and our Major Donor Chairs, Judy and Mark Usow, whose partnership, devotion, and generosity continue to inspire me. I am also thankful for our dedicated staff and board, who lead with wisdom and heart. Above all, I am grateful to the many donors, at every level, who contributed. Each gift, large and small, is an investment in the Jewish future we want for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren.

This month, our Allocations Committee will meet to determine how to distribute funds from our annual campaign to organizations beyond Federation's direct programs and services. Through this process, Federation will provide critical resources to educate our young people, support college students, and combat antisemitism and hate in our local public schools.

The committee will also grapple with how to help as many children as possible attend Jewish overnight camp, one of the most powerful tools we have to strengthen Jewish identity, build resilience, and instill the joy of being Jewish for a lifetime. With the average cost of a month at camp approaching \$9,000, these decisions are complex and deeply meaningful.

The Talmud teaches us, *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*, all of Israel is responsible for one another. Through Federation's allocation process, we live out this sacred responsibility by supporting vulnerable Jews around the world, aiding in rebuilding efforts in Israel, and sustaining our partnership with the Afula-Gilboa region.

Gratitude has long been my centering force. It lifts me when I feel depleted and grounds me when things feel complicated. It helps me think clearly, lead with intention, and keep moving forward with vision.

While serving on the Massachusetts Special Commission may have made my personal marathon more demanding this year, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity and the experience.

I was honored to be one of only two commissioners invited to join the co-chairs in personal conversations with Governor Healey, Lieutenant Governor Driscoll, Commissioner Martinez of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Senator Elizabeth Warren, and the Boston Globe Editorial Board. In each of these meetings, I was intent on bringing forward the perspective and concerns of small Jewish communities and ensuring that voices like ours were heard.

My trips to Boston may be over, but the work is far from finished. The next phase includes advocating for the implementation of the commission's recommendations. Locally, this means Federation working with our state legislators, engaging our large employers, and partnering with K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to help them turn these recommendations into meaningful action.

When I left Kripalu at the end of the day, I felt rested, but more importantly, I felt clear. Clear about why this work matters. Clear about the responsibility we carry. And clear about the strength, joy and resilience of this community.

I am incredibly proud of the work we do together, the impact we have, and the way we show up for one another in moments of celebration and in times of challenge.

This work is not always easy, and it is rarely quiet. But it is meaningful, it is critical, and it is sustained by people like you who care deeply. Thank you for walking this road with Federation, for believing in our shared responsibility, and for continuing to show up with generosity and heart. I am grateful.

Letters to the Editor

You Responded to Your Neighbors in Need

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you so much for your generous support of our food programs. Since the early fall, we have seen a marked increase in need among existing clients and even more so with new individuals and families in need. Your gift goes directly to purchase food so we can help many of our neighbors as possible.

Thank you for your generosity – your gift will go directly to community members!

With gratitude,
Bethany Kieley
CEO, CHP Berkshires

33 is A Lot of Exclamation Points

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you so much for helping me go to Eden Village Camp.

My Favorite things were art and share.

I can't wait until I can come back!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Mia Wax
Williamstown



Berkshire JEWISH VOICE

A publication of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, serving the Berkshires and surrounding NY, CT and VT. Published 9 times a year.

The color photography in this issue is made possible through the generosity of Linda Becker, honorary publisher.

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Next issue publication date: **March 23, 2026 – May 3, 2026**

Press deadline: **February 10, 2026**

Advertising deadline: **March 5, 2026**

Berkshire Jewish Voice e-mail: astern@jewishberkshires.org

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Your Federation Presents

How to Trace Ancestors Through Letters and Postcards



A vintage Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) postcard, most likely from the early 20th century (circa 1900-1915).

On Thursday, March 5, at 7 p.m., professional genealogist Kathryn Lake Hogan will present "How to Trace Ancestors Through Letters and Postcards," a Zoom program examining correspondence as a key resource for family history research.

Register on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

Letters and postcards can open a uniquely intimate window onto family history, and a forthcoming virtual program will explore how these often-overlooked materials can help genealogists uncover powerful personal and historical insights.

Hogan will explain how letters and postcards allow researchers to hear ancestors' voices, document family relationships, and capture the details of everyday life. The presentation will explore how clues such as postmarks, greetings, addresses, and even gaps in correspondence can reveal important information. Participants will also learn strategies for locating correspondence within families, archives, and public collections, and how postal routes and geography can illuminate patterns of migration. The program will conclude with guidance on correlating correspondence with census data, directories, and vital records.

Kathryn Lake Hogan, UE, PLCGS, is a professional genealogist and educator with deep roots in Canada. She is the founder of Looking4Ancestors and a graduate of ProGen 4 and the International Institute for Genealogical Studies, where she earned professional learning certificates in English and Canadian genealogy. Hogan is currently pursuing accreditation with ICAPGen and has written extensively on Canadian genealogy for publications including Family Tree Magazine and The APG Quarterly.

Do The Right Thing – with The Braid

True Jewish stories of doing the right thing... even when it's really hard!

On Thursday, February 12 at 7 p.m., The Braid returns with *Do the Right Thing*, true Jewish stories of doing the right thing, even when it's really hard! With humor, heart, and rising stakes, this show explores the Jewish tradition of questioning power and speaking up, especially when doing the right thing means standing alone.

This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email two days before the program containing information about joining the meeting.

This is the first show in the 2026 season by our friends at The Braid, the Go-To Jewish Story Company.

Experience The Braid's signature storytelling theatre with *Do the Right Thing*. See actors bring to life true Jewish stories of doing the right thing, even when



COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS APPLICATION DEADLINE IS APRIL 24

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Application information will be available in school guidance offices in February.



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it's really hard! The show explores the Jewish tradition of questioning power and speaking up, especially when doing the right thing means standing alone. With humor, heart, and rising stakes, this production teases the timeless cost of conscience through real voices and unforgettable choices. You'll be on the edge of your seat as a nervous flier halts a plane on the runway after spotting what he fears is an engine fire; fascinated as a young journalist amidst Vietnam-era college protests saves lives by withholding breaking news; and captivated as decades later, a woman tries to deliver a Holocaust-era letter to the surviving family. Don't miss these and other stories in a show that Broadway World raves is both "gripping and inspiring."

For nearly two decades, The Braid has created a unique artform at the intersection of storytelling and theatre that dramatizes and shares the diverse stories of a diverse Jewish people. This will be a 65-minute live theater production presented by actors of The Braid, followed by a moderated Q&A session.

Hebrew Calligraphy and Letter Arts Today: Tattoos, Type, and Graffiti

Final program in the series presented by Professor Joanna Homrighausen

On Thursday, February 26 at 7 p.m., join us for the last of three standalone talks on Hebrew calligraphy presented by Professor Joanna Homrighausen of Jewish Art Education. Her topic will be Hebrew Calligraphy and Letter Arts Today: Tattoos, Type, and Graffiti."

This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. No knowledge of Hebrew language required.

Professor Homrighausen will look at some of the new technologies in and controversial surfaces on which artists do calligraphy in the 21st century. These letters suggest a variety of ways of doing tradition Jewishly.

Joanna Homrighausen writes and teaches at the intersection of sacred text, lettering arts, and scribal crafts. Having earned her PhD in Religion (Hebrew Bible) at Duke University, she teaches Religious Studies at the College of William & Mary, where she has taught the biblical Hebrew sequence, the history of ancient Israel, and first-year writing seminars.



Hillel Smith, "Who Brings Forth Bread from the Land"

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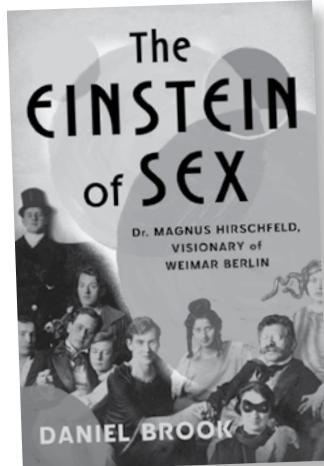
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Your Federation Presents

The Einstein of Sex: Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, Visionary of Weimar Berlin

The life and legacy of one of the 20th century's most daring and influential – yet largely forgotten – Jewish thinkers



On Thursday, February 19, at 7 p.m., journalist and author Daniel Brook will talk about his book *The Einstein of Sex: Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, Visionary of Weimar Berlin* in a virtual program exploring the remarkable career of a pioneering Jewish advocate for sexual and gender freedom in early 20th-century Germany.

Register for this Zoom program on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. Part of "Jewish Literary Voices, a Federation series presented in collaboration with the Jewish Book Council."

More than a century ago, Hirschfeld earned the nickname "the Einstein of Sex" for his revolutionary theory of sexual relativity, arguing that each individual embodies a unique blend of masculinity and femininity. At a time when same-sex relationships were criminalized and gender roles rigidly defined, Hirschfeld emerged as a bold public intellectual and compassionate clinician. Through advocacy, scholarship, and private counseling, he became a central figure in Berlin's vibrant cultural and cabaret scene, helping transform the city into a global center of queer life.

Hirschfeld's prominence also made him a target of the Nazis, who ransacked his Institute for Sexual Science and publicly burned his books. Forced into exile, he traveled widely through the United States, Asia, and the Middle East, pursuing a global study of sexuality. Shaped by antisemitic persecution and a late-in-life interracial romance, Hirschfeld came to understand race, like gender, as a human construct, and he spent his final years warning of the deadly consequences of racism.

Brook's presentation draws from his acclaimed book *The Einstein of Sex*, which brings together Hirschfeld's groundbreaking ideas on sexuality, gender, and race and situates them within contemporary struggles for personal freedom and social acceptance.

Daniel Brook is a journalist whose work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. He is the author of several books, including *A History of Future Cities* and *The Accident of Color: A Story of Race in Reconstruction*. A New York native and Yale graduate, Brook lives in New Orleans and researched *The Einstein of Sex* with support from a Robert and Ina Caro Research/Travel Fellowship.

Copies of *The Einstein of Sex* may be purchased through the Jewish Book Council, with a portion of the proceeds benefiting a local independent bookstore in the Berkshires.

Eating Identity: Yemeni Jewish Migration and Foodways, with Professor Ari Ariel



On Thursday, March 12, at **10:45 a.m.**, we welcome Ari Ariel, Ph.D., Director of International Studies at the University of Iowa and an Associate Professor of Instruction in International Studies and History. His research focuses on Jewish communities in the Arab world and Mizrahi communities in Israel, with a special interest in how migration reshapes foodways and cultural practices.

This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

What happens to the foods we love when we leave home? Yemeni Jewish immigrants carried rich culinary traditions with them to Palestine and later Israel – recipes and practices that kept their connection to Yemen alive while asserting a distinct ethnic identity. Migration, however, transforms what ends up on the table. New ingredients, unfamiliar cooking techniques, and changing access to traditional foods all leave their mark.

During the 20th century, most of the age-old Yemeni Jewish community immigrated to Palestine/Israel. This talk will use foods to examine how Yemeni Jews struggled to resist assimilation, while also working to integrate into Israeli society.

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Your Federation Presents

AMERICAN MACCABEE, continued from page 1

Andrew Porwancher is professor of history at Arizona State University. He is the author of *The Jewish World of Alexander Hamilton* and *The Devil Himself: A Tale of Honor, Insanity, and the Birth of Modern America*.

The BJV Interview: Andrew Porwancher

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

In January, Professor Porwancher spoke to the BJV about some of the themes of his work. Our conversation was edited for length and clarity.

Describe Roosevelt's relationship with the Jews of the Lower East Side during his time as police commissioner of New York City and later as the governor of the state. Also, did he have similar relationships with other immigrant ethnic groups?

Roosevelt, as police commissioner, began forging this deep bond with the Eastern European Jewish immigrants who were then flooding the Lower East Side. He barnstorms that neighborhood, going block by block, giving speeches to crowds made up of Jewish newcomers who had come to hear the young commissioner espouse his egalitarian ethos. He assured them that, contrary to the rule of Tammany Hall, the Democratic machine that had sold out rewards and patronage based on spoils and connections, that they were entering a merit-based society where a Jew of talents and work ethic who had no particular connections would be given a square deal, to put it in Rooseveltian terms. I have not made a special study of Roosevelt's relationships with various other ethnic groups, but I caught hints of it in my research. I believe that he also cultivated Irish and Italian constituencies with comparable vigor.

His rise was meteoric. From New York City police chief to assistant secretary of the US Navy to hero of the Spanish American War to governor of New York to vice president in less than ten years. Then, he was thrust into the presidency at age 42 following the assassination of William McKinley. He did so at a point of history that you describe this way: "His mixed approach to Jewish affairs aptly reflected a nation uncertain of its own destiny." Can you expand on that a little bit?

America was not yet the dominant global superpower that it would become amid the ashes of the Second World War, but neither was it the fledgling young nation on the margins of European Empire that it had been at its inception, a century before Roosevelt's political ascent. America in the Rooseveltian era was becoming an increasingly important player on the global stage and starting to project its power beyond its shores. At the same time that America is playing an ever increasingly important role in the global arena, the country is growing ever more diverse. It is drawing immigrants, not just from the Northern and Western European countries that had traditionally funneled migrants to the New World. Southern [Europeans] and Eastern European Jews were coming in unprecedented numbers. America was dealing with these twin challenges in an era of globalization. That is the broader backdrop against which Roosevelt's Jewish diplomacy abroad, as well as his relationship with Jewish immigrants at home, takes place.

After the Spanish American War, America starts to establish itself as an imperialist country. Yet at the same time, the borders are still open to new immigration. How did he reconcile this outward-looking imperialist program with the waves of immigrants changing the demographics of America?

Well, the case of Jews shows how counterintuitive the political logic could be at that time, because there were antisemites who supported a robust role for America in helping attenuate antisemitism overseas. Their motive was less humanitarian than it was to stem the tide of immigrants. What they really wanted was to suppress the catalytic force abroad that was pushing so many Jews into American ports. There are ways in which – counterintuitively – xenophobia and a more robust vision of America's place in the world could go hand in hand. That's not to say that every reactionary favored an interventionist foreign policy, nor does that mean that pacifists necessarily shunned immigrants. But it is difficult to know someone's views on immigration, and from that deduce with confidence their views on American foreign policy.

You characterize Roosevelt as somebody who held some of the prejudices of his era and of his class against the Jews. But you also make it very clear that above all, TR was a believer in pluralism. He was a believer in the melting pot, which often ruffled the feathers of some of his Jewish supporters. Were those ideas reflective of a broader consensus among the American public, or did Roosevelt, through his rhetoric and his actions, make that idea, the melting pot, more central to how America saw itself and its society?

Roosevelt, undoubtedly, helped strengthen the cultural premium on America as a melting pot. Roosevelt was a figure of really unparalleled influence in American history at his prime. Roosevelt was very involved in helping boost certain literary voices who championed the idea of America as a melting pot, not just Israel Zangwill [the British-Jewish playwright who penned the hugely popular inter-faith romance *The Melting Pot*], but also other Jewish immigrant writers. I have no doubt that Roosevelt's efforts, public and behind the scenes, were central to amplifying those voices who endorsed this assimilationist view of America. Yet, at the same time, Roosevelt is in tension with himself because he also, at times, articulates a much more pluralistic vision. When he heralds the Maccabee warriors as a model for American Jews, he is not saying that Jews should eschew their cultural heritage as the price of participation in American society. He is not calling for their total homogenization. Rather, Roosevelt is suggesting that Jews should honor those parts of their own heritage that accord with his own premium on vigor and valor. I think that it is undoubtedly true that Roosevelt played a significant role in amplifying voices that endorse the melting pot, and yet he also contradicted those voices. As you know from reading the book, it is consistently Rooseveltian for him to articulate one idea and then contradict himself in short order.

Much of your book involves Roosevelt's response to the deadly pogroms in Russia that started with Kishinev in 1903 and then escalated. As you show, he had a genuine fear that a forceful diplomatic approach might make things worse for the Jews in Russia. In a certain sense, what followed was a success in that it helped open the doors of the United States to more Jewish immigration. But generally speaking, do you think that was the appropriate approach to that situation?

Oftentimes, the electorate will judge a president based on whether they think something is going well or poorly based on their own subjective sense of what counts as good and what counts as bad. But the reality is that the policymaker-in-chief often finds themselves choosing between a bunch of suboptimal choices.

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Your Federation Presents



Theodore Roosevelt

We see with the Kishinev petition, Roosevelt uses the formal channels of diplomacy to call on the Tsar to protect the lives and liberties of his Jewish subjects. It is true that there were pogroms that took place after that intervention. Might there have been more pogroms, and could they have been a greater scale but for Roosevelt's intervention? Alternatively, did Roosevelt's intervention foment more pogroms? It's hard to know how the counterfactual would have played out.

Ultimately, I think that the central authorities in St. Petersburg did have agency for much of Roosevelt's presidency over what was happening in the provinces. I strongly suspect that America's public reproach of Russia over the pogroms probably made some headway in pushing the Tsarist

regime to abstain from even greater violence than was perpetrated because America had basically impugned Russia's honor and credibility on the world's stage by holding up a mirror to Russian barbarity for the global community to see. Could Roosevelt have done more? Could America have sent troops to Russia? I don't know. It is difficult to go to war in a sustained way without the support of the American people for boots on the ground. That is true today, and it was true at the time. When you measure Roosevelt's intervention, against the non-action of other world leaders, Roosevelt was willing to boldly defy international norms that frowned on an American president – or any world leader – making a humanitarian reproach against a barbaric empire like Russia. Roosevelt does become the only head of state in the world to speak out publicly and condemn the Kishinev pogrom.

One of the things that your book brings out was just how organized the Jewish community was and how appalled they were by the news out of Russia. It reminded me so much of the post-October 7 response. Were Americans very engaged with this story?

The American Republic was remarkably engaged with these questions of Jewish survival abroad. There were mass protests of Jews and Gentiles alike that pleaded with the president to intercede. These protests took place not just in the obvious locations with large Jewish populations like New York and Chicago, but also places like Texarkana. There is a group of Black lawyers in Louisville who hold a protest meeting against the violence visited upon Jewish victims in Russia. You have a Chinese theater in New York City hold benefit performances to funnel money to Jewish victims overseas. Newspapers – and not just major papers like the New York Times, but small-town papers – were informing their readership about developments with Roosevelt's Jewish diplomacy. When you look at just Roosevelt's records himself, these issues of Jewish diplomacy are part of State of the Union addresses, nomination speeches when he's running for president, campaign platforms. These issues were at the very center of American politics.

You write that in the 7.5 years of his presidency, America's Jewish population doubled from one million to around 2 million. Did that influx change American perspectives of Jews and were they well received during that time period?

It was really a mixed bag. The Jewish population that predominated before the wave of pogrom survivors came to American shores had been Jews, largely from Central Europe, who, by the era of Roosevelt's presidency, had become assimilated, Americanized, and very successful. The indigent Eastern European Jews who were fleeing persecution, cut a very different figure from their more patrician Jewish counterparts. Some Americans embraced these newcomers. There was a strain of Protestantism known as Social Gospel Protestantism, a variant of Christianity to which Roosevelt subscribed. It called on Christians to operationalize their faith by extending their hand to the needy and to the newcomer. Those people embraced these Jewish immigrants and saw in these steamships full of Jewish survivors future proud American citizens.

Others shunned these immigrants. They feared that America's racial purity would be contaminated by this influx of Jewish blood into the body politic. They were aghast at the overcrowded slums to which many of these Jews and other immigrants were shunted, slums that were hotbeds of disease and filth. There were many of the white Anglo-Saxon patrician class who shuddered at these Jewish newcomers – nor did they thrill the more affluent assimilated Jews trying to gain entry to their summer clubs and social resorts.

Partly because of the efforts of Jewish-American leadership to avert xenophobic legislation, and partly because of Roosevelt's willingness to lend his imprimatur to the cause of American inclusivity, we see an America that is remarkably hospitable to Jews, especially when juxtaposed to their treatment in the Old World. And yet, the era after Roosevelt would become something of a heyday for xenophobic antisemitism, as America in the 1920s institutes quotas that closes its doors to many Jews who are seeking to escape habitual bouts of butchery overseas.

You portray Teddy Roosevelt as a man of contradictions. After he died, when he was eulogized, especially in the Jewish community, they tended to remember the good things he did for the Jews, and not mention the things that they didn't like. Do you think there's any lesson for current political climate in just accepting the fact that politicians have very difficult jobs and that there are going to be inevitable contradictions?

Well, one lesson that we can take from the story of Roosevelt and the Jews is that in our democracy, the public matters a lot. Roosevelt was able to take a defiant stand against the Russian Empire on Jewish issues because he had the backing of the American people. To be sure, there were countervailing forces from diplomatic norms to folks at the State Department who were less sympathetic to the plight of Jews overseas.

But there was this tremendous force pushing Roosevelt to take a humanitarian stand on behalf of embattled Jews, and that was the American people. We often get the political leadership that we ask for. I think if the American people have the courage to demand more of our political leaders, it's in the nature of representative democracy that those leaders will be responsive to that public. In many ways, I think this book is a testament to the power of ordinary people to push American political leadership to do the right thing when doing the right thing is hard.

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Festive In-Person Purim Lunch!

Celebrate the Festival of Lots (of Hamenstashen)

PITTSFIELD – On Thursday, March 5 at noon, come together in community for a delicious Purim-themed lunch. Our new food services director Natalia Monahan has planned a menu of savory meat-filled hamantashen, Persian jeweled rice, sautéed green beans and mushrooms, creamy broccoli and tahini soup, challah, and hamantashen.

This Connecting With Community event will be held at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.

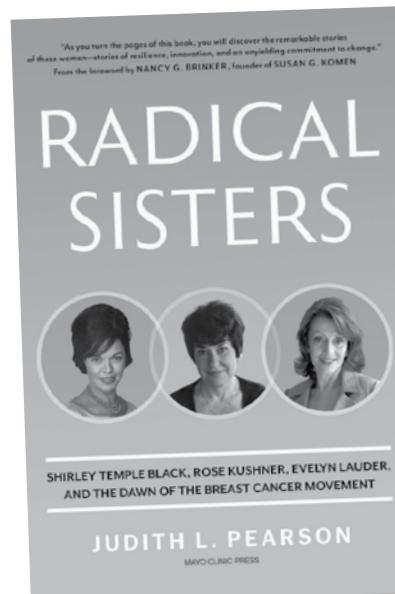
RSVP required by Wednesday, March 4 at 9 a.m.

Call (413) 442-2200 to reserve your meal. \$3 suggested donation for older adults aged 60 yrs+, \$7 for all others.



Per MyJewishLearning.com: "When it comes to drinking on Purim, the Talmud clearly understood what the scroll of Esther (the Megillah) was all about. In practically every chapter of the Megillah, someone is imbibing heavily at a drinking party. And the scroll concludes with Mordecai's instruction to the entire Jewish people to celebrate these days as "yemei mishteh v'simchah, days of drinking and rejoicing" (Esther 9:22)." Image: "The Banquet of Queen Vashti," from the 1617 Scroll of Esther from Ferrara, Italy. Institution: National Library of Israel, Jerusalem

Radical Sisters: Shirley Temple Black, Rose Kushner, Evelyn Lauder, and the Dawn of the Breast Cancer Movement, with Judith L. Pearson



On Thursday, March 19 at 7 p.m., join author Judith L. Pearson as she tells the compelling stories of three women whose bravery transformed breast cancer awareness and advocacy, based on her book *Radical Sisters: Shirley Temple Black, Rose Kushner, Evelyn Lauder, and the Dawn of the Breast Cancer Movement*. She will present this story in conversation with Rosalind Kopfstein.

This program will be presented via Zoom. Visit the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. Part of "Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series in collaboration with The Jewish Book Council."

There was a time when women's health was marginalized, when breast cancer wasn't discussed, and October wasn't pink. Then three women – Shirley Temple Black, Rose Kushner, and Evelyn Lauder – refused to be silenced. Their courage ignited a movement that forever changed society's approach to breast cancer.

Facing outdated medical protocols, little research, and widespread silence, these "radical sisters" became trailblazing advocates. They championed early detection, patient education, and women's health – from legislation and insurance coverage to founding treatment centers and launching the pink ribbon campaign.

Judith Pearson is a best-selling author and storyteller, with six biographies including award-winning works. A Michigan State University graduate, her career was briefly interrupted by a diagnosis of Triple Negative Breast Cancer, inspiring her to found A 2nd Act, a nonprofit supporting women cancer survivors giving back to the community.



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Federation Executive Director Dara Kaufman Honored with Peer Recognition Grant

JCRC CEO and Amber Award winner Jeremy Burton recognizes Kaufman's leadership and impact in the Berkshires and across MA



Dara Kaufman

foster a ripple effect of gratitude, mentorship, and shared celebration across the Jewish communal field.

In January, Jeremy Burton selected Jewish Federation of the Berkshires Executive Director Dara Kaufman as one of his Peer Recognition Grant recipients. In addition to collaborating closely on issues of shared concern, Burton and Kaufman served together on the Massachusetts Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism, which delivered its final report and recommendations to the Massachusetts State Legislature last November.

"Dara is such a thoughtful, skilled leader in a smaller community," said Burton. "Frankly, I think smaller communities often get overlooked in some of these national spaces. But Dara is respected both across the Massachusetts Jewish communal professional space and in the state house in Boston. She carries, nurtures, and supports so many different partners and community leaders."

Burton's other nominee for the grant was Dan Goldwin, who is Chief of Public Affairs at the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Chicago.

Reflecting on his own work, Burton noted the challenges inherent in communal advocacy: "On the day-to-day basis, sometimes it feels like I'm dealing with some of the hard, difficult, dark stuff, like how our state government is dealing with hate crimes and enforcement. It's working on institutional



Jeremy Burton receiving the Grinspoon Amber Award at Federation's General Assembly last November

"Smaller communities often get overlooked in some of these national spaces. But Dara is respected both across the Massachusetts Jewish communal professional space and in the state house in Boston."

Jeremy Burton, JCRC's CEO

hardening for Jewish buildings through non-profit security grants. It's not necessarily fun or easy things to think about. But the essence of the work is about ensuring that Jewish communities feel welcome and valued by the surrounding communities here in Massachusetts. And that Jewish people are safe and feel comfortable, welcomed, and can show up in Jewish spaces and live vibrant Jewish lives."

Know an outstanding Jewish communal professional?

Nominations are open for the 2026 Grinspoon Amber Awards. The nomination window will remain open until February 28, 2026.

Learn more about the 2026 nomination criteria and nominate an outstanding Jewish communal professional by visiting amberawards.org/nominate.

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Your Federation Presents

Strengthening Our Partnership with Afula–Gilboa



SNEC participants gathered in Hartford . . .

On a snowy January night, members of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires gathered for a meaningful reception with leaders of our Afula–Gilboa Partnership to reflect on the impact of our shared work and deepen our connection to the region. We are deeply grateful to Leslie and Roy Kozupsky for so generously hosting the evening and warmly welcoming our guests.

The reception brought together key partners from Israel, including Achiya Ben Ari Buganim, Afula–Gilboa Partnership Director; Maya Shoam, Partnership2Gether Northern Director; and Ronit Torgeman, Chair of the Afula–Gilboa Partnership Israeli Steering Committee. Their presence offered an important opportunity to hear firsthand about the challenges facing the region and the tangible difference our partnership is making.

Through this collaboration – carried out through the Southern New England Consortium (SNEC) and the Jewish Agency for Israel – Jewish Federation of the Berkshires supported the Afula–Gilboa region with \$40,000 in grants to organizations providing critical mental health services. These grants are helping individuals and families cope with PTSD and other ongoing challenges resulting from the war, strengthening local capacity at a time of profound need.

By pooling resources with other Southern New England communities through SNEC, our Federation moves beyond episodic support toward strategic, sustained impact. With the Jewish Agency providing infrastructure, accountability, and deep local expertise, this partnership reflects the core value of Jewish peoplehood – *kol Yisrael arevim zeh baze*, we are responsible for one another – and demonstrates how long-term, people-centered investment can build resilience, dignity, and hope in Israel's geographic and social periphery.



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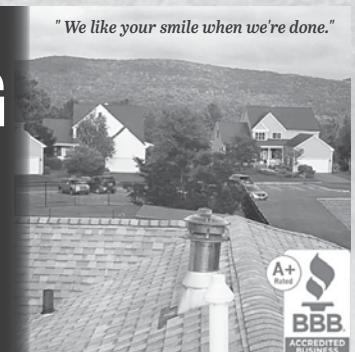
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Your Federation Presents



Your Campaign Dollars at Work Building Bridges Between Jewish and Arab Youth in Israel and Teens in Gilboa and the Berkshires

The Mishkan Museum of Art at Kibbutz Ein Harod provided this report on the youth leadership and shared living programs supported by Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. In a year defined by profound complexity, this partnership has provided a critical foundation for essential work within the Gilboa region. Here is one story about the difference your generous donations to Federation made in Israel and in the Berkshires.

During this period, the museum significantly developed activities within "The Atelier: Studio for Creative Thinking." These programs explore the intersection of seeing, reality, and communication. Inspired by a current exhibition by artist Ido Marcus, participants use photography to investigate how our current reality impacts perception and how changing the way one looks at the world can become a powerful tool for communicating ideas. Through these sessions, teens from throughout the region develop leadership skills for a changing reality.



Arab schoolchildren visit Mishkan collection

able to get to know the museum staff in a familiar setting before visiting the museum. This format has proven successful in building positive connections and will continue as a standard practice. Additionally, the museum expanded its focus to include the professionals who guide these youth. In October 2025 we hosted a Shared Living Conference for the heads of Abraham Initiatives centers in the northern region. The Atelier served as a springboard for this gathering, allowing regional leaders to use flexible thinking and art-based brainstorming to address shared goals and the obstacles to coexistence.

The work of connecting Arab and Jewish youth remains exceptionally sensitive and requires a deliberate, patient approach. Recognizing the complexity of these connections, the team took the initiative to go directly into Arab schools to build trust. By conducting a multi-stage program within the students' own environments first, they were

Our Artivist teen volunteers and Young Artists groups continue to meet weekly, serving as artistic activists within the museum. Their efforts culminated in an end-of-year exhibit that allowed these teens to serve as role models for their younger peers. By sharing their artistic journeys and commitment, they inspire a younger generation to see the museum as a space for leadership and voice. The ongoing art exchanges about sources of light with Lenox Memorial High School art students and about self-portraiture with teens at Hevre of Southern Berkshire in Great Barrington remain sources of immense strength.

While these successes are celebrated, the community recently suffered a devastating loss in a terror attack that took the life of a teen from the kibbutz. This tragedy underscores the urgency and the difficulty of this mission. The museum remains committed and is preparing to welcome a new cohort of Arab and Jewish teen leaders ready to carry the work forward. We are dedicated to expanding this essential work in 2026, focused on healing, resilience, and the slow but necessary mission of building a shared future through art.

We are deeply grateful to Jewish Federation of the Berkshires for your dedicated partnership and support of this crucial work.



Teens create self portraits to send to peers in Great Barrington

A Joyous First Night Passover Celebration

A meaningful Seder experience with handcrafted kosher cuisine

PITTSFIELD – Jewish Federation of the Berkshires will host a kosher community Passover Seder at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 1, at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road.

Participants will enjoy an engaging kosher Seder featuring meaningful ritual, lively song, and thoughtful insights that illuminate the Passover story.

The evening includes all ritual foods, ceremonial wine, and a festive four-course meal freshly prepared by Hand Crafted Catering & Events. The menu features Matzo Ball Soup; Crispy Meyer Lemon Chicken, Roasted Fingerling Potatoes, Sweet Potato Kugel, Honey-Glazed Tri-Color Carrots and roasted vegetables. Vegetarian and gluten-free options are available upon advance request. Attendees are invited to bring their own kosher-for-Passover table wine.

Rabbi David Weiner of Knesset Israel will serve as Seder leader. Children of all ages, extended family, and community friends are welcome.



An example of a catered meal cooked up by Hand Crafted Catering & Events

About Our New Caterers

Hand Crafted Catering & Events is our proud Seder partner. Hand Crafted was started 11 years ago in New York City and is now based in the Berkshires. They thrive on customizing experiences for each client and event with menus that are ingredient-driven, locally sourced, and thoughtfully produced, without the use of pre-made and frozen products and hot holding.

Owner Justin Carafotes moved to Richmond with his wife, Rachel Renchner-Kelly, and three-year-old daughter Mila in 2020. As members of the Jewish community, they recognized a need for farm-to-table kosher catering in the region. Since then, Hand Crafted has successfully served kosher events in the Berkshires.

The family are active members of the local Jewish community, a PJ Library family and new congregants at Knesset Israel, where Mila participates in Tot Shabbat. "We moved here to establish roots and start our family," says Justin. "We're excited to share this Seder meal and to continue feeding our community in the years ahead."

If You Go

The cost is **\$45 for adults and \$22 for children ages 6-17**. Children 5 and under are free but must be registered. Advance reservations and payment are required by **March 23**.

Financial assistance is available for anyone who may need it. Please contact Dara Kaufman at dkaufman@jewishberkshires.org or (413) 442-4360, ext. 12.

Reservations may be made by calling the Federation at (413) 442-4360, ext. 10, or online at jewishberkshires.org.

The Seder is sponsored by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires.

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Your Federation Presents

Experience a Powerful Story of Memory, Movement, and Resilience

Bringing 3RD GEN – A Survivor's Story to our community and our schools

One of the most effective ways to confront antisemitism is through education and through art that opens hearts as well as minds. A response to recent events here in the U.S. and abroad, *3RD GEN – A Survivor's Story* is a powerful dance memoir by acclaimed Israeli-American choreographer Shany Dagan that offers a deeply moving opportunity to reflect, learn, and bear witness.

On Thursday, February 26 at 2 p.m., the community is invited to a performance of *3RD GEN*, followed by a talk-back with the choreographer. The program is free and open to the public and will take place at the Perles Family Studio at Jacob's Pillow, 358 George Carter Road, Becket. Security will be in place.

Through movement and storytelling, *3RD GEN* honors the resilience of Holocaust survivors while illuminating the vital role their grandchildren play in carrying these stories forward as firsthand witnesses are lost. Drawing from her own family history, Dagan confronts centuries-old patterns of scapegoating and hatred, offering a compelling artistic response to narratives that blame or disparage Jews for complex societal challenges.

Come be part of an experience that uses art to remember, educate, and inspire action.

The Jacob's Pillow performance launches a three-part series by Dagan Dancers, which also includes:

- Friday, February 27 – School assembly at Mount Everett Regional Jr./Sr. High School (grades 8-12)
- Saturday, February 28, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. – Dance workshop for young choreographers and adults at Berkshire Pulse, Housatonic

This meaningful weekend of performance and education, presented in collaboration with Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, is made possible through the generosity of dedicated community members: Jane Glaser • Sherri Greenbach & David Goldstein • Roy & Geri Liemer • Sherry Londe • Helice & Steve Picheny • Heather Thomson Schindler & Jonathan Schindler • Ann Schnesel. For more information or any questions, please call (850) 460-4774.

About Shany Dagan and *3RD GEN*

3RD GEN – A Survivor's Story was born as a Covid pandemic project of Israeli-American dancer and choreographer Shany Dagan. During the lockdown, she revisited the survivor testimonies recorded at Yad Vashem by her maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather. In a studio, she relisted to her grandparents' voices and started to move in response to their words. Then, she invited her friend Yochai Greenfeld, who will be dancing *3RD GEN* in the Berkshires with Morgana Mauney, to the studio and asked him to listen to her grandfather's story and recreate it through improvised movement.

A shorter version of the dance was well-received, and so Dagan developed the idea into a full-length dance that would be followed by a talkback. Now the project has evolved, she says, "where my goal is to bring more pieces and more stories to life through movement and music. We are working on new pieces that people send us of their stories or their grandparents' stories," both spoken word and written word.

Music for the piece was composed by Luke Wygodny who, like the dancers, responded to the words of Dagan's grandparents, Emmanuel Dagan and Lily Alter, to whose memory the piece is dedicated. The genesis of the piece was conceived organically in the studio, Dagan explains. She filmed the development process and identified the improvisations that worked the best to develop the dance.

"This was the first time that I sat with my history and with the people who I loved most and listened to their pain," says Dagan. "Now I'm able to process it for myself and understand where I come from. Though it's based on my Jewish history, I had friends and audience members who are not Jewish, and they came to us after the show and they said, 'Wow, it made me think about our own stories.' That was the first time that I actually realized that everyone can relate. Shared humanity is not just a nice couple of words – it's we all experience something and we all have history and we can connect on that."

To Dagan's Berkshire audience, particularly the students, she says: "It's not supposed to be a sad performance. It revolves around strength and history and hope and resilience."

Holocaust and Antisemitism Education in Our Local Schools

Holocaust and antisemitism education is not only happening on stage this winter, it is also taking root in our local schools through Federation-supported partnerships that center student leadership, dialogue, and belonging.

"There are a lot of students here at Mount Everett that want to do these good works and make a difference and put into place some real change."

Educator Lindsey Brown

Lindsey Brown is a middle school science teacher at Mount Everett Regional in Sheffield, whose son participates in Federation's PJ Library programs. She says she "noticed that there was a space left in our school that was looking to be filled to bring students together to think through some of the ways that we as a district could face issues like racism, antisemitism, anti-LGB, and other forms of hate together and come up with a positive way to get students involved."

Last year, Brown connected with Federation's Executive Director Dara Kaufman. "Dara suggested that we partner in bringing Mount Everett into the Hate Has No Home Here campaign. And so we were able to start bringing students together and starting these initiatives here in the middle school and high school in September and October."



3RD GEN will be danced by Yochai Greenfeld and Morgana Mauney

PHOTO CREDIT: ANDREW MAUNNEY OF NYC

The Hate Has No Home Here campaign, funded by Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, is part of a broader Federation initiative to take a proactive approach to addressing antisemitism and hate across the community. As part of this effort, Federation also funds Changemakers for Good, a program that provides anti-bias training in local schools, and recently partnered with the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles to help launch the Massachusetts Mobile Museum of Tolerance, making this educational experience accessible to schools throughout Berkshire County.

Founded by Phil Fogelman, formerly of the ADL's A World of Difference program, Changemakers for Good will train Mount Everett students on how to facilitate difficult conversations with their peers. Brown notes that teachers are also incorporating instruction on the "historical components" of World War II and the Holocaust.

In March, the conversations will continue when the Massachusetts Mobile Museum of Tolerance visits Mount Everett to hold workshops for students in grades 6 to 12. They will focus on "how you can be an upstander rather than a bystander," says Brown, "how to engage in positive digital citizenship and supporting students and their peers through navigating some of these challenging situations." The school will follow up through the end of the year and continue to build on the results going forward.

Hosting *3RD GEN* is one meaningful step in that process. "This interested me personally because I know that there are a lot of students here at Mount Everett that want to do these good works and make a difference and put into place some real change," says Brown. "But it also interested me professionally in the sense that I feel like students deserve some agency in the way that their school culture is built and how we address some of these challenges that we're all seeing in the news and hearing about nationwide and closer to home here in the Berkshires."

Reflecting on the partnership with Federation, Brown adds: "I reached out initially to the Federation and was met with such wonderful enthusiasm from everyone I spoke with. From there, there has been a genuine human connection – with phone calls, conversations, visits in person with Federation members. Dara herself has taken a specific interest in connecting with schools. And it really just started with me reaching out to Federation and saying, 'Hey, I'd love to strengthen some of the programs we have here.'"



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10 am-noon • Sunday brunch & learn
Sefardi Music, Language & Culture • \$5

► **SATURDAY, MARCH 21**
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Contact Rabbi Pam Wax
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Made possible by the generous sponsorship of the Wildman Fund, in memory of Dorothy & Chaim (Carl) Wildman

Knesset Israel • כנסת ישראל

Your Federation Presents

Chanukah was Brilliant for the Berkshire Jewish Collective

Now get ready for a potluck Shabbat Together in March

By Sarah Singer

In December, the Berkshire Jewish Collective for young adults in their 20s, 30s, and 40s hosted a joyful and heartwarming Chanukah celebration at the Berkshire Food Co-op in Great Barrington. The Co-op proved to be a wonderful community partner, helping to create a truly special gathering in the heart of the community.

More than 40 people attended, including singles, couples, and families, filling the space with light, laughter, and connection. Participants lit the menorah together, played games, and enjoyed delicious catered food from Hand Crafted Catering & Events, prepared by community members Justin Carafotes and Rachel Renchner-Kelly.

One participant, Daphne, shared, "Thank you so much for this group and for your leadership in organizing such a wonderful event. This is truly what I've been looking for. I feel so fortunate to have found this incredible community of young Jewish locals and am excited to continue building new friendships through the group."

A hallmark of the Berkshire Jewish Collective has been its organic growth. Each event welcomes new faces, and the Chanukah celebration drew a significant number of first-time participants attending their very first Collective program.

Building on this momentum, the Collective will gather again on

Friday, March 6 at 6 p.m., when Noah Palmer and Hana Asrken will graciously host a Shabbat evening in their home in Chatham, NY. The evening will include songs, candle lighting, schmoozing, and a potluck Shabbat dinner open to singles, couples, and families. Attendees are asked to sign up to bring a main dish, salad, fruit, dessert, or seltzer.

Registration is required by March 1 through Federation's calendar of events at tinyurl.com/ShabbatCollectiveMarch6. The address will be shared via email after registration.

The continued growth of the Berkshire Jewish Collective underscores a clear need for welcoming, low-barrier Jewish connection for adults in their 20s through 40s. The Collective now includes more than 70 participants in its WhatsApp group and over 100 on its broader mailing list, with exciting plans ahead in the coming year.

Those interested in getting involved or being added to the group are invited to contact Sarah Singer at sarah@lifesyouradventure.com

Organizers continue to hear how meaningful it has been for participants to find a Jewish community like this in the Berkshires and look forward to watching the Collective continue to grow. All are warmly invited to join in.



The Berkshire Jewish Collective is a new initiative of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires for young adults in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, funded in part by a grant from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.



ISRAEL TRAVEL & STUDY GRANTS FOR YOUTH

The Michael Nathaniel Shute Endowment Fund provides grants to Berkshire area youth for educational travel or study in Israel.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Awards are made within 45 days of receiving the application. Additional funding is available through the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Download an application at jewishberkshires.org
or pick one up at the Federation's office
196 South Street, Pittsfield, MA



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\$100 per week, per child, financial assistance from the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires

Application Deadline: APRIL 30, 2026

Apply Online: tinyurl.com/DayCamp2026

Funding for this program is made possible by donors to Federation's annual campaign.



THE STRENGTH OF A PEOPLE
THE POWER OF COMMUNITY.

Your Federation Presents

PJ Library Winter: From Tubing to a Purim Tea Party

By Paige Wright / Coordinator of PJ Library

On January 11, just over 20 Federation families came to Bousquet Mountain to go snow tubing with PJ Library. It was a perfect winter day – there was hot chocolate, s'mores galore, and lots of laughs. We also collected more than 100 personal hygiene products (tubes of tikkun olam) to donate to the Berkshire Department of Children and Families, who will distribute them to local kids in need. A great day for Jewish Joy and giving back to our community.

Join PJ Library on Sunday, March 8, from 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. for a Purim Royal Tea Party fit for a Queen at WANDER Berkshires, located at 34 Depot Street, Suite 101, Pittsfield.

Families are invited to enjoy a joyful, age-appropriate story-telling experience sharing the Purim story through the lens of

Queen Esther. Children will sip yummy drinks, enjoy hamantaschen, decorate their own royal crowns, and shake a gragger as we celebrate together.

The afternoon will include music, costumes, and festive fun – with a touch of drag-style pageantry, sparkle and a special guest appearance – as we explore Queen Esther's bravery and heroism and the Purim themes of courage, kindness, and being true to ourselves. All activities are designed especially for young children and their grown-ups.

RSVP on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

New to the Berkshires or to PJ Library? We want to get to know you! Please get in touch at: pwright@jewishberkshires.org.



PJ Library, a program of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires in partnership with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, provides families raising Jewish children – from 6 months through 8 years old – with free, high-quality children's books, programming and resources that foster learning and deepen engagement in Jewish life.

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 Wed. March 11th | 3-6pm
 Sat. March 21st | 10 - 1pm



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LOCAL NEWS

Tickets On Sale: Joey Weisenberg in Concert to Support Congregation Ahavath Sholom

LENOX – Congregation Ahavath Sholom will present an afternoon of communal song and spiritual uplift when musician and composer Joey Weisenberg appears in concert on Sunday, May 17, at 3 p.m. at Shakespeare & Company in Lenox.

Titled "Music Is Breath, Song Is Life," the program will offer a participatory musical experience rooted in Jewish tradition and communal singing. Known nationally for his work cultivating grassroots Jewish musical expression, Weisenberg will lead an afternoon designed to bring audience members into song together, blending inspiration, creativity, and shared spiritual energy.

The concert is being presented by Congregation Ahavath Sholom of Great Barrington and marks a rare Berkshires appearance by Weisenberg, whose work has influenced synagogues, schools, and communities across the country.

Weisenberg is a multi-instrumentalist, singer, and composer, and the founder and director of Hadar's Rising Song Institute, which seeks to nurture musical-spiritual creativity within Jewish life. A devoted student and teacher of traditional Jewish melodies, he is also known for composing new nigunim that have been widely adopted by communities around the world.

He is the author of *Building Singing Communities*, a practical guide to communal music-making, and *The Torah of Music*, which received the National Jewish Book Award in 2017. Weisenberg has released eight albums of original music, most recently *Leila*, on Rising Song Records.

Tickets will be available beginning February 10 through Eventbrite. Admission is \$36 for students, \$72 for adults, and \$180 for supporters.

The concert will take place at Shakespeare & Company, 70 Kemble St., Lenox. For more information, visit the Congregation Ahavath Sholom website.

Congregation Beth Israel Announces Winter – Early Spring Services and Programs

NORTH ADAMS – Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires (CBI) continues its rich schedule of Shabbat worship, learning, and community programs through late winter and early spring, with offerings both in person and on Zoom.

Shabbat Services

Regular Shabbat Morning Services will be held Saturday, February 14 and March 7 at 9:30 a.m. at CBI. Services will feature words of Torah, prayer, study, and song in the spirit of Shabbat's sweetness, framed by the sanctuary's sweeping views of the natural world. Rabbi Pam Wax will lead on February 14, and Cantorial Soloist Ziva Larson on March 7.

Kabbalat Shabbat Services take place Friday, February 20 and March 13 at 7 p.m. at CBI. All are welcome to usher in Shabbat with prayer, music, poetry, and Torah teaching. On some weeks, the CBI choir and musicians will join Rabbi Rachel Barenblat in leading services, offering a reflective transition from the week into sacred time.

CBI will also host a First Friday Shabbat Zoom Gathering on March 6 at 7:30 p.m., bringing the community together online to light candles, bless wine and challah, and share conversation around the virtual Shabbat table. The Zoom link will be sent to those who RSVP via the CBI website.

Soul Spa Torah Study

A weekly Zoom "Soul Spa" Torah Study meets Saturdays at 10 a.m. on February 14, 21, and 28, and March 7, 14, and 21. Jointly led by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat (CBI) and Rabbi David Markus (Congregation Shir Ami), the group explores the weekly parashah through women's commentaries and midrash. Mourner's Kaddish is included when there is a yahrzeit.

RSVPs for all services are requested at cbiberkshires.com/calendar-of-events. Some dates may be subject to change; congregants are encouraged to check the calendar for updates.

Programs and Events

The CBI Book Club meets Thursday, February 19 at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom to discuss *The Photographer at Sixteen: The Death and Life of a Fighter* by George Szirtes, a poet's memoir tracing family history through a turbulent period of European history. RSVP via the CBI website; Zoom details will be sent closer to the date. The CBI Book Club with Author Barbara Viniar will convene Thursday, March 19 at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom. Berkshire resident Barbara Viniar will discuss her novel *Little Bird*, inspired by her grandmother's coming-of-age in turn-of-the-century New York City. This free event is open to all; advance Zoom registration is required.

On Sunday, March 1 at 4 p.m. at CBI, Rabbi Rachel will lead a **Pre-Purim Discussion: "Why Don't We Talk About Chapter 9?"** The adult-focused text study examines the often-overlooked penultimate chapter of the Book of Esther, exploring its spiritual and ethical questions through traditional commentaries.

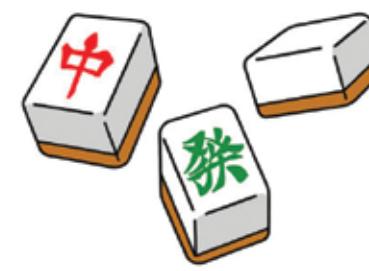
Hadassah, Purim, and Shabbat Zachor – Hidden Courage and Leadership

"We observe Shabbat Zachor to remember not only the threats Jews have faced throughout history, but also the extraordinary power we have when we act together," said Ros Kopfstein, co-president of the Berkshire Hills Chapter of Hadassah. "Just as Esther – Hadassah – stepped forward at a critical moment, we want to inspire our community to step forward in support of life saving medicine, strong Jewish identity, and the wellbeing of Jews everywhere."

Join Hadassah for their companionable and yummy "lunch-outs" coming up in February, March, and April. Learn about Hadassah's ongoing work in healing and advocacy, with a focus on empowering women and

strengthening the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

On Monday, February 23 at 11 a.m., join



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!



Pack & Deliver Purim Care Packages

Bring some Purim cheer to older adults in assisted living facilities, nursing homes, hospitals, and at home.

Volunteer to Pack Bags:

Thursday, February 19, or Tuesday, February 24
10:30am-12:00pm

Volunteer to Deliver Bags:

Wednesday, February 25 through Friday, February 27
9:00am-4:00pm at your convenience

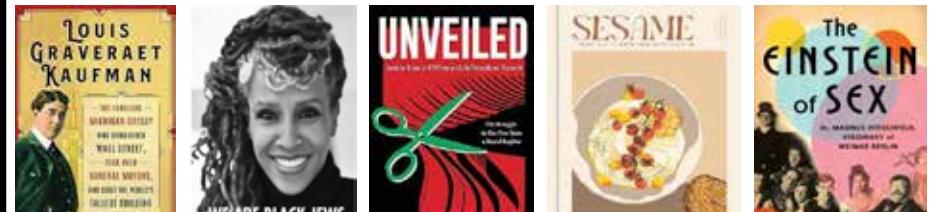


SIGN UP TODAY!

<https://form.jotform.com/260124866723963>
Questions? Contact Heidi Katz at
federation@jewishberkshires.org

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' Tikkun Olam Volunteer (TOV) Network connects community members of all ages with Mitzvah opportunities to make a difference in our community.

JEWISH LITERARY VOICES



A Federation series in collaboration with the Jewish Book Council

Thursday, February 19 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)

The Einstein of Sex: Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld: Visionary of Weimar Germany with journalist Daniel Brook.

Thursday, March 19 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)

Radical Sisters: Shirley Temple Black, Rose Kushner, Evelyn Lauder and the Dawn of The Breast Cancer Movement with founder of A 2nd Act and author Judith Pearson

Thursday, April 16 at 10:45 a.m. (virtual)

The Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz: A Story of Survival with biographer and correspondent Anne Sebba.

Thursday, May 7 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)

Eminent Jews: Bernstein, Brooks, Friedan, Mailer with author David Denby.

Friday, June 26 at 10:45 a.m.

In-person at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire

Carol King: She Made the Earth Move with journalist Jane Eisner and Rabbi Debbie Zecher.



LOCAL NEWS

a lunch-out with mah jongg. Email at the email address below.

Hadassah is active throughout the year. To hear about programs, to join, transfer your membership from another chapter or learn more about Hadassah please send your name, email and contact information to Berkshirehadassah@gmail.com. Look for Berkshire Hills Hadassah on Facebook.

Purim Hamentaschen Bake with CAS

Plus Upcoming Shabbat Services and Purim Study

GREAT BARRINGTON – Congregation Ahavath Sholom will welcome the holiday of Purim with a morning of baking, learning, and laughter during a special online program, “Hamantaschen Cooking with the Rabbi: Purim Edition”, on Wednesday, February 25, at 10 a.m., via Zoom.

The interactive program invites participants into their own kitchens to bake traditional hamantaschen while exploring the meaning and customs of Purim. Designed to be both festive and educational, the morning will blend hands-on cooking with light-hearted conversation and seasonal learning, making it accessible to bakers of all skill levels.

Presented by Congregation Ahavath Sholom, the program reflects the congregation's ongoing commitment to creating warm, participatory Jewish experiences that connect ritual, tradition, and community – even at a distance.

The event is open to the community. Advance registration is required; those interested may register by emailing rabbirudinahavathsholom@gmail.com

Zoom details will be provided upon registration.

Shabbats at CAS

Friday, February 6 & 20, Kabbalat Shabbat service at 5 p.m.

Saturday, February 7 & 21, Shabbat morning services at 10 a.m.

Sunday, March 1: Purim study, time TBA.



BERKSHIRE JEWISH CONGREGATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

Welcome to the Jewish Berkshires

Everyone is welcome to attend services and events at any of the organizations listed here.

Please call the organizations directly to confirm service times or to inquire about membership.

Learn more about our Jewish community and find great events on the community calendar at: JEWISHBERKSHIRES.ORG

Berkshire Minyan

Lay-led, Traditional, Egalitarian Minyan
South County
berkshireminyan.org

Berkshire Hills Hadassah

P.O. Box 187, Pittsfield, MA
(413) 443-4386,
Berkshirehillshadassah@gmail.com

B'nai B'rith Lodge, No. 326

Chabad of the Berkshires
17 West Street, Lenox, MA
(413) 499-9899,
jewishberkshires.com

Congregation Ahavath Sholom

Reconstructionist
North St., Great Barrington, MA
(413) 528-4197, ahavathsholom.com

Congregation Beth Israel, Reform

53 Lois St., North Adams, MA
(413) 663-5830, cbiberkshires.com

Hevreh of Southern Berkshires, Reform

270 State Rd., Great Barrington, MA
(413) 528-6378, hevreh.org

Israel Philatelist Society

c/o Dr. Ed Helitzer, (413) 447-7622

Jewish Federation of the Berkshires

196 South St., Pittsfield, MA
(413) 442-4360, jewishberkshires.org

Jewish War Veterans

Commander Robert Waldheim
(413) 822-4546, sellit4@aol.com

Jewish Women's Foundation of the Berkshires

Website: JWFB.org
Email: jwfberkshires@gmail.com

Knesset Israel, Conservative

16 Colt Rd., Pittsfield, MA
(413) 445-4872, knessetisrael.org

Temple Anshe Amunim, Reform

26 Broad St., Pittsfield, MA
(413) 442-5910, ansheamunim.org

Chabad of the Berkshires Invites the Community to an Unforgettable Celebration

Experience the Joy of “Purim in Japan”

LENOX – Get ready for a Purim celebration like no other! Chabad of the Berkshires is thrilled to invite the entire community to a one-of-a-kind evening of joy, culture, and celebration on Tuesday, March 3, with this year's dynamic theme: “Purim in Japan.”

Blending the timeless excitement of Purim with the beauty and flair of Japanese culture, the evening will feature colorful décor, upbeat entertainment, and delicious Japanese-themed cuisine, including fresh sushi and festive favorites. Guests of all ages will enjoy interactive activities, laughter, and a warm, welcoming atmosphere that captures the true spirit of Purim.

“Purim is about joy, unity, and discovering light even in unexpected places,” said Rabbi Levi Volovik, co-director of Chabad of the Berkshires. “This year's Purim in Japan celebration brings that message to life in a fun, creative way that welcomes every member of our community to celebrate together.”

“This is the kind of event where everyone belongs – families, seniors, longtime residents, and visitors alike,” added Sara Volovik, co-director of Chabad of the Berkshires. “It's joyful, welcoming, and designed so that people of all backgrounds can walk in, feel at home, and leave with a smile.”

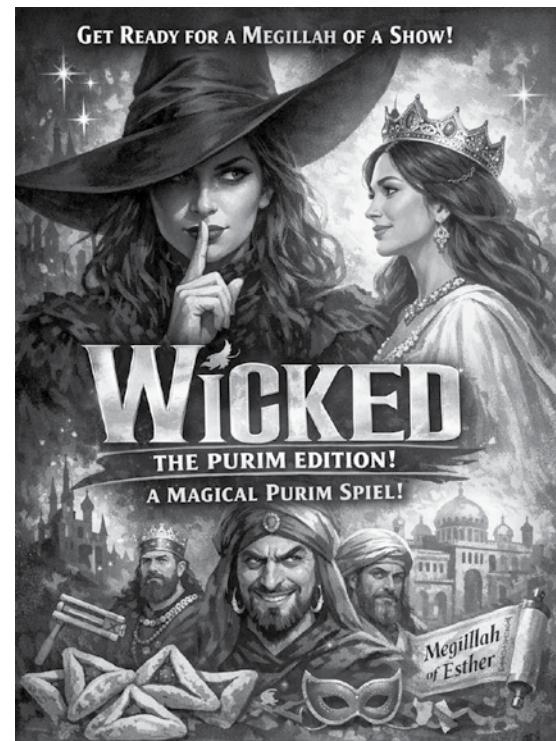
Purim celebrates resilience and the triumph of joy over adversity, and this immersive celebration invites families, friends, and neighbors to experience that spirit firsthand. Costumes are encouraged, smiles are guaranteed, and the sense of community will be unmistakable.

The celebration will take place at Chabad of the Berkshires, 17 West Street, Lenox, from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Admission is free and open to the entire community. A Purim Sponsorship opportunity is available for \$360, supporting Chabad's vital community programs throughout the year.

RSVPs are appreciated to assist with planning. For more information or to RSVP, contact Sara Volovik at (413) 499-9899, or register at jewishberkshires.com.

Hevreh Invites the Community to Celebrate Purim with Carnival and Wicked-Themed Purimshpiel



GREAT BARRINGTON – Hevreh invites families and community members of all ages to celebrate Purim with two joyful events that promise to be positively spellbinding.

HEVREH,
continued on page 16

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH MUSIC

MOSTLY AMADEUS – MEET THE MOZARTS!



March 15th, 2026 • 4pm

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, Great Barrington, MA



Tickets: \$60 / \$35
mhaiwe.org
cewm.org



LOCAL NEWS

HEVREH,

continued from page 15

The celebration begins with Hevreh's annual Purim Carnival on Sunday, March 1, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. This year's theme is "Pokémon"! Dress up as your favorite Jewish-inspired Pokémon character (Pika-Jew!). Children and adults alike are welcome to come in costume and enjoy games, treats, and festive activities in a warm, family-friendly atmosphere.

The festivities continue on the eve of Purim, Monday, March 2 at 6 p.m., with Hevreh's beloved Megillah reading and costume parade, followed by a truly "Wicked"-themed Purimspiel performed by Hevreh's Confirmation Class. Expect a story that's been defied with gravity, heroes who aren't quite what they seem, and a few emerald-green surprises along the way. This Oz-inspired retelling of the Purim story is sure to have audiences laughing, cheering, and maybe even discovering that no one mourns the villain when justice finally wins.

"Purim is a holiday that invites us to laugh, to dress up, and to see the world a little differently," said Rabbi Jodie Gordon. "Our students have created a Purimspiel that's not only wickedly funny, but also reminds us that hidden courage and friendship can change everything."

All events take place at Hevreh in Great Barrington. The community is warmly invited to attend one or both celebrations.

For more information, visit hevreh.org or contact the synagogue office.

Family Programs at CBI

NORTH ADAMS – This winter, Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires (CBI) offers local families ways to connect, celebrate, and do *mitzvot* in community.

Families are invited to **Bake & Deliver Hamantaschen** on Saturday, February 28 at 10 a.m. Participants will bake and deliver *mishloach manot* to homebound seniors and community members. The event will be held offsite in Bennington, VT. For details and to RSVP, contact learning@cbiberkshires.com

CBI's **Purimspiel Potluck & Party** takes place Monday, March 2 at 5 p.m. at CBI. Community members of all ages are encouraged to come in costume for an early potluck supper, a spirited retelling of the Megillah, and homemade hamantaschen, celebrating Purim's promise of light and joy. RSVP via the CBI website.

For full details and registration, visit cbiberkshires.com.

Trio Sefardi to Headline a Musical Wildman Weekend

PITTSFIELD – Knesset Israel will host Trio Sefardi for its annual Wildman Weekend, March 20–22, inviting the wider Berkshires community to take part in a weekend of music, worship, and learning celebrating Sephardic Jewish culture and tradition.

The weekend opens on Friday evening, March 20, with a Shabbat service at 5:45 p.m. featuring Sephardic musical settings of traditional prayers and songs, followed by a communal Shabbat dinner at approximately 6:45 p.m. On Saturday night, March 21, Trio Sefardi will present a concert at 8:45 p.m. featuring songs of love, loss, and hope, with a seasonal focus on music for Purim and Passover. The weekend will conclude on Sunday morning, March 22, with a brunch-and-learn program at 10 a.m. exploring Sephardic history, culture, and language.



Trio Sefardi

Trio Sefardi performs the traditional music of the Sephardim, descendants of Jews exiled from Spain in 1492. Their repertoire reflects song traditions from Sephardic communities in the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, and North Africa. The trio's work is especially influenced by Bosnian-born singer and composer Flory Jagoda, who served as their mentor and whose original compositions honor Sephardic communities lost during the Holocaust.

The group's programs feature songs sung in Judeo-Espanyol, commonly known as Ladino, alongside newer works composed by Jagoda. Before her death in 2021, Jagoda praised the ensemble, saying that Trio Sefardi's "beautiful harmonies and skilled accompaniment movingly translate the joy and soul of the lost world I remember so well."

Members of Trio Sefardi include Susan Gaeta on lead vocals and guitar; Tina Chancey on backup vocals, viola da gamba, Renaissance violin, Pontic lyra, and rebec; and Howard Bass on lute and guitar. Together, the musicians blend backgrounds in jazz, folk, and early music, shaped by years of collaboration with Jagoda.

The trio has released four recordings: *Sefardic Celebration* (2011), *Kaminos* (2016), *La Yave d'Espanya* (2019), and *Kinze Anyos* (2025), an anthology marking their 15th anniversary. CDs will be available for purchase during the Saturday evening concert and Sunday morning program.

All are welcome to attend the Shabbat service. Advance registration is requested for the Shabbat dinner (\$25), Saturday evening concert (\$18 in advance, \$20 at the door; free for children under 18), and Sunday brunch (\$5). Registration is available through the Knesset Israel website or by calling the synagogue office at (413) 445-4872.

The Wildman Weekend is supported by the Wildman family in memory of Dorothy and Chaim (Carl) Wildman, longtime Knesset Israel members and congregational leaders. The Wildman Lecture Series, which began approximately 25 years ago as a single evening program, has since grown into an annual weekend Shabbaton. As part of the weekend, the Wildmans' daughter, Judy Wildman, will lend her musical voice to the Shabbat morning service on Saturday, March 21, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Congregation Knesset Israel is located at 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield. For additional information, contact Rabbi Pam Wax, director of adult education and programming at rabbipwax@knессетисраэль.org.

INTERGENERATIONAL WOMEN'S PASSOVER SEDER SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2026 HEVREH OF SOUTHERN BERKSHIRE

A MUSICAL, INTERACTIVE SEDER EXPERIENCE LED BY RABBI JODIE GORDON & PERI SMILOW

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE GO TO HEVREH.ORG



To register, please visit: hevreh.org/holidays



Chabad of the Berkshires Presents Passover Wine Tasting and Concert Featuring Internationally Acclaimed Pianists

LENOX – Chabad of the Berkshires invites the community to a special Passover Wine Tasting and Concert on Wednesday, March 18 at 17 West Street. This elegant evening will blend the traditions of Passover with an exceptional live classical music experience.

The program begins at 5:30 p.m. with a curated tasting of kosher-for-Passover wines, generously sponsored by Domaney's of Great Barrington, followed by a concert at 6 p.m. featuring internationally acclaimed pianists Ronaldo Rolim and Xiaohui Yang.

Brazilian pianist Ronaldo Rolim has performed at major international venues including Carnegie Hall and Wigmore Hall. A winner of the 2017 Astral National Auditions, he holds a doctorate from Yale University and serves as Assistant Professor of Piano at the University of Puget Sound.

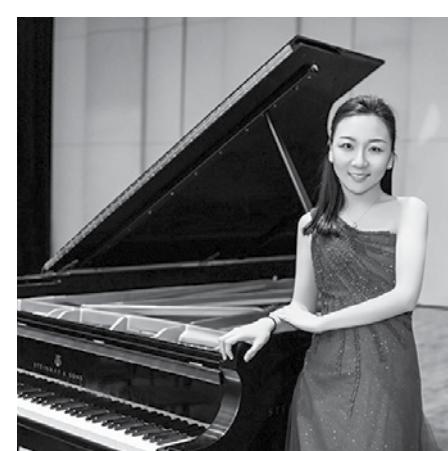
Joining him is Chinese pianist Xiaohui Yang, winner of the 2017 Naumburg International Piano Competition. She has appeared at prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall and the Seoul Arts Center and is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and The Juilliard School. She completed her doctorate at the Peabody Conservatory.

This Passover-season event offers a unique opportunity to celebrate freedom, tradition, and artistic excellence through fine wine and world-class music in a warm and welcoming community setting.

Admission is \$36 per person. RSVP Required: jewishberkshires.com/wine.



Ronaldo Rolim



Xiaohui Yang

OBITUARIES

Barbara Barron, 88, teacher, Judaic artist, joyful optimistic spirit
LENOX – Barbara Barron, 88, passed away on Friday, December 19, 2025, after a seven-month battle with lymphoma.

Born Barbara Marilyn Weinstein on June 12, 1937, she was the second daughter of Anna and Samuel Weinstein of Bronx, NY. After graduating from Hunter College, Barbara studied education at Columbia University, where she met her husband Donald Barron, and began working in the New York City public schools.

When her daughter Nancy was born, Barbara left teaching, and with the births of daughter Ruth and son Steven, life was busy. Once the children were older she decided to start a business, and soon was walking into high-end stores with her handmade macramé plant-hangers. They sold quickly, and the macramé evolved into a busy gallery and workshop in Huntington, Long Island, where she designed custom-order window treatments for her clientele.

Years later, after leaving the family business to Ruth and Steven, Barbara pivoted to make Judaic art for synagogues.

After his own retirement, Donald finally persuaded her to sell their home on Long Island where they had raised their family. They bought an RV and traveled the country for three years. When that adventure concluded, Barbara

and Don happily settled into their snowbird lifestyle, moving back and forth between Florida and western Massachusetts, first in Otis and later in Lenox. In this stage of life Barbara was as active as ever, sewing stuffed toys and quilts for charity, walking in her beloved bird sanctuary almost daily, and hosting friends and family.

Throughout her long, active life full of work, hobbies, and travel, she shared her joyful, optimistic spirit with many people from all walks of life.

Barbara was predeceased by her husband Donald, on June 5, 2021. She is survived by their three children, Nancy, Ruth, and Steven; Ruth's spouse Jeff Ommundsen; granddaughters Shion Takeuchi and Brooke Barron; her brother, Lawrence; as well as numerous family that Barbara stayed close to throughout her life. Sisters Sarah and Beverly predeceased her.

The family held services at IJ Morris Funeral Home in Dix Hills, NY on Tuesday, December 23, 2025. A zoom memorial was planned for a future date.

Mark Edward Oren, 85, exceptional physician deeply devoted to his patients, actively involved in community

COCONUT GROVE, FL – Mark Edward Oren, 85, died peacefully at home on Tuesday, December 30, 2025 after a prolonged illness, surrounded by family, having recently celebrated his 85th birthday.

Born December 20, 1940, in Catskill, NY, to Isidor and Belle, he was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and physician. Family was central to his life. He adored his children and was especially devoted to his grandchildren, taking deep pride in each of them and in the time they spent together.

Mark graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Cornell University as an undergraduate and pursued his medical degree at Harvard Medical School, inspired by the premature loss of his beloved mother. He completed an internship in medicine at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston and then served in the National Cancer Institute as part of the U.S. Public Health Service in Bethesda, MD. He completed his residency in medicine and a fellowship in hematology and oncology at Yale University Hospital in New Haven, CT, before finishing his training as a junior faculty member at the University of Miami. He was later appointed a Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine and Oncology there. He and his wife, Nedra, established their roots in Coral Gables as Mark continued his career as a distinguished hematologist, oncologist, and internist in Kendall.

Mark was an exceptional physician who was deeply devoted to his patients and was widely beloved by them. He took their care personally and remained committed to them long after he retired.

Beyond medicine, he was actively involved in his

community. He was a lifetime trustee of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation and a Trustee Emeritus of the Pérez Art Museum Miami, where he also served as president of the docents. For more than thirty years, he spent each summer in Aspen, CO, where he developed his abiding joy in attending lectures at the Aspen Institute and concerts at the Aspen Music Festival.

He was deeply devoted to the United States, Israel, Torah study, and his Jewish identity. He loved playing his guitar every day and taught himself to speak both Spanish and Hebrew. He also adored his frequent walks through Coconut Grove and Aspen. Later in life, regular ROMEO lunches and visits with lifelong friends gave great purpose and meaning to his final years.

Mark is survived by his beloved wife of 62 years, Nedra (Yulman); three children, Brad (Judith), Sara (Quincy), and Jill (Jeff); six grandchildren, Rachel (Marc), Zach, Daniel, Sophie, Mia, and Noa; and sister, Jane Siegel. He was predeceased by his sister, Sheila Balson.

Funeral services were held on Friday, January 2, at Mount Nebo Kendall Gardens. Donations may be made to the Greater Miami Jewish Federation or the Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM).

Reba Hough Evenchik, 80, preschool teacher, embodied light, love, and music

PITTSFIELD – Reba Hough Evenchik, 80, died peacefully

at home on Thursday, January 1, surrounded by her loving family, who are heartbroken to announce the passing of their beloved wife and mother.

Born September 23, 1945, in Springfield, MA and brought up in Mountain Lakes, NJ, Reba's life was a testament to joy, the arts, friendship, and a deep devotion to family.

Reba made Pittsfield her home, where she built a life shaped by creativity, community, and love. A longtime yoga teacher, she lived by the principles of yoga and spirituality, carrying a quiet sense of mindfulness and presence into everything she did. She also had a profound gift for working with children and spent 18 years as a preschool teacher at Knesset Israel, where she had a rare ability to help children feel seen and heard.

A passionate advocate for the arts, Reba was deeply involved in Pittsfield's creative community. She danced flamenco for 25 years, an art form that brought her immense joy and allowed her to fully express her love of rhythm and movement. She also served as head of Storefront Artists, a nonprofit organization in Pittsfield, where she championed local artists and community-centered creative expression. In addition, Reba was an integral member of the board of Barrington Stage, helping to shape the organization and

OBITUARIES, continued on page 18

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OBITUARIES

OBITUARIES,

continued from page 17

how it developed, guided by her belief in the power of the arts to bring people together and initiating the Children At Risk program.

She was a gifted poet, writing about things she saw in the world that moved her. Giving a voice to beauty and places and situations while motivating people into action with her words.

Music lived in her bones. Reba was an unabashed dancer who simply could not sit still. Any rhythm, any drumbeat, any song was an invitation to move. Whether dancing to the djembe in Africa, joining a spontaneous flash dance at the Berkshire Mall, or dancing flamenco on the Inside Out stage at Jacob's Pillow or First Night in Northampton, she embodied light, love, and music.

Reba loved to visit her children living abroad and explore the world alongside her husband Bruce, delighting in experiencing new cultures and ways of life. One of her most joyful adventures was in India, where she fully embraced the celebration of Holi, reveling in its color, music, and spirit, an experience that perfectly reflected her openness and joy.

She found deep joy outdoors, whether walking with the dogs in Kennedy Park or working in her garden, which is magical and a reflection of the care and beauty she brought into the world.

Reba's generosity extended far beyond her work. Her home was always open to anyone who needed a place to stay, and it was not uncommon to find friends, artists, or travelers sleeping over or swimming in the pool. She had the biggest heart and an instinctive desire to help, especially those in the arts or anyone simply needing care and welcome.

She believed life was meant to be lived fully and joyfully and taught those around her to embrace life and community connection. Her laughter was contagious, her energy unmistakable, and her spirit impossible to forget.

Reba is survived by her devoted husband, Bruce; four children, Meghan (Paul), Jason (Delphine), Craig, and Ben (Martha); grandchildren Liam, Braedyn, Raphael, Mina, Alexandra, Ari, and Naira; and her loving dog and constant companion Buddha Bear. She is lovingly remembered by many extended family members and dear friends whose lives she touched profoundly.

A celebration of Reba's life was held on Monday, January

5 at Temple Anshe Amunim, Pittsfield, with Rabbi Valerie Lieber officiating. Burial followed in Pittsfield Cemetery.

Donations may be made to Barrington Stage Children at Risk Program, ROPE Berkshires, or Temple Anshe Amunim in care of Flynn & Dagnoli-Bencivenga Funeral Home, 5 Elm Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

Sonia (Nissenbaum) Lebowitz, 98, quiet sweet nature, volunteer at area synagogues

GLASTONBURY, CT - Sonia (Nissenbaum) Lebowitz, 98, long-time resident of Pittsfield and North Adams, passed away peacefully on Friday, January 2 at Salmon Brook Nursing Home in Glastonbury, CT.

Sonia graduated from Pittsfield High School in 1945. She was the wife and widow of Herbert Lebowitz, who passed in 2013.

Sonia was a traditional housewife and mother in the 1960s and 70s and was seen by many working in the family store, Lebow's Men and Boys Store, or volunteering her time in the Sisterhood at Beth Israel in North Adams or Knesset Israel in Pittsfield. She was known for her quiet and sweet nature, and people loved talking to her.

Sonia is survived by her sons, David Lebowitz of FL and Andrew Lebowitz (Lisa) of Rocky Hill, CT; six loving grandchildren, Jessica and Sarah Garrison, Jenna (Lebowitz) Leahy, Emily Lebowitz, Shayna Lebowitz, and Zachary Lebowitz; great-granddaughter Bailey Leahy; and cousins, Marvin Smith, Heidi (Dick) Ferren, and Robert Ferren. Sonia's brother David Nissenbaum predeceased her over 90 years ago, and her daughter Ellen Garrison died on October 25, 2025.

A graveside service was held on Tuesday, January 6 at Knesset Israel cemetery.

The family have asked for contributions in Sonia's memory be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

Jeffrey A. Diamond, 65, theater geek, wit, creativity, and incredible tenacity

GREAT BARRINGTON - Jeffrey A. Diamond, 65, passed away at home surrounded by his family and caregivers on Thursday, December 18, 2025, after a 16-year struggle with early onset Parkinson's disease.

Born December 1, 1960, to Donald S. Diamond and Minnette (Langfelder) Diamond, Jeff was a proud fourth-generation San Franciscan. He graduated from Menlo-Atherton High School, attended California

Institute of the Arts, and graduated from the University of the Pacific. He was a theater geek and loved designing sets during high school, college, and for community theaters.

After college, Jeff worked as an associate technical director for the Los Angeles Opera Company. He traveled the world with the company recreating sets at some of the most prestigious opera houses in the world.

Jeff moved to the Berkshires in 1992 to work with Douglas Trumbull on three attractions for the Luxor Hotel as executive producer for the Kleiser-Walczak Construction (KWC) Company (3D animation). Through KWC, he also produced the visual effects for feature films *Clear and Present Danger* and *Stargate*, and the animated Columbia Pictures logo.

During this time, he met his partner of 30 years, Diane Pearlman, who was running visual effects studio Mass. Illusion. After their work in effects, Jeff and Diane started KinderMuse Entertainment developing children's television for such clients as HBO.

Jeff founded two companies, MediaFusion and Morecars/SmartNav, that combined his Hollywood content creation, technical innovation, and venture capital interests. He also consulted on the digital renovation of Babelsberg Studios in Berlin. Jeff ran a successful family real estate business with his mother, and later his sister and wife.

Jeff was known for his wit, creativity, and incredible tenacity. He loved hiking in the woods, reading science fiction (especially to his sons), cooking, classic rock (Grateful Dead), taking his boys camping, and...cars! As a child, Jeff and his father bonded over restoring cars, especially working on his grandmother's 1953 Mercedes 220B Cabriolet. Jeff proudly showed this family heirloom at the Lime Rock Concours and Gathering of the Marques, winning twice in its category. He was a "car guy" and took great pleasure in the vehicles he drove and owned.

Locally, Jeff served for many years on the board of Flying Cloud Institute and most recently for a decade on the board of Berkshire Pulse.

Jeff is survived by Diane Pearlman; their two sons, Jake and Matthew; sister Sheri Ginis; and nieces, Abbie and Eliana Ginis. The family is forever grateful to Jeff's primary caregivers, Lynn Ryan and John Mezsarov, as well as the hospice professionals who attended to Jeff.

A private funeral was held at Hevreh of Southern

Berkshire. Donation may be made to the Michael J. Fox Foundation, HospiceCare in the Berkshires, or Berkshire Pulse.

Judith Slotnick, 85, Tanglewood volunteer for over 35 years, stalwart supporter

BOYNTON BEACH, FL - Judith Slotnick, 85, passed away on Tuesday, January 13.

A Tanglewood volunteer for over 35 years, Judy was most well-known for her work as a regular usher. She was present at almost every shed concert, and regularly served well over 150 hours each season. Over the years, she also served as a greeter and was well-known by concert-goers and staff alike. She was passionate about Tanglewood, the audience, and the students. She was a stalwart supporter.

Judith was the loving wife of Elliot; cherished mother of Philip (Shara) Slotnick and the late Jessica; adored grandmother of Nathan and Benjamin; loving sister of Frances Roth.

A funeral service was held on Friday, January 16 at Beth Israel Memorial Chapel, Boynton Beach, FL. Interment was at Eternal Light Memorial Gardens, Boynton Beach.

Donations may be made to Boston University Tanglewood Institute or Hadassah.

Timothy Gunnet-Shoval, 49, devoted to family, rooted in Jewish values

GREAT BARRINGTON - Timothy Gunnet-Shoval, 49, passed away early Monday morning, January 19, surrounded by love.

Tim earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from The New School in New York City and later completed his Master's degree in Counseling and Human Services at Lehigh University. It was there that he met the love of his life, Karyn Gunnet-Shoval, with whom he shared sixteen and a half years of marriage. Together, they built a family rooted in Jewish values, curiosity, and connection. Tim was a devoted husband, a deeply caring father, and a thoughtful, compassionate presence in the lives of those who knew him.

Above all else, Tim was a devoted father to his four children, Isabel, Elliana, Zak, and Aaron, who were the center of his world and the greatest joy of his life.

Tim is survived by his wife, Karyn and his children; father, Jeff Gunnet; and his step-family, Regina Gunnet, Cristal Wright, and Jonathan Holt.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Kathleen Crum; stepfather, Michael Crum; and sister, Patre Gunnet.

Tim will be remembered

for his intelligence, sensitivity, humor, and the depth of his care for others. His presence left a lasting imprint on his family and all who were fortunate enough to know him. He will be profoundly missed and forever loved.

Funeral services were held on Thursday, January 22, at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Great Barrington. Contributions can be made in Timothy's name to The Jimmy Fund at Dana Farber Cancer Center or to Fairview Hospital in Great Barrington, which provided so much solace in the last weeks of his life.

J. Livingston Kosberg, 89, leader in the Jewish community, strong philanthropic supporter

HOUSTON, TX - J. Livingston Kosberg, 89, died on Saturday, January 24.

Born November 17, 1936, in Waco, TX, he was the son of Dorothy (nee Livingston) and Cy Kosberg and younger brother of Dolores Kosberg Wilkenfeld. Livingston was a proud and philanthropic Jew, successful serial entrepreneur, and passionate protector of the underprivileged.

Livingston came to the University of Texas with a used car, one pair of shoes, and a zest for success. More than once, he was singled out as the most likely to succeed in business, in spite of his mediocre grades. It was while working at a Houston Howard Johnson's in the summer of 1955 that Livingston spied Saranne, whom he courted relentlessly when she arrived in Austin at the University of Texas that fall. Saranne felt that he was mature and had serious plans for their future. By June 1958, he had his degree and Saranne in hand. They soon settled in Houston, where Robin, Lori, and Wendy were born and raised. He and Saranne were true partners in life in every way.

While Livingston ultimately owned and ran companies of many types, he was most comfortable in the healthcare sector. His initial company went public in 1968, and he started his last company in 2018.

Livingston could take the kernel of an idea, raise seed capital, and build it from a tiny start-up to a public company. Once it was stable and successful, he moved on to another challenge. He had great confidence in his ability to succeed in business, and he loved to bring in friends and acquaintances to his business projects.

By the late 1960s, Livingston was an active young leader of the Houston Jewish community, culminating in his becoming

OBITUARIES,
continued on page 19

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BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

Unity and Common Purpose Lifted All Spirits

A Sar-El mission that provided meals for nearly 24,000 IDF soldiers**By Gene Jura / Special to the BJV**

Like most Jews after the atrocities of October 7, 2023, I was depressed and angry at the one-sided news coverage by Western mainstream media, and looked for a way to channel my energy in a positive way. An internet search led me to Sar-El, an organization affiliated with the Israel Defense Forces that offers volunteer opportunities in Israel on IDF military bases.

In mid-October 2025, I flew to Tel Aviv. A few days later I met a few hundred volunteers (most between 50 and 70 years old) from all over the world at Ben Gurion Airport, where Sar-El organizes volunteers from 35 countries into groups and then sends them to various army bases across Israel to do their volunteer work. Even when approaching the Sar-El assembly point at the airport, there was a buzz of palpable excitement in the air. As it turns out, some of the volunteers are "repeat offenders" who, in some cases, have been returning for 40-plus years. Old friends and acquaintances were engaged in lively conversations, and even though this was my first time, I soon found myself drawn into friendly conversations with total strangers. After about an hour, the registration process was complete, and my group of approximately 30 volunteers from 12 different countries (half of them women), was transported via air-conditioned bus to a large logistics base in the vicinity of Be'er Sheva.

On the bus, I made fast friends with a gentleman from Newport, RI, who looks like a tanned Swiss mountain guide and is not Jewish, but who felt a strong need to contribute to Israel after feeling that "Israel is being bullied by everyone, especially Western media." As it turned out, about half the volunteers are not Jewish and what you might call "Chovevei Tzion" (Lovers of Zion). They come out of conviction that Israel, and Jews in general, are being unfairly targeted by the rest of the world. Hence, they come to Israel to remedy that situation by personal example, sometimes to make the point that they vehemently disagree with their country's government and politics – as was the case with a contingent of six Spaniards in my group.

The drive south through the Negev revealed large swaths of green that have been wrested from the desert through irrigation. After a 90-minute drive, we arrived at the base, where we were separated by gender and sent to living quarters where four of us shared a communal room similar to "summer camp for adults." The rooms have bunk beds and are identical to the ones used by IDF soldiers, but with deference to our age, only the lower bunks were used. In view of outside temperatures in the 80s, we noticed with delight the one luxury: air conditioning !!!

We were greeted by our *madrichot*, the young female IDF instructors responsible for us and for coordinating our work with the IDF soldiers in charge. They shepherded us to the dining hall, where we were treated to an unexpectedly good lunch with various choices of salads, vegetables, meats, fish and fruit. After lunch, we were given a brief introductory talk in English (the lingua franca in view of the many different countries volunteers come from) about our responsibilities. We were asked to refrain from discussing politics and religion while on the base, similar to what is expected of IDF soldiers.

The daily routine consisted of breakfast from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m., a brief flag raising ceremony at 8:15 followed by work between 8:30 and noon, lunch until 1 p.m., and then a return to work until 4 p.m. After dinner wrapped up at 7 p.m., the *madrichot* led a one-hour presentation on a specific topic, a group discussion, or a workshop relating to Israel or army life. We also received green military uniforms consisting of a cap, jacket, trousers and a belt, as well as special blue Sar-El t-shirts that we wore while on base and working, though we were free to wear casual clothing in the evening.

Our first assignment was working on a warehouse assembly line packaging food into cardboard boxes to be shipped to combat soldiers. Such boxes contain food for four soldiers, their contents rather nutritious and healthy: canned tuna, vegetables, crackers, nuts, condiments, coffee, and tea. During 3.5 days of work, we managed to pack nearly 6,000 boxes, i.e. meals for almost 24,000 soldiers, a tangible result for volunteers with no prior experience in "food engineering."

To keep us motivated, music – mostly Israeli – played constantly. Groups of local high school students joined us for 2 hours each day on the assembly line. We had interesting conversations with them, as well as with the supervising soldiers. Although we were supposed to avoid politics, inevitably we ended up discussing the "current situation" (*ha'matsav*). Everyone was polite and respectful and, despite occasional disagreements, we felt very much appreciated as volunteers and frequently shared heartfelt moments and laughter with both students and soldiers. Considering the age of our *madrichot* (18 and 19 years old) and other soldiers we met – among them two tank commanders who were barely 20 years old and in charge of three other soldiers entrusted to them, as well as a 70-ton tank – I was humbled thinking about the awesome responsibility placed on their shoulders and the maturity they demonstrate. I found myself wondering about the many young people in Western countries who are "still searching for themselves" in their late 20s.

In the evening, we had our first "activity": getting our blue shoulder stripes identifying us as Sar-El volunteers to others. In the coming days, it became obvious that most soldiers have never heard of Sar-El even though it's an integral part of the IDF's Logistics unit and has been around for more than 40 years. In conversations with young soldiers in the dining hall, we were frequently met with looks of surprise and astonishment: "You're what? A volunteer? Can't believe you'd volunteer to be here on an army base! At your age? Wow!" A very touching moment was when a silver-haired soldier approached and asked us in Hebrew to which unit in the *Milu'im* (army reserves) we belonged. It turns out he's 81 years old and volunteers as a tank driver to ferry tanks from Gaza to this base for repairs. He was flabbergasted that we came from abroad to volunteer at an army base and thanked us for our service. Young soldiers gathered around us and cheered us on.

The best part – aside from feeling useful in providing a small but important service for the IDF's humanitarian needs – was the camaraderie that developed among the volunteers. In spite of various national and language backgrounds, we quickly developed strong group cohesion and a common sense of purpose. Deep conversations happened daily and invitations flew across four continents! After four-and-a-half days of this routine, we were sent back to Tel Aviv by the base commander with great appreciation for our service. He emphasized that our physical achievement, packing 24,000 meals, was but part of the accomplishment. The more important and invaluable part was the love and support we provided for

the young soldiers who feel beleaguered and unloved by the rest of the world. We said an emotional goodbye to the many soldiers we got to know in one-on-one conversations. It felt very much like saying goodbye to family, and some volunteers were in tears. Many – myself included – have already committed to coming back with Sar-El next year.

The deep bonds formed with some of the other volunteers surprised me, as I arrived in Israel with no such expectations. The sense of unity and common purpose lifted up all our spirits and gave a new meaning to "Am Yisrael Chai!"

Dr. Gene Jura is originally from Israel and was educated in Europe. He came to the United States 42 years ago and worked as a pediatrician for 40 years. A Berkshires resident since 2011, he is a member of Knesset Israel in Pittsfield.

**OBITUARIES,***continued from page 18*

President of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston in 1975. In 1968, he and Saranne made the first of many, many trips to Israel, where they made close friends and became strong philanthropic supporters. In the 1990s, he travelled to Cuba, Ethiopia, and Yemen, using his negotiating skills in support of the Jews of these countries. He believed very strongly in the Jewish people and the need to raise up the next generations of Jews and Jewish leaders. A major donor of Houston Jewish day schools, he put his money

where his values led.

In 1969, Livingston supported Lloyd Bentsen for US Senator from Texas and began his work in support of Democratic candidates around the country. He donated to them and he raised political donations for them. In 1983, Governor Mark White appointed him as Chairman of the Board of what was then known as the Texas Department of Human Services. His goal was to use his inside knowledge of the healthcare sector to help underprivileged Texans. Livingston strongly supported those with less clout and was proud to use his contacts to

help individual needs of folks of every stripe. He relished keeping up with political news and races around the country almost as much as keeping track of his beloved Houston sports teams.

Livingston felt obligated to ensure that his family was secure. One means of security was education. He made it possible for his daughters and grandchildren to attend college. Graduate school was encouraged as well. "You must be able to provide for yourself," he counselled. He was always so proud of the accomplishments of his wife, his daughters, and his grandchildren.

Livingston played golf, poker, and bridge with zeal and formed his lifelong friends from these groups. Thank you to Barry Lewis, Sid Weiss, Jerry Deutser, and Mel Anhalt for their friendships to the very end. Thank you to Sylvia Montemayor for her decades of handling the family office and to Joe Kaplan for stepping in to advise and assist the family during these difficult years. Thank you also to his loyal caregivers Glenda, Milton, Maria, Julio, and Chris, and especially to Dr. Alan Hoffman, who has become an honorary "Kosberg" for his skilled and menschlik care of Livingston and Saranne.

Livingston is survived by Saranne Rosenzweig Kosberg, his wife of 67 years; their daughters, Robin (Mark Washofsky) Kosberg and her daughters, Rachel and Hannah; Lori (Jeff) Blumenthal and their children and spouses, Max and Evan, Amanda and Andrew and Jack and Jordan; and Wendy (Andy) Starr and their children and spouses, Shayna and Tyler, Jared, and Jolie and Thomas. Livingston would be proud that the next generation of Kosberg great-grandchildren have begun to be born. He is also survived by his sister, Dolores Wilkenfeld. He was predeceased by his parents, Dorothy and Cy Kosberg and brother-in-law J.H. "Buddy" Wilkenfeld.

A memorial service was held on Wednesday, January 28, at Congregation Emanu El, Houston, TX.

Donations may be made to the Emery/Weiner School, www.emeryweiner.org, the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston, www.houstonjewish.org, or the charity of your choice.

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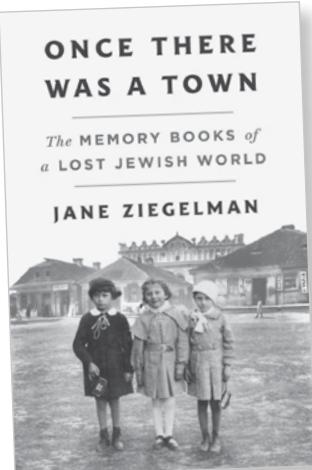
CULTURE & ARTS

Once There Was a Town: The Memory Books of a Lost Jewish World

Author Jane Ziegelman unlocks the history and humanity contained in post-WWII yizkor books

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

Yizkor books are commemorative volumes produced in the decades following the Second World War to memorialize the Jewish communities erased during the Holocaust and the lives of those who perished. Compiled and published mostly in Israel and the United States by mutual aid societies established by a town's emigrants (*landsmanschaft*), the books are stuffed with history, reminiscences, profiles of eminent townspeople, poetry, maps, artwork and photographs, accounts of the community's demise, long lists of the dead, and survivors' stories. Although regarded by many professional historians as the sometimes not-entirely-reliable work of amateurs, yizkor books contain a motherlode of information about Jewish life in Eastern Europe that no longer exists anywhere else.



While yizkor books serve as a foundational component of Jewish collective memory, they also have played a role in the collective forgetting of our European past. According to Jane Ziegelman, author of a remarkable new book, *Once There Was a Town: The Memory Books of a Lost Jewish World*, the elders in some families frequently concealed yizkor books from their children and grandchildren, an expression of their desire to move past the trauma of the Holocaust and to shield the next generations from its grim reality. Written mainly in Yiddish and Hebrew, yizkor books are also likely to be impenetrable to readers of other languages, although translating them is an ongoing historical project that conceivably could be streamlined by the use of AI.

My family was one of those who kept their hometowns' yizkor book under wraps (and shielded the children from our Holocaust narrative), even

though members of our extended family appear throughout its pages as contributors, as well as in the lists of victims of Nazi atrocities. My maternal grandfather was from the then-Polish (now Belarusian) town of Luninets and my grandmother was from Kozhan-Gorodok, a smaller village nearby. They emigrated to New York before World War I and were actively involved with their towns' *landsmanschaft* in America. When I first encountered our yizkor book about 10 years ago, I was stunned to find out that my grandfather, Harry – a man chiefly recalled in our extended family as having been a sickly, remote, and heartbroken man – had been the person entrusted by his emigre compatriots to bring relief funds collected in America back to Luninets after WWI. He is described as being a savior whose mission rescued the community from starvation. After World War II, he was part of the committee that aided survivors – there were not many, as the two towns were among those annihilated in 1941 by the Einsatzgruppen killing squads during Operation Barbarossa – and published their yizkor book in Tel Aviv in 1952.

You think someone in the family might have mentioned that, but no. I was given a thoroughgoing education about the Holocaust even as my own family story was obfuscated by omission and mistruths. Reading our yizkor book transformed my understanding not only of my family history, but of my own life and family dynamics. (I thought they acted as they did because they just didn't like me – but no, there was this Holocaust grief and survivors' guilt thing going on that I had no way of apprehending as a child.) Perhaps similar types of revelations await you, as well – if your ancestral communities produced a yizkor book, it is likely to be digitally archived and perhaps at least partially translated in the online collections of JewishGen.org, the Yiddish Book Center, and the New York Public Library, among other repositories. By all means, I encourage you to investigate if you haven't already.

And when you do, you will find that Jane Ziegelman has provided with a superb introduction to yizkor books that also works as a rich but concise overview of everyday life in a shtetl and as an affecting personal memoir (her family, not all of whom made it to the United States, was from Luboml, then in Poland and now in Ukraine). Ziegelman – author of the acclaimed Lower East Side history *97 Orchard* – is a fine prose stylist whose descriptions of domestic life, market day, street life, worship, food, shtetl Shabbats, the *cheder* classroom, and Zionist idealism at times absolutely sing. But her keenest authorial decision was to structure *Once There Was a Town* by adapting the conventions of a

typical yizkor book – it starts with early history and moves through shtetl daily life, folklore, politics, conflicts with non-Jewish neighbors, annihilation, and finally survival. After finishing her narrative, you will understand how our forbears chose to tell their stories to themselves and record them for their descendants; that, in its way, is as meaningful as the stories they told. The books reveal so much about the way Jews processed the lost Jewish world in the immediate wake of the catastrophe and offer a snapshot look at how they were starting the hard work of creating a new one in Israel and the Diaspora.

"Yizkor books are very much about places and the idea of place," Ziegelman writes. "You could also say, however, that they function as places themselves." They are what we have left, and I predict that *Once There Was a Town* will further unlock the worlds and lives and multitudes contained in their pages.

In January, Ziegelman spoke to the BJV about *Once There Was a Town*. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Explain what yizkor books are and the place they hold in our collective memory. Given that these books were sometimes hidden away by elders who didn't want to expose their children to what happened in the Holocaust, what part do they also play in our collective forgetting of Europe?

Historically, the Jewish response to disaster has been to write about it – a tradition of what's called "disaster literature," starting with the Old Testament Book of Lamentations, which documents the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. In the Middle Ages, there's another type of disaster literature called *memorbucher*, which are records of these killing sprees that took place during the Crusades in medieval Germany. And there are more examples as the centuries go on. Yizkor books belong in that tradition of documenting and remembering disaster. This is part of who we are as Jews. Yizkor books started to be written in the 1940s. So very early, in the decades after the Holocaust, fellow townspeople came together in groups to commemorate their towns or their shtetls. And they are both records of the destruction of the shtetls and – this is the part of the story that I emphasize – what came before the destruction. What was so captivating to me is the before.

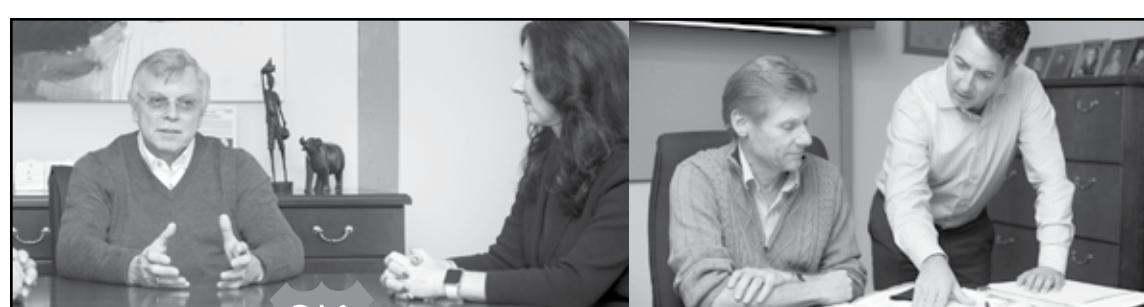
The larger question of collective forgetting, as I'm beginning to understand it, was that there was a period when the Holocaust was too close. The pain was too raw to engage in intensive remembering. We're gaining distance now. We're also losing witnesses. We're losing our shtetl Jews. My father is 98. In fact, his birthday is this weekend. He's among that generation. And I think there's a sense now among people of our generation that time is running out, and we have to save the memories of this world that was destroyed. We've reached a point where it's time to remember with purposefulness.

I'm going to read you a bit of writing you're probably going to recognize. "Standing over the grave, one feels sure that terrible things have happened here. The ground still looks freshly tamped, it looks uncomfortable. I am standing on the very spot where the war happened, where history exploded, and it's my history. To dream that the ground was heaving doesn't seem far-fetched." That is what you wrote in 1991, after you visited Luboml. So you've been writing about this and thinking about this as a writer for more than 35 years or 34 years. How did you, from the point you started, process the family story and the historical story to the point where you put together Once There Was a Town?

Some of my earliest childhood memories are of hearing stories about Luboml, particularly stories that were told by my father. The fact that he was an immigrant Jew from this little town who became a very successful businessman was a very important part of his self-mythology. Stories about Luboml were always in the air. When the family got together, I felt the presence of this town in the room with us. It was palpable. And I knew something bad had happened there. I didn't understand what it was as a young kid. As my knowledge grew, I understood that the Holocaust had taken place. I knew that Luboml was part of that story, but I didn't know in what way. I always wanted to ask questions about Luboml. I remember interviewing relatives as a kid with a cassette tape recorder. 'Tell me, what did you eat? Tell me, what games did you play? Tell me, what was your house like?' I always wanted to understand this place that haunted me. And discovering the English translation of the Luboml yizkor book that came out in 1997 was like the answer to a long-held dream. Finally, I'm going to know this place that has played such an important part in my family's history and in my own sense of self, in my own identity.



Jane Ziegelman



Peace of Mind DURING TURBULENT TIMES

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CULTURE & ARTS

Yizkor books are unflinching about what life was like before the Holocaust, particularly in terms of the poverty and the harassment by the hooligans who lived alongside the Jews. But when you write about the good parts of life, as in the section about the importance of Shabbat and of the salty, fatty foods they ate for their Shabbat meal, your tone captures a fondness the yizkor book writers must have still had for life in the shtetl. How much about that life do you think was sentimentalized by the contributors?

No doubt there was sentimentalizing. Yizkor book writers were deeply self-aware. They knew that they were sentimentalizing, and some even acknowledge that they're writing in an elegiac mode. A yizkor book was a place to remember what was difficult, but also what was beautiful in this 'luminous civilization,' which is a Cynthia Ozick phrase and a beautiful description. Yes, there was sentimentalizing, but the idea that that would happen was very much in the consciousness of many of the people who wrote these books.

It's small town life. I mean, think of our own perceptions of small-town America, of the sense of community and of connectedness. Well, that was very much part of the shtetl as well. So there's a degree of sentimentalizing, but also there's a large degree of truth. These were tight-knit communities, what anthropologists call face-to-face communities, where people knew each other in a way that they don't in my neighborhood in Brooklyn Heights. I think that those feelings were part of the reality of what a shtetl was.

How can people connect with Yizkor books to help form a contemporary Jewish identity or sustain a certain kind of historical Jewish identity? How might they be useful in processing what's going on today, in our own Jewish lives?

Well, the beauty of it is that yizkor books are much more accessible than they were 20 years ago. The JewishGen's database that hosts the yizkor books was originally a genealogical website – and that's primarily what yizkor books were used for. People used those necrologies at the back of yizkor books as important genealogical tools. Users didn't really pay much attention to the content of the descriptions of the world that was being conjured in the yizkor books. Now that's beginning to change. People are beginning to read the rest of the yizkor book, not just the necrology. What that did for me is show that for my ancestors, as we were saying, life was immensely hard, filled with challenges, material, psychological, economical, but that shtetl life was punctuated by these flashes of almost transcendent beauty.

Part of it were things like the traditional ways of honoring the Shabbat. That flash of beauty that you received on Shabbat is what sustained you for the rest of the week. And I guess the idea is, let's look for those flashes the way our ancestors did and let's find them in our own Judaism. I mean, there were elaborate structures that were established in the shtetls for helping the poor and the wandering peddlers and beggars, a substantial charitable network set up where people really did take care of each other. This is a Jewish impulse with historical roots, and it's perpetuated today. This is a great thing to know about ourselves and to commit to more of it.

You said that when we first started speaking, how Jews response to tragedy has been to write about it. In the yizkor book of my village, there is a whole section about descendants or people from these villages who fell as soldiers in Israel's 1948 War of Independence. To me, it shows how much these postwar survivor communities connected the struggle to establish a homeland with what happened in the Holocaust. They were not two things. They were all part of the same thing. Is that a correct way of looking at it?

I'd never put it together that way, but I would say yes, that's accurate. In the yizkor books, you also see where Zionism started and how it started and what it meant to people who felt they were living in exile – and how far, I believe, that we've strayed from the roots of Zionism as it was forming then in Eastern Europe.

Jewish Care Services

Berkshire Jewish Communal Safety Net

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires has provided a safety net for our Jewish community for nearly 85 years. During these uncertain times, we would like to remind you of the services available to help if unexpected challenges arise.

- ♥ **Kosher Meals and Meals on Wheels:** Meals are available for delivery (for qualified individuals) or pickup for older adults aged 60 and above.
- ♥ **Community Social Worker:** Jill Goldstein, MSW, LICSW is available to assist community members in navigating local care services, accessing transitional assistance, and providing ongoing case management.
- ♥ **Hebrew Free Loans:** The Federation offers interest-free loans to help with unexpected expenses and other needs.
- ♥ **Specific Assistance Grants:** Federation offers one-time emergency financial assistance for community members struggling with essential needs and can facilitate additional services to get a person back in a more sustainable situation.

To inquire about assistance, please contact
Jill Goldstein, MSW, LICSW

(413) 442-4360, ext.17 or j.goldstein@jfswm.org



Jewish Federation
OF THE BERKSHIRES

THE STRENGTH OF A PEOPLE.
THE POWER OF COMMUNITY.

In your book, you share how there were kibbutzim in Poland, of which I was only dimly aware.

Those kibbutzim were really agrarian socialist communities. That's what people were dreaming of. That's not exactly what Israel is today, but it was a very altruistic vision of a way that Jews could live. I think I put this in the book. There's a section where a guy is working on one of the kibbutzim in Poland, and he talks about the energy that he feels coming out of the Earth as he's working. So that was also part of Zionism, that deep connection to Earth and nature. That, for me, was revelatory.

So, about survivor's guilt. I know it very much permeated my family and a lot of other families I knew. I grew up in Miami Beach, where there were a lot of survivors, a lot of people who had lost a great deal, and that included my own family. How much does that sense of survivor's guilt permeate the Yizkor books that you have read, or was that something kept closer to the vest?

It was kept closer to the vest. It was something that I became interested in, actually, after I finished the book, where I started doing searches for exactly that, for people expressing remorse over things they should have done. Why are they alive? Why didn't they go back to the house that third time or a fourth time and take their little sister? Questioning why they were alive and their families weren't. But I feel, again, that in the time period that these books were written, it was too soon, historically, to go to that place in a public way to bring light to such dark feelings. The pain was too intense.

I know I've recently had a conversation with my aunt. FYI, I'm secular, but the rest of my father's family are all deeply devout. I didn't actually ask her if she ever feels guilty, but she said 'Sometimes I wonder, Why me? Why me? Why am I alive? And then I look at all my children and my grandchildren, and they're studying Torah. And I think, Okay, maybe that's why.' And that was the way she answered it – she was saved to save Torah through the devotion of her progeny.



As my parents planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who come after me. – Talmud

Thank you to these individuals who through their gift to the Legacy Circle will ensure that the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires thrives long into the future. May your name be a Blessing, and may the example you set inspire others to create their own Jewish Legacy.

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Jewish Federation
OF THE BERKSHIRES



Kosher Meals to Go—Meals on Wheels

ALL ARE WELCOME: Kosher lunch will be prepared on Mondays, Tuesdays (starting October 21), and Thursdays. Meals to go will be ready by noon for pickup at the Knesset Israel kitchen door, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield. All meals-on-wheels will be delivered by Federation volunteers in the early afternoon. Suggested donation of \$3 for adults over age 60; \$7 for all others

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED BY 9 A.M. THE DAY BEFORE THE LUNCH: Call Federation's kitchen at (413) 442-2200 the day before to reserve a meal for pick-up or to arrange delivery.

What's for Lunch?

(GF) Gluten-Free entree • (DF) Dairy-Free entree

FEBRUARY

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Noon, Lunch...Baked ziti, California blend vegetables, garlic spinach, minestrone soup, Italian bread, and peaches.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

Noon, Lunch...Salmon croquette (GF)(DF), green beans, rice with peas, roasted garlic and potato soup, whole wheat bread, and apricots.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12

Noon, Lunch...Pizza bagel, broccoli, baby carrots, shredded iceberg salad, and strawberries and cream.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Closed for Presidents' Day

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Noon, Lunch...Chicken cacciatore (GF)(DF), egg noodles, Italian green beans, salad, white bread, and tropical fruit salad.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Noon, Lunch...Pierogies in paprika sour cream sauce, cabbage, beets, lentil soup, rye bread, and snickerdoodle cookie.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Noon, Lunch...Chicken piccata (GF)(DF), zucchini and yellow squash, rice, vegetable soup, dinner roll, and fruit cocktail.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Noon, Lunch...Tuna casserole, peas and carrots, roasted Brussels sprouts, butternut squash soup, white bread, and tapioca pudding.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Noon, Lunch...Lentil stew (GF)(DF), quinoa, roasted potatoes, pineapple coleslaw, pita bread, and apricots.

MARCH

MONDAY, MARCH 2

Noon, Lunch...Meatloaf (GF)(DF), mashed sweet potatoes, mixed four blend vegetables, salad, whole wheat bread, and applesauce.

TUESDAY, MARCH 3

Noon, Lunch...Macaroni and cheese, broccoli, peas, salad, multi-grain bread, and chocolate pudding.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

Noon, in-person lunch...Purim meal: Savory meat filled hamantashen (DF), Persian jeweled rice, sautéed green beans and mushrooms, creamy broccoli and tahini soup, challah, and hamantashen.

MONDAY, MARCH 9

Noon, Lunch...Vegetable and cheese quesadilla, yellow rice, fiesta corn, black bean soup, corn chips, and key lime mousse.

TUESDAY, MARCH 10

Noon, Lunch...Sweet and sour chicken (GF)(DF), rice, Asian vegetables, salad, Chinese noodles, and Mandarin oranges.

THURSDAY, MARCH 12

Noon, Lunch...Turkey pie, roasted potatoes, green beans, hearty white bread, and brownie.

MONDAY, MARCH 16

Noon, Lunch...Eggplant parmesan, pasta with marinara, Italian green beans, salad, garlic bread, and sugar cookie bar.

TUESDAY, MARCH 17

Noon, Lunch...Shepherd's pie (GF)(DF), roasted Brussels sprouts, braised cabbage, salad, Irish soda bread, and pistachio bundt cake.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19

Noon, Lunch...Salmon loaf (GF)(DF), asparagus, mashed potatoes, vegetable soup, rye bread, and fruit cocktail.

MONDAY, MARCH 23

Noon, Lunch...Fettuccine with peas, spinach, and mushrooms, stewed tomatoes, broccoli, salad, Italian bread, and oatmeal cookie.

TUESDAY, MARCH 24

Noon, Lunch...Stuffed cabbage (GF)(DF), roasted potatoes, California blend vegetables, hearty turkey soup, pumpernickel bread, and pears.

Recovering from an illness or injury? Cooking becoming difficult?



KOSHER MEALS ON WHEELS:

Meals are available for delivery to qualified individuals to help extend their home independence and health. There is no income requirement, just a simple assessment through Elder Services will get your meal deliveries started, if you qualify.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Jill Goldstein at (413) 442-4360, Ext 17, j.goldstein@jfswm.org.

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

Meals-on-wheels drivers are always appreciated. Contact Heidi Katz, (413) 442-4360, ext. 10, federation@jewishberkshires.org to inquire.

Meals and programs are made possible by the generous support of our community. The kosher lunch and meals on wheels program is in collaboration with Elder Services of Berkshire county.

Knesset Israel – 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield



ONGOING MINYANS

Saturday, 9:30 a.m.

Sunday, 8:45 a.m.

Friday, 5:45 p.m.

CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

Friday, February 13 5:04 p.m.

Friday, February 20 5:13 p.m.

Friday, February 27 5:22 p.m.

Friday, March 6 5:30 p.m.

Friday, March 13 6:35 p.m.

Friday, March 20 6:47 p.m.

MAZEL TOV!

Wendy Penner on receiving the Peacemaker Award presented on January 19 in North Adams by the MLK Jr. Day of Service Committee. The award honors those who have contributed substantially to peace in our region and have a history of working with people and/or neighborhoods and communities to promote greater tolerance, understanding, and caring. Wendy is co-president of Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires in North Adams.

Dr. Randy Pellish, gastroenterologist at Lahey Hospital & Medical Centers in Burlington, MA, son of **Janie and Dr. Larry Pellish**, who followed in his dad's footsteps in being named 2025 Humanitarian of the Year by The New England Chapter of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation.

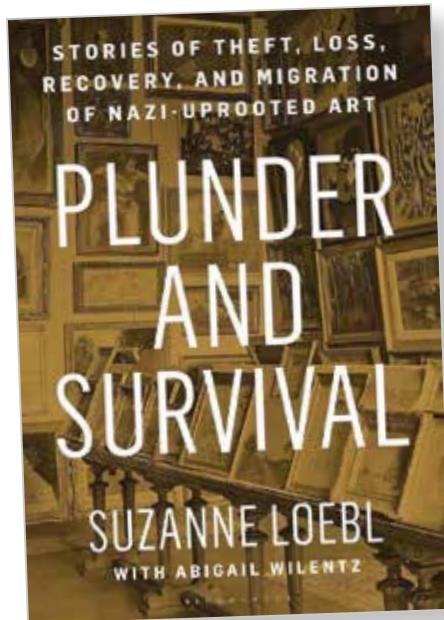
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Ellen Rosenblatt
and the BJV delivery
team, Dave Halley,
Colin Ovitsky,
Megan Dopson and
Roman Rozenblyum.

CULTURE & ARTS

Plunder and Survival: Stories of Theft, Loss, Recovery, and Migration of Nazi Uprooted Art, by Suzanne Loebel (with Abigail Wilentz)

Reviewed by Linda F. Burghardt / Jewish Book Council



Suzanne Loebel grew up in Nazi Germany in a Jewish art-collecting family. Now, decades later, she has written with tender memories about the works of art that were looted. As a Holocaust survivor, Loebel's writing displays a deep degree of sensitivity and poignancy. Readers are swept along as the author shares what happened, painting by painting, starting with the theft and then looking at many of the pieces that were recovered and restored to their rightful owners.

Throughout, Loebel describes the Nazi attack on modern art as a veritable crusade against the so-called degeneracy of both the works themselves and the artists who produced them. Loebel is diligent in describing the stolen pieces, listing in an appendix exactly where they are currently on display in US museums. This welcome addition not only enables us to easily view these pieces in person, if we are so inclined, but also to gain an

overall sense of the achievement that having saved them represents.

Interwoven within the stories of the artworks' fates are colorful pictures of Loebel's wartime experiences in Germany and her family's timely escape to Nazi

occupied Belgium; here, they were safely hidden during the Holocaust. Personal anecdotes illuminate what life was like for the teenaged Suzanne there, and how her family finally made it to the safety of America.

Suzanne Loebel's family had lived in Germany for hundreds of years, subject to familiar cycles of acceptance and persecution, and finally becoming part of society and feeling at home. But all the wealth they had accumulated and all the relationships her family had forged came to a crashing end with the rise of Hitler.

Loebel illustrates the desire of the Nazis to gather up as much art as they could from the people and institutions in the countries they occupied. Both the subject matter of the paintings and the nationality of the artists themselves were of interest. Hitler's officers lusted after this art, all the while maintaining that they despised the pieces they stole.

Loebel's family owned many historically significant prints and paintings that Hitler desired, plus a grand selection of expensive Bauhaus furniture, nearly all of which became victims of Nazi plunder. To our benefit, she takes us beyond the art and brings us deeply into the story of the dealers and collectors who were involved in the lives of the artworks.

The writing is crisp throughout, and each segment about a piece of art brings us deftly into the next one. We delve into the works one at a time, and then suddenly we are able to see them all together, and in that moment, we grasp the immensity of the artistic loss brought about by the ruthless Nazi plunder. Many of the artists were murdered in the concentration camps at the same time that their creations graced the galleries of the high-level Germans who stole them.

The parts of the book that focus on the restitution of the artworks are particularly gratifying, and they are greatly enhanced by the inclusion in the book of capsule biographies of the people who made it happen, many of whom were Jewish. These bios are offered in one of the two appendices following the main text. We get to know on a personal level the full range of both the collectors who owned the art and those who decided their fate.

Loebel wrote the book together with Abigail Wilentz, who, as an expert in art, design, and photography, added an extra dimension to these chapters. Gorgeous color prints of some of the most famous looted paintings grace *Plunder and Survival*'s pages, making a visceral visual statement about the cultural value of the works of art. Paintings by Egon Schiele, Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, and the like make this book not only an intellectual achievement but a beautiful statement in its own right.

Originally published by Jewish Book Council, the home for Jewish literature, authors, and readers. Find book reviews, interviews, book club resources, and more at jewishbookcouncil.org.

Linda F. Burghardt is a New York-based journalist and author who has contributed commentary, breaking news, and features to major newspapers across the U.S., in addition to having three nonfiction books published. She is now serving as Scholar in Residence at the Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County and also has a home in the Berkshires.

The First Air France Poster to Israel, 1949

Original available at the Farkash Gallery in Tel Aviv (farkash-gallery.com):

This historic poster, printed in France in 1949, became a powerful symbol within the global Jewish community. It marked one of the earliest acknowledgments by a European nation – and the international world at large – of the newly established, sovereign State of Israel.

Depicting an Israeli girl holding the national flag in front of the ancient walls of Jerusalem, the poster served not only as a travel advertisement but also as a declaration of Israel's presence on the global stage. Through this image, Air France invited travelers to discover the reborn nation and helped announce its founding to the world.



The poster was created by Renluc, one of the most celebrated French illustrators of the 1950s. Known for his stunning work with Air France, Renluc's elegant and dreamlike graphic style left a lasting mark on the history of design. His compositions are distinguished by their refined use of color, clarity, and ability to inspire wanderlust in viewers across the globe.



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CULTURE & ARTS

TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE

Yes, We Have Some Bananas!

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

An apple a day may keep the doctor away, but bananas can give those round red fruits a run for their money. Bananas are packed with potassium, fiber, and Vitamin B6, as well as antioxidants. They provide both energy and support for heart and digestive health.

Most people consider the banana a fruit that grows on trees, but that description is misleading. Because the banana plant's main stalk (not a trunk, but a pseudostem made of rolled leaves) dies back after fruiting, it is technically an herb. And not just an herb, but the world's largest herb. It is *not* a tree. And the fruit itself is classified botanically as a berry. A giant berry, true, but a berry nonetheless.

Given all that background, what is the correct *bracha* to say when you are about to eat a banana? For that answer, we go back to the 1500s when the renowned Rabbi Joseph Karo explained that since bananas are not a fruit, "ברא פרי הארץ" (ברא פרי הארץ), meaning "Who creates the fruit of the ground," should be recited.

Rabbi Karo knew about bananas even though these berries are not mentioned anywhere in the Torah. That's because they weren't introduced to the Middle East until around 600 years after the fall of the Second Temple. The banana has its origins in New Guinea. Upon spreading westward toward the Philippines, they hybridized with other subspecies before being brought by Arab traders from Southeast Asia across the Indian Ocean to Africa, the Middle East, and eventually Europe.

Once introduced to the Holy Land, they took root in the subtropical area around the Kinneret. But despite their presence in the region, Israel has only been cultivating them since the 1930s. The intense summer sun with its accompanying dizzying temperatures in the Jordan Valley prompted farmers to use their ingenuity. They erected canvas roofs to shield the plants and developed advanced irrigation and fertilization methods.

Today, Israelis are among the biggest consumers of bananas, eating over 60 pounds per capita every year. In comparison, we Americans each eat only 27 pounds per year.

I can still remember the first time I visited my cousins at Beit Zera. After getting off the bus on Route 90, my friend and I walked down the drive leading to the kibbutz's center. Row upon row of banana plants lined the way, emitting a pungent, almost alcoholic odor that assaulted my nostrils. I wondered how anybody could stand the cloying fragrance all day long – in the hot sun, no less.

The banana also has an American story with a Jewish twist. Like many an immigrant, Samuel Zmuri (name later changed to Zemurray) came to New York via steerage. One of the many odd jobs he worked to support himself was unloading bananas from ships. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, banana production was just becoming a major industry. If you've ever checked the blue labels on the skins of your Chiquitas or Doles, you will know that Central America was and is the source for virtually every banana consumed in this country.

Zemurray was quite the entrepreneur. Unloading heavy bunches of bananas was not his life goal. Instead, he bought up over-ripe bananas and began selling them to grocery stores. Why grocers would want over-ripe bananas is beyond me. I only use them for banana bread. Nevertheless, by 1903 he had started his own company that eventually included his own line of freighters. He became one of the largest importers of bananas to the United States – and a controlling shareholder in United Fruit, which then morphed into United Brands, and ultimately Chiquita Brands.

And the Jewish angle? Zemurray was much more than Sam the Banana Man. A philanthropist and ardent Zionist, he bought for the pre-state Haganah a decommissioned junk ship called the *USS President Warfield*. Renamed the Exodus, that vessel went on to fame for smuggling Holocaust survivors out of Europe and into Palestine.



Banana Bread

This has been my go-to banana bread for decades. Have all ingredients at room temperature. Set your oven to 350°.

INGREDIENTS:

1 3/4 cups flour	2 eggs, beaten
2 1/4 teaspoon baking powder	1 1/4 cups over-ripe banana pulp, mashed*
1/2 teaspoon salt	1/4 c. chopped dried apricots
1/2 cup oil	1/4 c. chocolate chips
2/3 cup sugar	
3/4 t. grated lemon rind	

DIRECTIONS:

Sift together the first three ingredients. Beat until creamy the oil and sugar. Add the sifted ingredients in about 3 parts to the sugar mixture. Beat the batter after each addition until smooth. Blend in the next three ingredients. Fold in the dried apricots and chocolate chips. Place the batter in a greased bread pan. Bake the bread about 1 hour or until done. Cool before slicing.

*I like to keep over-ripe bananas in the freezer. When I have enough, I simply thaw them out and use those. They're sweeter and much easier to mash.



Carol Goodman Kaufman, has just published her second mystery book, *Crak, Bam, Dead: Mah Jong Mayhem* (Next Chapter Press). The collection of cozy mystery short stories features food writer/ aspiring investigative reporter Kiki Coben and her Mah Jong group as they follow clues from a "Black Widow" murder at sea to a suspicious death at a senior home charity event. Armed with a curious mind and her formidable group of friends, Kiki is ready to prove that the only thing you need to catch a killer is persistence – and maybe just a little bit of luck.

Crak, Bam, Dead is available in stores and online.

יא! מיר האבן נישט קיין באנאנס

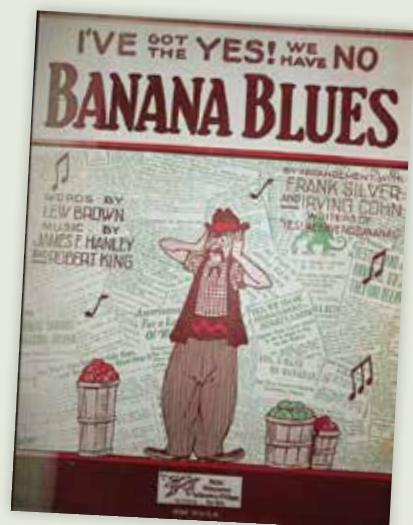


'Yes! We Have No Bananas' was the novelty hit of 1923 and the Jews were blamed – in this case, with cause. As detailed by DJ Professor Dan on the TNOCS.com website, the song was written by Frank Silver and Irving Cohn, and was introduced by Eddie Cantor in his Broadway revue, *Make It Snappy*. Per DJ Professor Dan, the tune tells "the story of a greengrocer whose aversion to disappointing his customers results in him refusing to

ever answer in the negative. Much to everyone's confusion and amusement... It appears that 'Yes! We Have No Bananas' was a catchphrase before it was a song. I say 'appears,' because there was a lot of debate at the time about who was responsible – i.e., who to blame – for making the infernal thing so popular. The debate became so heated that Time magazine, in one of its earliest editions, contacted...two characters most likely to have been responsible and begged them to sort the origin story out." It seems that the phrase was devised by a Greek greengrocer familiar to the songwriters, "a man who likely never got the credit, or the royalties, he was owed." And they were substantial, "plenty of coin" as this newspaper clipping relates: \$60,000 in royalties (over \$1.13 million today) "with more to follow later."



Needless to say, "dozens of other food songs [were] launched in the successful wake of 'Yes! We Have No Bananas,'" including Eddie Cantor's "answer record..." 'I've Got The Yes! We Have No Bananas Blues,' all about a guy who is sick of hearing 'Yes! We Have No Bananas' everywhere he goes." Surely the intellectually laziest answer record released until Chubby Checker's 1961 hit "Let's Twist Again (Like We Did Last Summer)" – a tune that was written by Kal Mann [nee Kalman Cohen] and Dave Appell and



is also the fault of the Jews – 'I've Got The Yes! We Have No Bananas Blues' was "almost as big" as the song that inspired it, according to DJ Professor Dan.

'Yes! We Have No Bananas,' however, did inspire the title of Kevin Ayers's 1976 album, 'Yes! We Have No Mañanas (So Get Your Mañanas Today)'. Now largely forgotten, the album does not live up to the Zen

proverb-like acuity of its title, which certainly gives us something to chew on along with our banana bread.