

# SCHMOOZE NEWS



## Chag Pesach Sameach from the Jewish Federation of Oklahoma City

### New Beginnings Each Spring

BY MARCY PRICE  
SENIOR CARE COMMITTEE

Passover greets us with the promise of new beginnings. The starkness of winter gives way to new buds on the trees and colorful displays of spring blooms. We welcome Passover and repeat the ancient prayers and stories that have propelled the Jewish people throughout the ages. Thankfully, this year we do not have to set an empty place at the table. All of the hostages are home. The greater our freedom now, the better we are able to pursue freedom and justice for others near and far. As we gather around our Passover table, we begin by blessing this sacred time of renewal from the *Night of Beginnings* by Marcia Falk.

"Let us bless the flow of life  
that revives us,  
sustains us,  
and brings us to this time."

In this *Pesach* edition of *Schmooze News*, we highlight the vision and story behind Michael Pollack's community *mitzvah* project "Take a Bite Out of Hunger" which has mobilized our Jewish community for at least 14 years to pack food for children and families who are food insecure. Michael's daughter, Rachel, penned an essay about Michael and Jiji's Jewish journey to their chosen home here in Oklahoma City.

This *Schmooze News* also highlights many of the educational and social programs offered to all ages in our greater OKC Jewish community from Camp *Chaverim* to Torah Study and *Chai* on life events. We each benefit when we come together for learning, cultural experiences, celebrations and remembrance programs, so be proactive like Michael and Jiji and become more involved and connected...and take a bite out of Jewish life in Oklahoma City!



**Schmooze News is a project of the Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City's Senior Program**

**Senior Care Committee Chairs:**  
Marcy Price and Pamela Richman

**Senior Care Coordinator:**  
Margo Nechtow

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# Take a Bite Out of Hunger 2025



Michael & Jiji Pollack



Marcy Price & Lauren Koeller



Anita Barlow



Nataly Rome

## *I'd Sooner be Jewish*

An interview with Michael Pollack  
By Rachel Pollack (Michael's daughter)

Lately I've been thinking about Fievel Mousekewitz, the young mouse from *An American Tail*. His family flees Eastern Europe dreaming of America — where there are no cats. In the film, the cats stand in for Cossacks and persecution, the forces that drove Jews from their homes.



Michael Pollack

Of course, in reality, there were cats in America, and vicious ones too. There always are. But the dream of safety and dignity carried them forward.

With immigration once again filling the headlines, that animated film feels less like nostalgia and more like a mirror to our present day.

During Passover, we revisit our own ancient immigrant story. We open the door for Elijah. We tell our children that we were strangers in the land of Egypt — and that memory shapes how we treat strangers today.

When my family and I arrived in Oklahoma in 1992, we too felt like strangers. We didn't know the rhythms. We didn't know the people, and we weren't sure how long we would stay. We use to joke about heading back to California someday, though that's not something one says too loudly in the Sooner State. But the Oklahoma Jewish community closed that distance quickly. The Carson, Epstein, and Raff families saved seats for us at their Seder tables. Rabbi David Packman taught the history of Jews in Oklahoma, who ran dry goods stores in small towns across Oklahoma. We were one of many immigrant groups shaping this state. Scratch the surface of almost any Oklahoman, and you'll uncover a migration story.

That warmth extended beyond the Temple and Synagogue. We've partnered with Mayflower Church. We've stood beside members of the Muslim community. When refugee families from Afghanistan arrived, we helped furnish apartments, stock kitchens, and make sure they were not alone. We followed the example of the wonderful work that HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) did welcoming Jewish refugees back in the day.

The way we celebrate the Jewish holidays here reflects the unique blend of Jewish values with Oklahoma warmth. On *Chanukah*, we light candles against the darkness. On Purim, we deliver *mishloach manot*. During the High Holidays, we follow the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who taught us that a proper fast doesn't mean just abstaining from food, but includes feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and providing shelter for the homeless. If we feel hunger on *Yom Kippur*, it is meant to move us toward action.

When I turned 50, I tried to take forward the idea of a spiritual fast. After serving on the Temple and Federation boards, OU Hillel, OKIE, and elsewhere, I sensed a hunger for *mitzvot* in our community. (continues pg.3)

That's how "Take a Bite Out of Hunger" began at the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma. What stays with me are the happy faces of the young people, who left with pride, joy, and connection. We had done something unmistakably Jewish, together.

Today, as immigrants are being detained and dehumanized, we know better than to pretend there are no "cats." Jewish history teaches us what happens when fear replaces memory. But it also teaches hope. As Papa Mousekewitz said, "As long as we're together, we'll be all right." Oklahoma is a place where Jews of every stripe come together. It's a place where we stand in solidarity with each other and with the wider community. Now we must do so again.

There's nowhere else where I'd sooner be Jewish.

## Passover Cooking Corner

### Brisket Recipe

By Debby Johnson

#### Ingredients:

- 1T onion powder
- 1T garlic powder
- 1T paprika
- 1T salt
- ¾-1t pepper
- A brisket—about 5 lbs
- 4 T vegetable oil
- ½ c water (and a splash or two of wine if you feel like it)
- 3 c chopped onion
- 2 T finely chopped garlic (or just put it through a garlic press)
- ½ c honey
- 4 lbs red potatoes—cut into chunks—peel or not—up to you
- 2 c carrots diced or cut in rounds is fine
- 1 ½ t fresh or dried basil
- ½ c brown sugar (light is better)
- ½ lb. pitted prunes



#### Preparation:

1. Make a dry rub out of the spices and rub it into the brisket. Wrap the whole thing in foil and put in the fridge for a day or two.
2. When ready to cook, take out a large skillet. Heat 2T of oil over medium to high heat and brown the brisket.
3. When browned, put the brisket in a Dutch oven, add the water (and I cheat and also throw in some red wine) cover it and let it simmer for an hour.
4. While the meat is simmering, use the same pan you browned the brisket in, add another couple T of oil and sauté the onions until browned. When they are pretty close to done (golden) add the garlic and sauté it. Take em out. Drain em and put onion/garlic aside.
5. Add honey to the pot and stir it in. Make it easy on yourself and spray the measuring cup with PAM and honey will slide out. Cover and simmer for another 30 minutes.
6. Mix up the veggies (potatoes and carrots, basil and onion-garlic mixture) and add it to the brisket pot and cook another hour.
7. Take out the veggies and the brisket and put them on a plate for a little bit. Add the brown sugar and prunes to the juices in the pot and stir it up. (If you're low on juices, add another splash of water or wine). Then put half the veggies (the ones that were on top) on the bottom of the Dutch oven, add the brisket and then put the rest of the veggies on top. Cook for another hour or so.
8. How do you know if it's done? Stick a fork in the leaner end. When there is a slight pull, it's done.
9. You can either make this whole thing on top of your stove or in the oven at 325. Your choice.
10. Be sure to trim off some of the fat before serving. Slice up the brisket. Put veggies and prunes around it. Top with some of the juices and enjoy!

## Take a Bite Out of Hunger 2025 cont.



Sherry Barton, Barbie Greer, Maddie Greer  
Sara Honegger

### Matzah Kugel

By Pamela Richman

from Mrs. Eva Cohen, of blessed memory, who lived down the street from me in Hyde Park (on the south side of Chicago.) She was one of the few Jews from Hungary I knew who came to this country after the war.

#### Ingredients

- |               |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| ½ cup oil     | 1 cup chopped apples     |
| 4-5 eggs      | ¾ cup matzah meal        |
| 1/3 cup sugar | Raisins                  |
| Some salt     | Walnut halves (optional) |

Mix everything together except for walnut halves. Put into 9 x 9 pan. Top with walnuts. Bake at 350 for about 40 minutes. Serve warm. (I usually double the recipe.)

*Variation: This recipe works for Matzah Meal Muffins, too! Spoon the mixture into buttered muffin tins and bake 25 - 30 minutes.*

## OKLAHOMA HILLELS VISIT

A huge "Thank you" to Kasi Shelton, Hillel Director for giving us a tour of the **new Hillel facility in Norman** and hosting us for lunch!



Evelyn Friedman, Danica Chronister, Beth Resman-Targoff, Boris Zubok, Margo Nechtow, Dan Johnson, Kasi Shelton

## JFED ANNUAL KICK-OFF



Sherri Barton, Sharon Cohen, Rabbi Jacobson, Diana Robinson, Mike Robinson, Tania Lavi



Rachel Johnson with new board members Lisa Howard-Tichenor, Jolene Traum, Jay Shanker, and Jfed President Sara Honegger

## BAKING CHALLAH

The *challah* is included in our deliveries of our chicken noodle, matzoh ball soup to anyone in the Jewish community who needs soup for any reason.

Call or email [Margo@jfedokc.org](mailto:Margo@jfedokc.org).



Marcy Price, Tiffany Cashion, Nataly Rome

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, April 12 @ 2p - The Hope We Choose, Holocaust Remembrance Program

Monday, April 13 @ 8a - Holocaust Remembrance Day at the State Capitol

Be sure to sign up for our emails on our website  
[www.jfedokc.org](http://www.jfedokc.org)

## Welcome to our new Board Members!

### Lisa Howard



After motherhood, serving Oklahoma City's Jewish Community has been the greatest honor of my adult life. The Federation has touched my family by its involvement with PJ Library, investment in sending children to Greene Family Camp, and sponsoring part of the high school Israel trip.

The OKC Jewish Federation is important as it supports Jewish families from infancy through adulthood. I am passionate about helping to make Oklahoma City a place where Jewish life is vibrant, beautiful, and an irresistible option for my children as adults. It is important to me to support the Federation, by serving on its Board, so that I can be a small part of helping our community thrive.

### Jeff Kline

I'm excited to rejoin the Board after taking a few years to focus on our growing family. Our Jewish community has always been another home to me, and I want my girls to have that same experience. I hope to continue focusing on JCRC-related issues by monitoring local and state events that impact our Jewish community.



### Jolene Traum



I am excited to join the Jewish Federation board because the Jewish community is so very important to me. I love working together to foster events and learning opportunities to bring us all together.

## Thank you to our outgoing Board Members

Thank you all for your time, dedication and passion!

Loren Plotkin  
Michael Pollack  
Yvette Trachtenberg  
Donald Wood

### Don't forget

Torah Study class meets every Monday from 12p - 1p  
Jewish Book Club second Wednesday of every month from 11a - 12p  
Email [Margo@jfedokc.org](mailto:Margo@jfedokc.org) if you're interested

# "There are Jews in Oklahoma?!"

by Marcy Price

Our greater Oklahoma City Jewish community is fortunate to have so many dedicated and wise volunteer leaders planting seeds to blossom and grow in the future. Helene Harpman is one of the best examples of a lifelong educator, leader, innovator who has planted many seeds of knowledge through her expertise in Torah study and creative Jewish programs like the Vashti's Purim Party, Hanukkah Bingo, and most recently with her Oklahoma Jewish History initiative.

## **A little history on the History project**

In 2007, Oklahoma's Centennial Year, the Jewish Federation initiated a Jewish History project to collect stories, photos and videos of longtime Jewish Oklahomans from the small towns of Miami, Hobart, & Chickasha as well as with OKC elders including Justin Gardner, Anne Singer, Al Karchmer, Ben and Shirley Shanker, Michael Josephson, of blessed memory, among others.

Now almost 20 years later, Helene is leading the way to publish these stories as well as add new ones to create a digital history of our Oklahoma Jewish stories. Thank you to photographer, Ann Sherman, who is taking professional photos during these interviews.

Helene established initial funding through the Oklahoma City Jewish Foundation to cover the cost of transcribing oral histories and recording them on video. For our next steps, we need a dedicated Project Management team to bring Helene's vision to life. If you have an interest in this subject and would like to be part of this dynamic volunteer team, please contact, Margo ([Margo@jfedokc.org](mailto:Margo@jfedokc.org)).

Let's preserve our stories for future generations.

