

The Award Winning

» HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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A publication of The Buffalo Jewish Federation

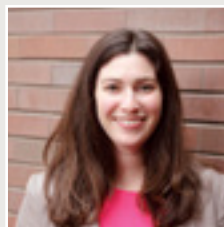
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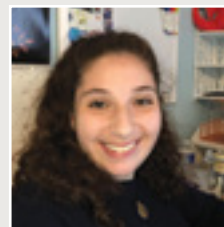
## GOODBYE 2020



## HELLO 2021



**INSIDE:**  
NEW CJEL  
LEADERSHIP  
(8-9)



**LOOK:**  
STUDENT  
TO STUDENT  
(12)



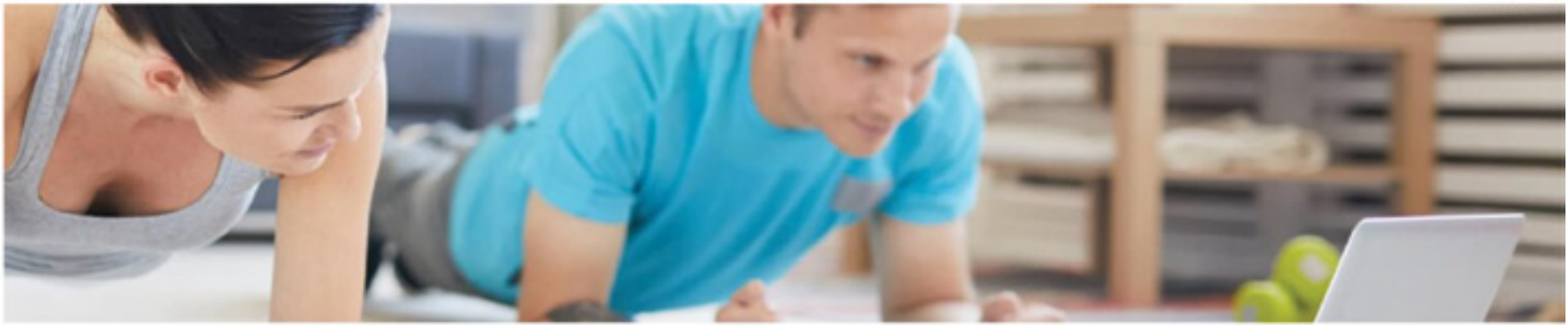
**DON'T MISS:**  
JCRC  
"TEAM"  
(13)





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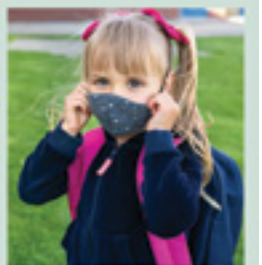
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# January 2021

## Editor's Note



Ellen Goldstein, Editor

**Happy secular New Year.** Thank God 2021 is here, and 2020 is over. It was a very difficult year for so many – for families and individuals as well as communities, not-for-profits and businesses. Some people lost loved ones and others lost their jobs. Neighborhoods lost businesses; some restaurants and stores large and small closed for good. And through the chaos of this “new normal,” which may be new but it isn’t normal, I have discovered what matters most: Jewish Community. Buffalo Community. Good friendships and great leadership!

These frightening and perilous times have been made so much less daunting through connection to Jewish Buffalo. By doing things like making latkes separately yet together via technology, lighting Shabbat candles or Hanukkah menorahs on Zoom, attending virtual shivas, Facetiming with friends, family and colleagues; work meetings and conferences on YouTube, streaming High Holy Day services, drive-by birthdays, and early and mail-in voting.

I’ve learned that connection, whether in-person or virtually, matters most. Living, working, playing and celebrating in community is what keeps me going. And the extra effort so many of us in Jewish Buffalo have put into virtual events, meetings, galas, concerts and religious services have made the difference between darkness and light.

The short days and long nights of coronavirus are not yet over. Yes, a vaccine is now available, but most of us will not be receiving ours for months. And the damage done to our society by this pandemic is not over. We must work overtime to continue to repair this precious world.

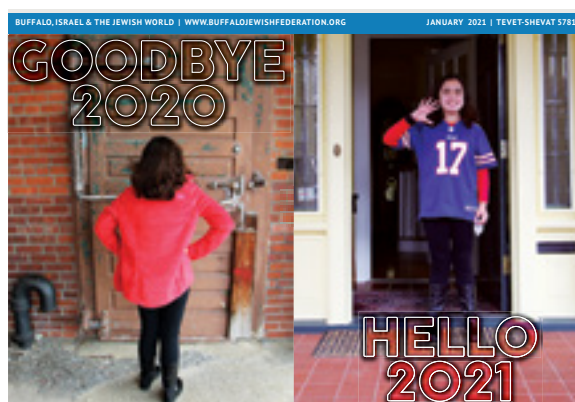
But hope is at hand, and our Jewish agencies and synagogues have survived the worst part of this plague, and we are all open for business in one way or the other. I invite you to join me in continuing our collective *Tikkun Olam* for our agencies, our synagogues, our community of Western New York in whatever way we can, and by expressing our gratitude for those people and things we have in our lives.

Hey 2021! Look out!

We are making our world better whether 2020 likes it or not! Stay well and safe!

Ellen Goldstein - Editor

## On The Cover



Sofia Reisman has had it with the Year 2020, just like the rest of us. And she welcomes all of us in to the joyful possibilities the Year 2021 offers, including Josh Allen (#17) and the Buffalo Bills. Don't miss the story of Sofia's COVID-19 Bat Mitzvah on page 7. *Photos by Ellen Goldstein.*

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**BUFFALO JEWISH FEDERATION**

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President.....**Shelly Yellen**  
Editor.....**Ellen S. Goldstein**



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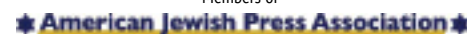


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# A Path to Success

I am honored to begin my service as President of the Buffalo Jewish Federation (BJF) for the next two years and look forward to working closely with the many dedicated volunteers and professionals in our community. While taking over during a worldwide Pandemic may not sound appealing, I look at the state of Jewish Buffalo and feel very fortunate to be in this position at a time when we have defined success and have a strategy in place to achieve our mission. In fact, it is the concept of success that I want to address. What does success look like for the BJF and Jewish Buffalo? How do we measure it? How do we know it has been achieved?

As many of you know, in the for-profit business world, success can be seen as objective, including reaching certain levels of profitability, cash flow, and market share. Success can also be defined as subjective, such as a feeling of achievement, confidence, and security. Objective measures of success are typically easy to measure, and therefore simpler to identify when achieved. A company that reports earnings which meet or exceed goals has defined measures of success and obtains achievement when the goals are achieved and reported. In a business environment, subjective measures of success are not quite as easy to measure, although are often achieved when feelings match or exceed expectations. For example, when someone feels really good and satisfied in their work. A sense of work accomplishment can be very satisfying, especially when reinforced by seeing your results help your company achieve goals.

In the not-for-profit world and the role the BJF serves in Jewish Buffalo, how should we be looking at success? To this end, here are just some of the traditional approaches considered for success:

- The financial stability of the Federation, agencies, synagogues, and other organizations in the community.
- Fundraising dollars raised overall, and particularly during annual campaigns.
- How much of our funds raised go to Israel and overseas needs.

- How much of our funds raised stay local.
- The amount and percentage of agencies funds that can be supported through the Annual Campaigns.
- The number of events and programs that are held each year.
- The number of people that attend events and programs.

Consider how you might add to the list given your history in the community and involvement in the organizations that comprise Jewish Buffalo.

While many of the traditional approaches are still relevant, today we must also include many of the analytics that are available through virtual activities: number of clicks, number of views, length of views and participation in on-line events, etc. These are tools that can help the organization evaluate how we feel about Jewish Buffalo. Some questions to consider:

- Do I feel good about Jewish life and our community?
- Is Jewish life in our community relevant for me and my family?
- Are my children engaged and how do they feel about their Jewish future?
- Are resources there to provide for those in need?

With this in mind, consider the BJF Vision and Mission:



Shelly Yellen

## OUR VISION

**A robust, caring, and connected Jewish Buffalo where every Jew and their loved ones can access a welcoming and thriving network of communities, engage in meaningful collective Jewish experiences, and explore and own their personal Jewish journey.**

## OUR MISSION

**Guided by Jewish values, Federation convenes, inspires, collaborates, leads and enriches the Jewish community locally, in Israel and around the world.**

The Vision and Mission Statements are powerful words and help to define success. Of course, how do we measure “convene,” “inspire,” “lead,” “enrich” and even more challenging, know we are successful at achieving our mission? In order to tackle these questions, it is important to look at the organization’s priorities. Priorities defined as impact areas include:

- Jewish Experience, Engagement and Learning
- Caring for Jewish Buffalo
- Promoting a Civil and Just Society
- Connection to Israel and Global Jewry
- Preserving our Legacy
- Sustaining and Securing our Community

Priority areas were established by the BJF professional team partnering with the community, intent on offering the greatest positive impact to Jewish Buffalo and the greater community on a national and international level. When we partner with agencies, synagogues, the Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies, and others in the community, the programs, events, and initiatives that many of you are involved in fall within these impact areas. For example, if you have involvement in The Center for Engagement and Learning (CJEL), this falls under the impact area of Jewish Experience, Engagement and Learning. The BJF budget even coincides with these priorities. More details about these impact areas can be found on the Federation’s website ([www.buffalojewishfederation.org](http://www.buffalojewishfederation.org)) and on page 6 of this issue of the *Journal*.

Consistent with our mission and vision, we strive to provide meaningful programs, events, and activities aligned with the impact areas. The challenge is in measuring and determining if success has been achieved. Are the programs well received? Is participation strong (virtual and/or in-person)? Are the recipients diverse enough and is the content relevant to a large portion of the community? Do people feel the activities and call to action are time well spent? These are just a sampling of the many questions that have to be discussed and need to be addressed as part of the process. The process is made even more complex in that we are focused on our impact on a local, national, and international level.

Ultimately, the BJF must work closely with our community partners to constantly assess the pulse of Jewish Life, as we know success is determined by how people feel. In the context of community building, striving for success is fluid and requires a long term approach. Priorities change and successful organizations adapt strategies to not just what works today but what we want to be in the future.

I feel good that we are on the right path. This excites me and I look forward to working with the Federation team, agencies, synagogues, The Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies, and other community organizations as we strive for success. *If you want to share your thoughts, please reach out to me at [shelly@buffalojewishfederation.org](mailto:shelly@buffalojewishfederation.org).*

The Board of Directors and Staff of the Buffalo Jewish Federation

*Wish you a  
Healthy, Safe, Vibrant 2021!*

# BUFFALO JEWISH FEDERATION

## Federation Announces New Officers and Board Members for 2021

The Buffalo Jewish Federation formally installed newly elected board members and officers at its 117th Annual Meeting on December 3, 2020. The following slate of officers was elected for a one-year term expiring in 2021.



**Shelly Yellen**  
President



**Shawn Frier**  
Vice President



**Rise Kulick**  
Vice President



**Marjorie Bryen**  
Treasurer



**Ellen Weiss**  
Secretary



**Leslie Shuman Kramer**  
Immediate Past President

The following individuals were installed to serve a three-year term as at-large members of the Board of Governors beginning January 1, 2021:

Jordan Balsom, Marc Brown, Brenda Freedman, Ellen Niles, Laurie Sadler and Gil Wolfe. Merredith Levin was installed to fill an unexpired one-year term beginning January 1, 2021.



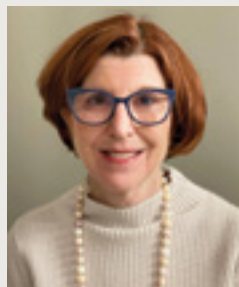
**Jordan Balsom**



**Marc Brown**



**Brenda Freedman**



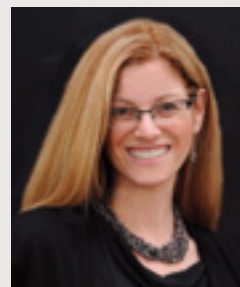
**Ellen Niles**



**Laurie Sadler**



**Gil Wolfe**



**Meredith Levin**





Beets, carrots, parsnips and turnips are among those vegetables commonly known as root crops. They offer a prolonged harvest season, a long storage life, produce a large amount of food in a small amount of space and are staples in an Eastern European diet.

The Buffalo Jewish Federation's **Winter ROOTS** Series pays homage to these staples, appreciating the sustenance they bring during a long winter season. In that spirit, ROOTS co-chairs, Leslie Shuman Kramer and Rise' Kulick, invite you to join them for three engaging virtual sessions that begin later this month. "Our goal is to connect Jewish Buffalonians with their genealogical roots in Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on Ukraine," Rise' explained. "Each of our sessions take their inspiration from the root crop cycle," added Leslie, "We first prep the soil, then nurture the crop and finally harvest, eat and enjoy!"

*Details on the three experiences are below. For more information, please contact Joan Kwiatkowski by emailing her at [joan@buffalojewishfederation.org](mailto:joan@buffalojewishfederation.org).*

**#1 Prepping the Soil:** A Conversation between Charlie Shuman and Rabbi Dan Shuman – Monday, January 25, 2021 from 7:00 -8:00 p.m. ET. Rabbi Shuman will interview his father whose family fled Sokolivka in central Ukraine in the early 20th century. They'll not only explore the Shuman Family history and shtetel life in Sokolivka, but also discuss Charlie's roots journey to the area with other family members in the late 1980's.

**#2 Weed and Feed:** Ukraine Today featuring Rabbi Julia Gris, Congregation Shirat ha-Yam in Odessa. Hosted by Jim Lodge, Senior Development Officer, ORT America - Sunday, February 21, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. ET

**#3 Eat and Enjoy:** Eastern European Food and Culture. March 2021 (Exact date and time to be determined).

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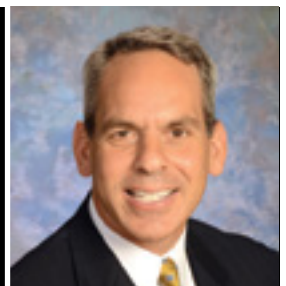
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# BY THE NUMBERS: Federation Makes An Impact *Part 1*

Over the last several years the Buffalo Jewish Federation has changed from primarily a fund-raising organization to one that provides an array of services and programming with our mission and goals aligned with six Community Impact Areas:

- Jewish Experience, Engagement and Learning
- Caring for Jewish Buffalo
- Promoting a Civil and Just Society
- Connection to Israel and Global Jewry
- Preserving our Legacy
- Sustaining and Securing our Community

In crafting Federation's operating budget and determining grants for our local and overseas partners, Federation's leadership connects the resources we raise from thousands of donors to each impact area so that we and our partners can build a more connected, caring and vibrant community in Buffalo and around the world.

## Local Impact

Through a system of community partner agencies and synagogues, we seek to gather every age and segment of our community to strengthen Jewish life and care for one another. Our campaign grants within the Federation umbrella (such as support for *The Jewish Journal* and the Holocaust Resource Center) as well as local partner grants provide an array of program touch points from cultural arts through the JCC, engagement, experiences and student leadership development for Jewish college students at Chabad and Hillel, Jewish day school education at Ohr Temimim and for Kadimah Scholars at Park School and so much more.



Jewish Experience, Engagement and Learning

## Global Impact

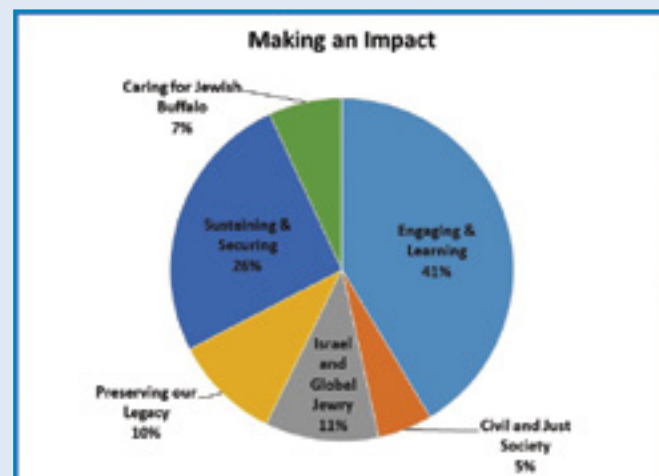
Federation also provides grants for organizations that support Jews in need outside of our region. Overseas Partner Grants were awarded to our three historic partners, The Jewish Agency For Israel (JAFI), The American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and World ORT, as well as six new non-profit organizations in Israel. These grants include \$2,500 of designated gifts from the *Momentum* group and \$1,800 allocated by teens participating in the *Being Jewish in 2020* program.



Promoting a Civil and Just Society



Connection to Israel and World Jewry



## Combined Impact

Federation dollars constantly and consistently meet the needs of our Jewish family, no matter how far-reaching and no matter where they may be, and when combining the campaign grants to support Federation programs and activities and grants made to our local and overseas partners, the total grant funds awarded for 2021 is \$1,997,550. Above is a chart that indicates the overall impact of campaign dollars.

*Part 2 will be included in the February Jewish Journal of WNY with a breakdown of each community impact area. For more information, visit our new webpage at [buffalojewishfederation.org/making-an-impact/](http://buffalojewishfederation.org/making-an-impact/).*



Caring for Jewish Buffalo



## Sofia Reisman: Becoming a Bat Mitzvah during COVID

In early November, 13-year-old Sofia Reisman became a Bat Mitzvah. The ceremony at the JCC in Getzville was live-streamed and only immediate family and a few close family friends were able to gather. "At first, I was kind of upset as I was always looking forward to that weekend, but seeing what COVID-19 has done put it all in perspective for me. In the end, I wasn't disappointed and just happy to be able to celebrate this momentous event even if most of the people weren't with me in person. And, it was so meaningful for me to get to read from the Torah," she said. "Next year we hope to have a party at Camp Centerland since it is my favorite place in the world."

"This year has been very odd overall though. I am extremely thankful that I was still able to have my service. My portion was *Vayera* and one of the lessons from it is 'do what you are told to do and you will have good luck.' So I encourage everyone to wear a mask and stay safe," she said.

"I wore a new tallis, which is very special since my grandfather Dr. Robert Reisman's (z"l) tallis was sewn onto my tallis and is now part of it," she said. "For me, the tallis is a sign of female empowerment in a time when we need it and I feel it shows that I am strong and powerful. My grandpa was a very special person and a very strong man, so I felt I was inheriting some of his power," she added.

Sofia is an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at the Park School. Like everyone her age, going to school during COVID-19 has been different. "At Park, we all wear masks, get our temperature checked each morning – pretty normal now. But we have been able to meet every day in person and that makes me happy." Sofia loves being at Park and enjoys everything about her school day. Outside of school, Sofia is engaged in the Jewish community both through TBAZY – the youth group at Temple Beth Zion – as well as teen leadership through CJEL, the Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning.

Sofia has many passions but perhaps the most prominent is her love of sports. "I'm a major fan," she said with a big smile. "I'm passionate about sports in general but what I really love is to hang out with my friends, play football and watch Bills games together. We've been



Betsy Abramson and David Reisman with their daughter, Sofia on her Bat Mitzvah.

watching the games outside these days because of COVID. These guys are my closest friends."

Sofia is also passionate about social justice and politics. She took a keen interest in the recent election and invested a great deal of time learning about the candidates and the electoral process. And how ironic, that when Sofia was called up to the Torah on her Bat Mitzvah Day, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were declared winners of the Presidential election. "When my Mom told me, I was so excited. This was insane! I then told my grandmother the news and she cried. I almost cried too."

Sofia Reisman is a regular Buffalo teen figuring it all out during a pandemic: she loves hanging out with her friends, enjoys school and loves her Buffalo Bills. And she will always remember Saturday morning, November 7, 2020 at around 11:15 AM when she began to read from the Torah in the Lippman Lounge of the JCC's Benderson Building. Not only was she surrounded by the love of family and hundreds watching her from the comfort of their homes, but after a contentious election, Joe Biden officially was declared the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. And on top of that, the next afternoon her beloved Buffalo Bills beat the Seattle Seahawks in what will be remembered as a signature win. "I know," she said, "It was surreal. And I predicted the Bills would win by 10. I knew Josh (Allen) would have a great day."

A poster for a campaign event. The top half has a blue background with white stars. The text reads: "CAMPAIGN for JEWISH BUFFALO PRESENTS: HAMILTON MAN, MYTH, MUSICAL... MENSCH: A LOOK AT HIS JEWISH ROOTS JOIN US FOR A DISCUSSION WITH ROBERT P. WATSON, PH.D." The bottom half has a red background with white text: "TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2021 AT 7 PM REGISTER: BIT.LY/HAMILTONJEWISHROOTS".

A poster for a community event. The top half has a blue background with white and yellow dots. The text reads: "SAVE THE NEW DATE SUPER SUNDAY REIMAGINED". Below this is a large white outline of the Superman 'S' logo. To the right of the logo is the text "SUPER SUNDAY REIMAGINED". Below the logo is the text "We're all in this Together" in a white script font. Below that is the text "FEBRUARY 28, 2021 | 9 AM - 1 PM". Below that is the text "CHAIRS MERREDITH &amp; KEN LEVIN ARE BUSY PLANNING A NEW AND VIRTUAL SUPER SUNDAY EVENT! VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED TO MAKE CALLS, THANK DONORS, &amp; DISTRIBUTE VOLUNTEER MATERIALS." Below that is the text "SIGN UP TODAY: BIT.LY/2021SUPERSUNDAY". The bottom half has a blue background with white and yellow dots.



# Reflections on Leadership with the Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning

BY ELLEN WEISS

It has been an honor and privilege to serve as the inaugural Chair of the Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning (CJEL). It is rare for a volunteer to have the opportunity, along with professional partners, to help shepherd an entity from an idea to a thriving hub of the Buffalo Jewish Federation and the general Buffalo Jewish Community. But over the last few years, that is exactly what we have accomplished through organizational collaboration, personal relationship building, and creativity.

The process started about four years ago, when we were trying to reimagine the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE). Established over 90 years ago, the BJE planned community-wide Jewish educational programming, concentrating on post B'nai Mitzvah teens and adults.



Ellen Weiss

However, the Buffalo of today looks vastly different than the Buffalo of the 1930s or even the 1990s. Demographic studies showed that we had a shrinking and

aging population. In addition, we found that teens and young adults approached Jewish education and engagement in very different ways.

What was working well was a new experiment called Nickel City Jews (NCJ), a platform for engaging adults in their 20's, 30's and early 40's. NCJ was modeled after successful endeavors in other Jewish communities, which focused on peers leading, creating, and promoting gatherings, with assistance from professionals — instead of the reverse where professionals plan content hoping that their audience will embrace the ideas. Beginning in 2015, Nickel City Jews was connecting with an increasing number of Jewish young adults, those whom we didn't see at a typical Federation event.

Federation leadership wanted to share the methodology and learning being deployed by Nickel City Jews with all of Jewish Buffalo, which led to the establishment of the Engagement Task Force, created to design and host an Engagement Conference to share these principles. The Engagement Task Force brought in Rabbi Mike Uram, Executive Director of University of Pennsylvania Hillel, to the conference as our Keynote speaker. Rabbi Uram provoked our community's volunteer and professional leadership to think about how Jewish organizations can reinvent themselves using an alternative community building model called Engagement, implemented successfully across the Hillel movement. The Engagement Conference was a huge success as communal leaders were energized to think and plan differently.

With the support of the Bureau of Jewish Education President, Michael Berger and the Board of the Buffalo Jewish Federation, a resolution was passed to dissolve the existing BJE and create a new entity called the Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning (CJEL), which would encompass both the BJE's existing educational programming and inclusion efforts as well as the Federation's Engagement Department, including PJ Library, Teen Engagement, Nickel City Jews, Adult Learning and Engagement and Immersive Experiences.

But our CJEL Leadership team did not rest. We knew there was more good work to be done. First, our teen programming

model was reimaged under the direction of volunteer Hadar Borden and the Buffalo Jewish Teen Initiative was established. Second, under the leadership of volunteer Robin Raphael, we examined our approach to inclusion, expanding our tent to the many marginalized people and groups who look to belong in Jewish Buffalo through the Inclusion Planning Group. As a result, we renamed our work in this space *Belonging*, a reflection of our efforts to work towards a state where all feel welcome to participate in Jewish living and learning experiences to the extent of their abilities and interest, and to find a space of belonging in Jewish Buffalo regardless of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ability. Third, under the guidance of volunteer Brenda Feldstein, we expanded the PJ Our Way program, geared towards 9 to 11 year olds to create the newly formed Middle School Leadership Council and Middle School engagement efforts. Most recently, CJEL launched its newest endeavor, *Women Gathering*, a series of small learning cohorts for women at different stages of life, including Mussar for Moms, Well Circle, Wise Women and Wise Aging.

What am I most proud of after serving as the CJEL Chair for the past 2 ½ years? It has been our thoughtful transition and evolution towards remote programming and engagement during an international health pandemic. Nothing stopped our incredible team working to meet the needs of the individuals and families we serve. As an example, look at page 10-11 to see photos of our recent Hanukkah Box of Light project, and its accompanying 15 virtual programs, which brought Jewish text/experiences and the light of Hanukkah into the homes of 275 Buffalo families, helping many find light in the darkness.

I want to thank my professional partner and friend Miriam Abramovich, Buffalo Jewish Federation's Chief Experience Officer and her team: Mike Steklof, Susan Schwartz, Rabbi Ori Bergman, and Ben Wolfson. You all have helped our community grow stronger during this challenging time. I also want to acknowledge our volunteer leaders, the members of the CJEL Leadership Council – CJEL Vice Chair Sheri Rodman, NCJ Chair Shiri Kester, NCJ Vice Chair Mark Faber, PJ Library Chair Marni Marciano, incoming PJ

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In January, Sheri Rodman will be assuming the role of CJEL Chair. I have learned so much from Sheri over the past few years. She can look at the big picture while keeping us focused on our mission. She is smart, caring, and dedicated to our community. Sheri represents the “Ideal Client Avatar” of the Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning. Growing up in Buffalo – she assumed teen leadership roles,



Sheri Rodman

BY SHERI RODMAN

Since its inception in 2019, it has been an absolute pleasure to work alongside Ellen Weiss, Miriam Abramovich, and other community leaders to design/build the Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning (CJEL) to truly focus on creating opportunities for meaningful, purposeful and relevant Jewish exploration. As the founding CJEL Chair, Ellen brought comfort and stability to the community as she oversaw the merger of the Bureau of Jewish Education and the CJEL and made sure the focus on Jewish learning wasn't lost in the transition. Thanks to Ellen's leadership, we established a solid structural, professional, and fiscal foundation for the CJEL, one which will lead us for many years to come. Ellen continuously leads by example, prioritizes learning, and shares her passion for the Buffalo Jewish community and bringing people together. As I step into Ellen's role as Chair this month, I know I have some big (and fashionable!) shoes to fill.

spent time living in Israel, co-chaired NCJ, created a woman's Well Circle and soon, as a new mother – she will read her new baby books supplied by PJ Library and attend CJEL family gatherings. That is our goal – for individuals and families to participate seamlessly through a continuum of Jewish living and learning experiences offered to the very youngest to the most senior members of our community.

I look forward to continuing leadership efforts through my role on the Buffalo Jewish Federation's executive committee, chairing CJEL Adult Engagement, and collaborating with the JCC of Greater Buffalo offering a variety of health coaching programs to keep our community well and thriving.

Moving forward, the CJEL will continue to engage and nurture relationships with and among families and individuals at all stages of life, create opportunities for meaningful and relevant Jewish exploration and learning, and support and amplify the work of synagogues and partner organizations. In early 2020, we formed a Leadership Council committed to strengthening community collaboration and a vibrant and caring Jewish community. Councilmembers work with each other and Federation's professional team to advance the organization with their creativity and passion and are engaged in strategic thinking to hone the organization's direction.

This month, the Council will grow to include both chairs and vice chairs of the CJEL program areas: PJ Library, PJ Our Way/Middle School Engagement, Teen Engagement, Nickel City Jews, Adult Engagement, Belonging, and Immersive Experiences. These community leaders have a natural aptitude for inclusion and Jewish engagement and they facilitate peer-to-peer engagement throughout Buffalo. As a Council, we plan to meet quarterly to ensure leaders build and deepen relationships with one another, support seamless movement of individuals and families across areas of engagement and learning, and wrestle with shared problems and serve as thought partners for achieving stated priorities. I couldn't be more honored and excited to help lead the council and work with these incredible community leaders in pursuit of the CJEL vision that all Jews, their friends and partners of other faiths, and those exploring Judaism, have access to Jewish living and learning experiences that help them thrive.

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*Standing on the parted shores of history  
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*That wherever we go, it is eternally Egypt  
That there is a better place, a promised land;  
That the winding way to that promise  
Passes through the wilderness.*

*That there is no way to get from here to there  
Except by joining hands, marching  
Together.*





# Belonging

## How to Plan Gatherings which are More Welcoming: Tips from CJEL's Belonging Initiative

BY MIKE STEKLOF AND ROBIN RAPHAEL

The Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning's (CJEL) Belonging Initiative invites you to explore how to make your organization's events more welcoming to all. This means working towards a state of being where all feel welcome to participate in Jewish living and learning experiences to the extent of their abilities and interest, and to find a space of belonging in Jewish Buffalo regardless of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ability. This work can be difficult and takes effort, thought and time, but you are not alone. This effort will be less difficult and cumbersome as relationships are created between new people and current organization participants. Meeting new people prior to a gathering and/or speaking with newcomers will further the comfort level of all.

Here are some guidelines developed by CJEL's Belonging effort, to help you work towards designing gatherings that are welcoming to all:

### 1. Commit to the Work

- Take time to build an organizational commitment to the work of designing events and gatherings that are *welcoming* to all.
- Assign a responsible professional/volunteer leader whose work it is to ensure that gatherings are welcoming to all.

### 2. "Nothing About Us Without Us"

- Do not make decisions without the input of those you want to include.
- Do not put your discomfort ahead of the comfort of others.

### 3. Plan Ahead

- Ask what accommodations participants need in order to fully participate and plan accordingly.
- Plan for different food-related accommodations (e.g., gluten free, pureed).
- Budget for accommodations to ensure inclusive participation.
- Reach out to members/participants who are in the relevant cohort, but may be shy about requesting a needed accommodation, to encourage their participation.

### 4. Design for Access and Inclusion

- Select venues that do not pose physical barriers to participation.
- Select venues that have plentiful access to restrooms.
- Always use a microphone and closed caption videos.

### 5. Adopt Inclusive Language

- Do not ask a person's gender or use gendered language. Share your personal pronouns and ask participants for their personal pronouns.
- Translate Hebrew or other jargon.
- Use person-first language.
- Give credit where credit is due.

Mike Steklof is Director of Jewish Experience and Robin Raphael is CJEL's Belonging Chair.



### 6. Design Around the User Experience

- Do this exercise for every event: walk into the space and imagine that you know no one, know nothing about Judaism, and need accommodations in order to fully participate. Based on this experience, make tweaks/changes.
- Take and share photos that represent diversity in the Jewish population.

### 7. Read the Room

- Plan ahead but oftentimes challenges present themselves in the moment so be prepared for the unexpected.
- Work to understand the thoughts, emotions and needs of the people at your gathering and constantly reassess and fine-tune.

### 8. Ask for Help

- You are not alone.
- The Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning has professionals, volunteer leaders, and access to experts at the ready to help.

### 9. Safe Space

- Ensure a safe environment for all participants to raise questions, fears or issues, regardless of gender, racial/ethnic background, or level of Jewish knowledge.
- Work to have courageous conversations about this work with your colleagues and volunteer leadership.
- Be open to feedback and criticism

## Box of Light

CJEL's Box of Light brought Jewish content, activities, and light into the homes of 275 individuals and families this Hanukkah. With gratitude to our partners and generous donors – we hope you enjoyed your Box of Light!





# Box of Light



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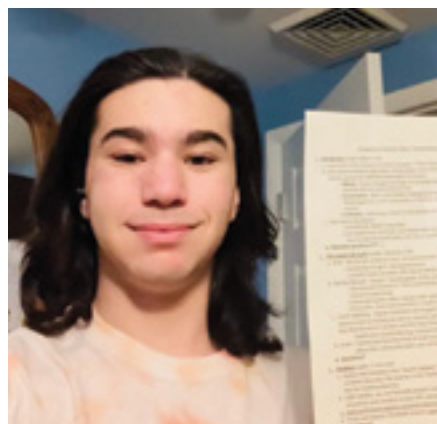
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# How Being a Kadimah Academy Student Prepared Me to Lead through *Student to Student*

BY CHARLIE HERMAN AND SHAINA POTASH



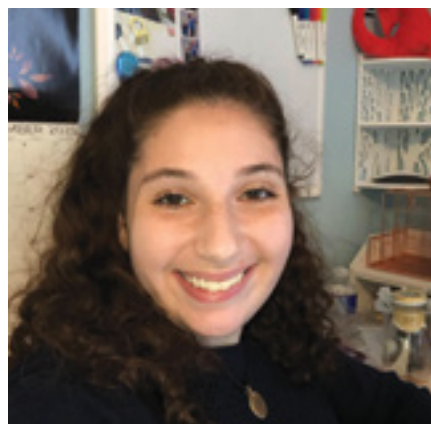
**Charlie:** Last spring, I prepared to be a presenter for the new *Student to Student* program. Unfortunately, as COVID sprung up and schools became fully virtual, we had to postpone all of our plans. This year, as all of our schools became more adept in virtual spaces, our team of fellow Jewish teens including Adam Beiter, Ava Rosenthal, Josh Garson, Shaina Potash, Syvonne Forgette and me began preparing for online *Student to Student* presentations at a few schools across Buffalo. At the end of two months of preparations, we gave our first series of presentations at Hamburg High School. During five presentations, we shared details about Jewish life, our lives, and spread



knowledge of our religion.

Part of what prepared me to make presentations through the *Student to Student* program was the education I received at Kadimah Academy. Growing up in a Jewish environment taught me that there are many different ways to live a Jewish lifestyle beyond the traditional Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements. Each person or family chooses traits or components that are meaningful to them. Having a Kadimah education gave me a step up and allowed me to learn more deeply than I would have otherwise have been able to.

After graduating from Kadimah, I have had much less exposure to Judaism on a daily basis. Now, in the times of COVID, my involvement in Jewish life has been very low and *Student to Student* gave me an opportunity to continue to engage with Jewish Buffalo. And, even to give back.



**Shaina:** I would have never known about the *Student to Student* program if it wasn't for CJEL's Buffalo Jewish Teen Initiative retreat that I attended this September. At that event, I watched several other teens give a mock presentation, and I knew this was a way that I could contribute.

Being a 2019 graduate of Kadimah really helped me prepare to talk about all the things I experienced as a Jewish person. It's given me a chance to teach others who may not know anything about Judaism, or those who have never even met anyone Jewish, about my culture. It has been a wonderful and memorable experience.

Despite everyone's sadness that Kadimah was closing as an independent school, the best graduation gift I received was learning that I could take my Jewish day school education with me to 9th grade at The Park School of Buffalo! I am excited to be one of the first high school students to graduate as a Kadimah Academy Scholar from Park in 2023. Park teachers, administrators, and students have welcomed the Kadimah kids and made our first year a success for all of us. I feel that being a teen leader both at Kadimah and with the *Student to Student* program, will give me many opportunities in the Jewish community in Buffalo and beyond.

We are both thankful that through *Student to Student*, we have the opportunity to spread knowledge and acceptance of Jews and Judaism. Although we are disappointed that our presentations cannot happen in person we are thankful that they could happen at all. It has been a pleasure to teach with our fellow Jewish students and an honor to learn from them.

*Charlie Herman is a Junior student at Williamsville North High School and is President of Gilgool USY.*

*Shaina Potash is a Sophomore Kadimah Scholar at the Park School of Buffalo and is a member of the Buffalo Jewish Teen Leadership Fellowship.*

## *Student to Student* Program begins with Presentation at Hamburg High School



***Student to Student* is a high school peer education program that was initiated in St. Louis over a decade ago. The Buffalo Jewish Federation, through the Buffalo Jewish Community Relations Council, received a grant to replicate the program in Western New York.**

The goal of *Student to Student* is to reduce prejudice and bigotry and foster understanding among high school peers. The program brings together Jewish

students from different backgrounds, trains them to talk about their lives as young Jews, and to facilitate discussion among their non-Jewish peers to

dismantle antisemitism. In essence, *Student to Student* puts a human face on Judaism.

*Student to Student* is a collaboration of the Center for Jewish Engagement and Learning, the Holocaust Resource Center, and the Jewish Community Relations Council.

There are currently six high school student presenters: Adam Beiter (Hamburg), Ava Rosenthal (Williamsville East), Charlie Herman (Williamsville North), Josh Garson (Clarence), Shaina Potash (Park), and Syvonne Forgette (City Honors). The group is coordinated by Mike Steklof, Director of Jewish Experience, and Elizabeth Schram, Director of the Holocaust Resource Center.

On November 19, five presentations were made at Hamburg High School to Lori Raybold's Human Rights Literature

and English classes. Hamburg students were active participants and asked great questions, including: Is it hard to keep kosher at restaurants? Why is Shabbat on Friday? Is the weather in Israel nice? What is your process like for taking off school or work for Jewish holidays since they aren't mainstream? Can all of you speak, read and write in Hebrew?

In reflecting on the experience, Adam Beiter, a student at Hamburg High School, said, "I loved the opportunity to educate my peers and to advocate for the Jewish Community." Josh Garson, a student at Clarence High School, said "I really enjoyed talking to the students at Hamburg High School about some of my religious practices as a Jew; it strengthens Buffalo as a community!" Despite COVID-19, the group seeks to present to five different schools during the academic year.



# JCRC “Team” Helps in Refugee Resettlement

Members of JCRC’s Multicultural Women’s Group remembered what it was like to be newcomers to a new country. Last month, members of the group and friends participated in a Jewish Family Services of WNY Home Set-Up Team, led by Martha Malkiewicz, a member of the JCRC Multicultural group and a musician with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Together, they created a beautiful and welcoming home for a family from Burma, who recently moved to Buffalo. The team has been working hard for months to collect all of the items needed to complete the set-up, generously sourcing or buying new items.



Volunteers Irwin Gelman, Martha Malkiewicz and her son, Mark

Team members included Martha’s son, Mark Malkiewicz, and other members of her family, Beatrice Arnone-Singh, Yanhong Baranski, Nanette Massey, Phyllis Steinberg, Win Min



Volunteer Nanette Massey

Thant, Irwin Gelman and Mara Koven-Gelman. Sierra Johnston, JFS of WNY Volunteer Coordinator, expressed her gratitude: “You all did an absolutely fabulous job! We cannot thank you all enough!”

This level of generosity and organization is reminiscent of JFS’ early origins and also a time when many members of the Jewish community throughout North American and in Israel did the same for Jews coming from the Former Soviet Union, and before that time for Survivors from the Holocaust.

Every year, JFS of WNY serves hundreds of refugees and immigrants of all ages, ethnic groups, faiths, and backgrounds. *If you are interested in becoming part of a Home Set-Up Team please contact Sierra Johnston at 716-883-1914 x331 or [sjohnston@jfsbuffalo.org](mailto:sjohnston@jfsbuffalo.org)*

# Adopting a New Definition of Antisemitism

BY MARA KOVEN-GELMAN AND ELIZABETH SCHRAM

Leaders from Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and the Holocaust Resource Center (HRC) held a joint meeting to discuss and learn about the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) widely accepted and adopted working definition of Antisemitism, adopted by 35 countries to date.

A week later, HRC’s President Dr. Ann Marie Carosella and JCRC Chair Deborah Goldman recommended to Federation’s Board of Directors that they formally adopt the new definition, which passed unanimously.

To help understand the IHRA’s history, best practices and uses of the definition, Stephanie Hausner, Interim Director of the Israel Action Network (IAN) presented at the meeting. IAN is a program of the Jewish Federations of North America and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. Stephanie is responsible for strengthening the capacity of local community professionals in countering the assault on Israel’s legitimacy. Ms. Hausner was the keynote at the Buffalo Jewish Federation event last May about “Building Bridges in the time of Antisemitism.”

The compelling reason for adoption of this definition is that it encompasses all the forms antisemitism can take and provides concrete examples, including:



Stephanie Hausner

Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust

Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.

Most communities and organizations that adopt the definition use it as a tool in Holocaust education and building bridges with other communities and legislative bodies. Other uses discussed included Jewish teens using the definition in Student-to-Student presentations, HRC teacher education and on Jewish communal promotional material.

“While we feel that adopting this definition is obvious, it is important to bring the Buffalo Jewish community closer to countries and dozens of other Jewish communities who have adopted it,” said Deborah Goldman, JCRC Chair. “HRC is looking forward to using the definition throughout all its educational programs,” added Ann Marie Carosella, HRC president. “We have already heard that it has been very useful in the teen experience programming.”

*Mara Koven-Gelman is JCRC Director and Elizabeth Schram is HRC director.*



JCRC co-chairs Deborah Goldman and Nina Lukin participated in an interfaith gathering sponsored by Voice Buffalo to honor the lives lost and impacted at the Erie County Holding Center and Alden Correctional Facility. Twenty-eight people have died while being detained there. Deborah and Nina honored each person by reading their name, age and a detail about their life.



JCRC bought and delivered flowers in advance of the recent Multicultural Women’s Group Gathering. Founder Deborah Greitzer who lives in Ridgeway, Ontario, Canada (where the border is closed) also received hers by delivery truck. Thank you to members, Martha Malkiewicz and Yanhong Baranski who helped deliver 14 baskets to the women.



# The Nazis Next Door

BY DR. DANIEL KESTER

**Editor's Note:** International Holocaust Remembrance Day will be commemorated this month on January 27. As you read the following essay, remember the victims as well of the Survivors like Paul Kester, who was able to survive and teach the lessons of the Holocaust.

My father grew up in Wiesbaden, a medium sized city on the Rhine River in western Germany. Born in 1925, Paul Kleinstrass (he changed his name to Kester upon immigration to the U.S.) was seven years old when Hitler came to power. As a little boy, he remembers seeing all the political flags hanging from buildings, including the Nazi swastika and the red Communist flags. He remembers being disappointed that his family didn't have one. After 1933, of course, only the Nazi flags continued to fly.

His family had lived in Wiesbaden since at least the late 1700s and were well established in the town. His grandfather was on the City Council and was a member of the School Board. His family owned a children's clothing store on the city's main shopping street. My father lived with his parents, sister Helen, and his grandmother in a three-story apartment building with seven apartments.

In the building there was only one other family with children, the Waldorfs, who had a daughter, Ursula, and a son, Gunter. Gunter was a bit older than my father and his sister, Ursula a bit younger. It would have been natural for my father and his sister Helen to play with the two neighbor kids, however the



Paul and Ursula today, standing in front of house

Waldorf parents were ardent Nazis, quite anti-Semitic, and contact between them and the Jewish Kleinstrass family was discouraged. My father says that a tacit understanding existed that while the two families did not bother each other, they also had no unnecessary contact, ignoring each other if they would pass in the stairwell.

As conditions for the Jews of Germany worsened, my father's family sought ways to leave. In mid-1938, relatives in the U.S. said they would sponsor one child, and his sister Helen, being the oldest, left for New York. The rest of the family applied for U.S. visas, but were put on waiting lists.

In the fall of 1938, my father was busy preparing for his Bar Mitzvah, which was scheduled to take place in the beautiful synagogue of Wiesbaden that December. On the morning of November 10, while my father was at school, a school official came to his classroom and told him he should go home; the synagogue was burning and there was trouble going on. That was the morning of *Kristallnacht*,



Paul & Helen as kids



Ursula & Gunter as kids

a night of government-organized anti-Jewish riots throughout Germany. My father discovered that not only had the synagogue been burned down, but his parents' store had been destroyed, its windows and display cases smashed and most of the merchandise ruined.

A couple of days later, his father was arrested and deported to the concentration camp of Dachau (most adult Jewish men were sent to concentration camps immediately after *Kristallnacht*). When my father returned to his high school, he was called to the principal's office and told that he was expelled, and no longer welcome at

the school. The events of the following couple of months happened quickly: the store declared bankruptcy, his father returned from Dachau, and various European countries agreed to accept Jewish children from Germany in the *Kindertransport*. My father was put on a list for Sweden, and on January 9, 1939, he said goodbye to his parents and was put on a train to Sweden.

My father spent the War years in Sweden, first at a Jewish boarding school in southern Sweden, later in Stockholm. At the boarding school he met my mother, who had come there from her home in Berlin. His parents and grandmother were deported from Wiesbaden to the ghetto of Theresienstadt in September of 1942, and his parents were sent from there to Auschwitz in February, 1943, where they were killed. His grandmother died in Theresienstadt, and most of the rest of his family who had not been able to leave Germany were also killed. In 1948 my parents left Sweden for the United States, where they settled in Los Angeles, married and had a son (me).

From *Kristallnacht*, fast forward some 75 years. A German woman goes to visit the home where she grew up, an apartment building in Wiesbaden. She is Ursula, the daughter of the Nazi family in my father's building. In front of the house, embedded in the sidewalk, she is very disturbed to see four "*Stolpersteine*" ("stumbling stones"). The *Stolpersteine* are small brass plaques showing the names of Jews who had been murdered in the *Shoah*, and are placed into the sidewalk in front of their former homes.

The project of a German artist, they are found throughout Germany. Ursula is very upset to see there the names of her former neighbors. She contacts the Jewish Museum in Wiesbaden, which had organized the placing of the

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plaques, to find out more about the fate of her neighbors, the Kleinstrass family. My father had worked with the museum for many years, so the museum could tell her right away that he was still alive and living in Los Angeles, and gave her his address. Unsure if he would even want contact with his former Nazi neighbor, she took a chance and wrote him a letter, "I'm not sure if you will remember me..." He wrote back, "Of course I remember the girl next door with the blue eyes and the nice smile..."



Stolpersteine

One thing led to another, and sometime later I found myself in Germany with my almost ninety-year-old father back in Wiesbaden. He had arranged for the two of us to meet Ursula and her husband and daughter in a local restaurant. There she told us her story. She told us how her brother, Gunter, had gone off to fight in the War and had lost his life on the Russian front. She told us how her parents had moved the family to the city of Lodz. A Polish city, the Nazis were attempting to "Aryanize" it, renaming it Litzmannstadt and having Germans settle there. When the Waldorf family moved there in 1943, the tide of war had turned and the Soviet Red Army was already marching westward towards Berlin. That the family moved there at that time, still optimistically expecting the Germans to win the War, shows what true believers in Nazism they were.

Lodz had been the second largest Jewish community in Poland, after Warsaw, with 160,000 Jews. By the time the Waldorfs moved there, many of the Jews had already been murdered at Chelmno, the first extermination camp, where Jews were killed by stuffing them into vans that had been retrofitted so the carbon monoxide exhaust was fed back into the vans, killing them. On one occasion, Ursula took a streetcar that passed through the Jewish ghetto. She was shocked at the misery she saw, such as a mother holding a starving hollow-eyed baby. When she got to where she was going, she was in tears about what she had seen. She was told that it was

the Jew's own fault, for starting the War.

Ursula wrote and published a book about her life. It is fascinating to read, to see how a young Nazi girl viewed the world. She wrote how she believed the Nazi propaganda that Germany would win the War, even as the Soviets approached Berlin. She wrote about her despondency when she learned of Hitler's death.

Looking back to her childhood, Ursula remembered an incident when she and her brother were home alone. Told by their mother to take a bath, they went off to play while the bathtub filled. Suddenly there was pounding at their door; their downstairs neighbor yelled that water was pouring through their ceiling. When their parents came home they asked who had cleaned up the mess. "Frau Kleinstrass," she replied. The mother thought about her Jewish neighbor doing this, and the incongruity with how evil she knew the Jews to be. "Well, there are exceptions..." she said.

After the war, Ursula's politics changed and in later years she was very active in the left-leaning German Green party. But she said that her mother never lost her belief in Nazism or her love for Hitler, although in her later years she did admit that he had gone too far in what he did to the Jews.

After lunch we all drove to the apartment building where they had lived. It was being renovated so we were able to visit each family's apartment. Together we walked up the stairs where the two families had once ignored each other.

My father and Ursula kept in contact, writing and visiting, until Ursula's death last year. They finally had the friendship that they should have been allowed to have eighty years earlier.

My father spoke, and continues to speak, at schools, telling his story. He has even spoken a few times at the high school in Wiesbaden that he had been kicked out of in November 1938. When asked what message he would like to convey to the students, he always answers simply, "Don't hate." It is a good message for all of us to remember in these days when hate seems to be so much a part of our political landscape.

*Dr. Daniel Kester is a retired Materials Scientist. He is President of the Congregation Shir Shalom Men's Group, Treasurer of the Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies, and is on the board of Jewish Family Service of WNY and the Holocaust Resource Center.*

## 5 THINGS You Can Do in January to Repair the World

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**2» Learn about Alexander Hamilton's Jewish roots** with Federation friends online Tuesday, January 19 at 7:00 p.m. with scholar Robert Watson Ph.D. **Register for this free webinar at <http://bit.ly/HAMILTONJEWISHROOTS>.**

**3» Meet a remarkable woman and Holocaust Survivor to mark International Holocaust Remembrance** brought to you free through Buffalo's own TELL Fund. (See ad on the back cover) Rus Devorah Wallen interviews *New York Times* bestselling author and Auschwitz Survivor Dr. Edith Eger Thursday, January 28 at 7:00 p.m. **Register here: [http://bit.ly/TELLFUND\\_EGER](http://bit.ly/TELLFUND_EGER). Any questions? Email [TELLFund@gmail.com](mailto:TELLFund@gmail.com).**

**4» Donate Gift Cards to Jewish Family Service** for needy families and individual during this difficult time. Gift cards from Tops, Wegmans, Walmart, Price Right and Walgreens are preferred. **Mail or drop off at JFS, 70 Barker Street, Buffalo NY 14209- ATTN Matt Stewart.**

**5» Never Forget! You can join with your Buffalo Community for International Holocaust Remembrance Day** with the screening of *Broken Dreams*, based on the diary of Poland's Anne Frank. The event includes Q & A with the director from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sunday, January 31. **Register at <http://bit.ly/brokendreamsscreening>. Free.**

## WHERE IN JBFLO ?



### Where is this found in Jewish Buffalo?

**The first 5 people to correctly identify the location will be mentioned in next month's *Jewish Journal* because the JCC's Buffalo Kosher Gourmet at the Myers Family Tel Aviv Café is closed due to COVID-19.**

Last month Cheryl Tobias, Marsha Goldberg, Sharon Krebs, Beth Alt and Susan Lichtblau all correctly identified the front of the Saranac Shul located on Saranac Avenue in Buffalo.



# JCC Cultural Arts Winter Series

Stay engaged and stay connected with Cultural Arts programs at the JCC. The Cultural Arts Winter Series has something for everyone with author events, poetry readings, cooking demonstrations and film talkback events led by members of the Buffalo International Jewish Film Festival. All events are virtual, making it easy to participate from the comfort and safety of your home, whether that is here in Buffalo or somewhere outside the community. All are welcome to join and we hope you will invite friends and family to participate. We are happy to present our events at no cost making it accessible for anyone to participate but do appreciate your support of our programs through donations. Please consider making the suggested donation when registering.

For more information visit [www.jccbuffalo.org](http://www.jccbuffalo.org) or email Katie Wzontek at [kwzontek@jccbuffalo.org](mailto:kwzontek@jccbuffalo.org).

## JCC & Moment Magazine Book Fest

Zoom events at 7 p.m. (EST)

The JCC Book and Arts Fair in partnership with *Moment Magazine* present a Virtual Book Fest series, complete with authors, editors, cartoonists and playwrights. Events are free and open to the public. Registration is required.

**JAN 11** Author Patricia Averbach in conversation with Les Hunter

*Resurrecting Rain*

**JAN 13** Amy Schwartz, *Moment Magazine's* opinion and book editor

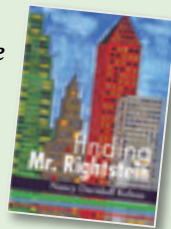
*Can Robots Be Jewish? And Other Pressing Questions of Modern Life*

**JAN 18** Bob Mankoff, former *New Yorker* Cartoon Editor

*Have I got a Cartoon For You! The Moment Magazine Book of Jewish Cartoons*

**JAN 21** Playwright Nancy Kelton with Jewish Repertory Theatre's

*Finding Mr. Rightstein*, Stage Reading and Talkback



## Jewish Poetry Series

Zoom events at 7 p.m. (EST)



Philip Terman



Baruch November

The JCC will offer monthly readings as part of a Jewish Poetry Series. Hosted by Philip Terman and Baruch November, each month will feature different Jewish poets reading selections of poems that include but are not limited to Jewish themes, values and ideas. Join Monday, February 22 for the book launch event of "101 Jewish Poems for the Third Millennium." Events are free and open to the public. Registration is required.

**MON, FEB 22**

**MON, MARCH 15**

**MON, APRIL 26**

**MON, MAY 24**

## JRT now offering Closed Captioning for 2020-2021 Season

Presenting a season of virtual theater wasn't the original plan for the Jewish Repertory Theatre of WNY as it prepared to celebrate its 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Scripts had been carefully selected, contracts negotiated, and all the myriad details of putting a season of theatre together were well underway when it became apparent the pandemic would last much longer than anyone expected.

"We decided during the shut downs that we were not going to let our 18th anniversary pass without presenting our audiences with a season to help them during this challenging time," said Jordana Halpern, JRT Managing Director. "We took a chance, chose a new set of plays that would work well as videotaped productions and got to work making a new type of theatre."

Presenting a virtual season has opened unexpected opportunities, added Halpern. "We now have subscribers in 20 US states and three Canadian provinces, and we've seen reviews in Buffalo, Boston and New England theatre publications. It's especially exciting to hear from so many people who are seeing our



shows and telling us how much they are enjoying to live theatre, albeit on their screens."

Audience feedback is also shaping the evolving production of JRT's current season. After several inquiries about Closed Captioning, the theatre company found Leah Barron, a captioning specialist at Accessible Festivals. Starting with JRT's second play of the season, "Holiday Shorts," audiences will be offered the option to choose Closed Captioning for all productions.

It's been an interesting process of program evolution as we see restrictions leading us to greater accessibility," said Halpern. "While we are not able to bring people into our theater at this time, we are able to invite communities far beyond Western New York to join us. We're enhancing what we offer with flexible viewing times, 21-day viewing windows and now, Closed Captioning. These new features are already being incorporated in next season's planning which we expect will include live shows back in the theatre, as well as video produced shows for remote access."

**JRT season plays and dates at**  
[www.jewishrepertorytheatre.com](http://www.jewishrepertorytheatre.com).  
**Information about Accessible Festivals at**  
[www.accessiblefestivals.org](http://www.accessiblefestivals.org).

## Cooking Series with Chef Marshall Goldstein

Zoom events at 7 p.m. (EST)

Join monthly for live cooking demos, shared tips and recipes. Each class will feature a different recipe demoed by Chef Marshall. Recipes will be sent out in advanced so you can cook-along if you like.

Chef Marshall has an Associate's degree from Johnson and Wales University in Charleston, South Carolina and a Bachelor of Arts degree from The Lourdes University in Sylvania, Ohio. Since graduating from The Johnson and Wales Hospitality University in Charleston, South Carolina in 1992, Chef Marshall has gone on to work in many facets of the culinary world. He was featured on a local Food show in the Toledo area called "Let's Eat Toledo" and has been written up in multiple newspapers over the many years. He currently has worked the last 14 years as an award-winning Executive Chef in the healthcare industry. Events are free and open to the public. Registration is required.

**JAN 14** "Not Just another Phyllo dough Recipe", phyllo, pistachios and more.

**FEB 11** "My Dad's 40-yr-old Rugelach", with a Chef's twist

**MARCH 11** Babka: "My Israeli breakfast, lunch and dinner"

## Chai Flicks Film Series and Talkback

Zoom events at 7 p.m. (EST)

Participants must sign up for a free trial of ChaiFlicks to stream selected films. **View films at your convenience prior to the Tuesday Talkback.** Talkbacks which will discuss the film will be led by Buffalo International Jewish Film Festival Committee members. All Talkbacks are through zoom at 7pm. Registration Required.

**FEB 2** *The Testament*

**FEB 9** *Rape of Europa*

**FEB 16** *Once in a Lifetime*

**FEB 23** *Fanny's Journey*



## Donor Relations Manager Opportunity: Foundation For Jewish Philanthropies

The Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies is seeking highly motivated applicants interested in serving as a Donor Relations Manager. This individual will hold a major role in fundraising efforts connecting potential donors and community partners.

The Donor Relations Manager is responsible for managing established donor relationships, developing, and implementing engagement and fundraising strategies to enhance and grow endowments with current and prospective donors. Additionally, they coordinate fundraising support, database management and reporting, event logistics and donor stewardship efforts. The Donor Relations Manager will coordinate with volunteers and lay leadership (as needed) to help with Foundation efforts.

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Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Jewish Repertory Theatre's production of *Exquisite Potential*, scheduled January 7-27, 2021, is being postponed and will be presented in April, 2021.

Please join us for a Zoom performance of

### FINDING MR. RIGHTSTEIN

by Buffalo-born writer Nancy Davidoff Kelton

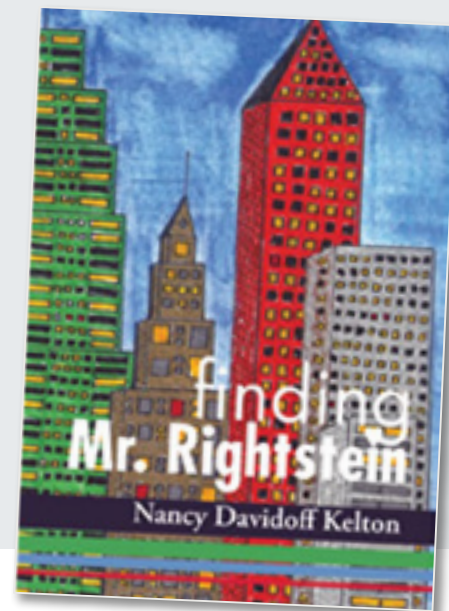
Thursday, January 21 at 7 p.m.

In this heartbreaking, hilarious play, Nancy Davidoff Kelton takes us from the gray house of her Buffalo childhood with a depressed mother who was in and out of "the nervous hospital," to the often daunting but never dull world of dating as a divorced mom in Manhattan.

#### Details at:

[www.jccbuffalo.org/community/arts-culture/book-arts-fair/](http://www.jccbuffalo.org/community/arts-culture/book-arts-fair/)

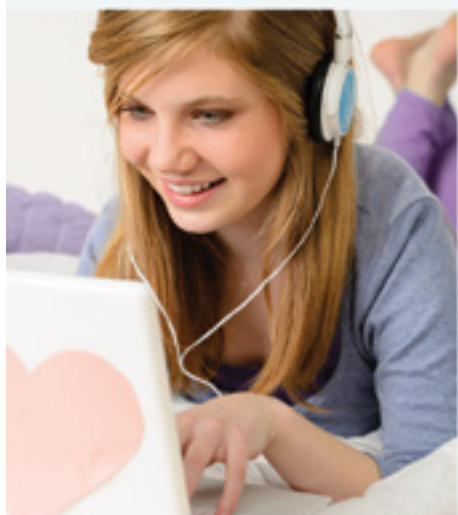
Don't miss Nancy Kelton's latest essay, "The Blessing of Comic Relief" on page 28.



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## COMMUNITY

# Hillel Connects with Russian Speaking Jewish Students

BY LOGAN WOODARD

Hillel of Buffalo recently received a Russian-Speaking Jewish (RSJ) grant from Hillel International, made possible by the Genesis Philanthropy Group. The grant supports programming and community building efforts geared towards students who themselves or their parents were born in the Former Soviet Union. Approximately 15% of American Jews identify as Russian-Speaking Jews.

Sasha Vool, a junior statistics student at the University at Buffalo has stepped into the role as the RSJ Intern. "I am grateful for this opportunity to connect with students from a similar background who share cultural experiences and upbringings to me," she said. "For instance my father is from Moscow, and I and other students in similar



Sasha Vool

positions don't often find spaces where we can connect with students who share similar familial experiences."

The RSJ community building effort was kicked off in November with a delicious Russian-themed meal of

borscht, potato olivier, and pierogis made by Lori Morrison of **Luscious by Lori**. Students picked a meal up from Hillel and hopped on Zoom to share stories of their family's journeys to the United States and bond over their favorite Russian candies.

In the spring semester Hillel will host a Russian-themed Shabbat meal and a cooking program highlighting foods and stories from participating students' families' journeys. Students also expressed interest in watching Russian films and cartoons together as well as a New Year's celebration. Hillel of Buffalo is grateful to Hillel International and the Genesis Philanthropy Group for enabling us to engage our Russian-Speaking Jewish students.

*Logan Woodard is Hillel of Buffalo Director of Engagement*



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**Sunday, February 21  
4:00 pm ET - 5:15 pm ET  
Virtual Event**



# Where the Soul Takes off for Heaven: Max Abramovitz, Ben Shahn and Temple Beth Zion

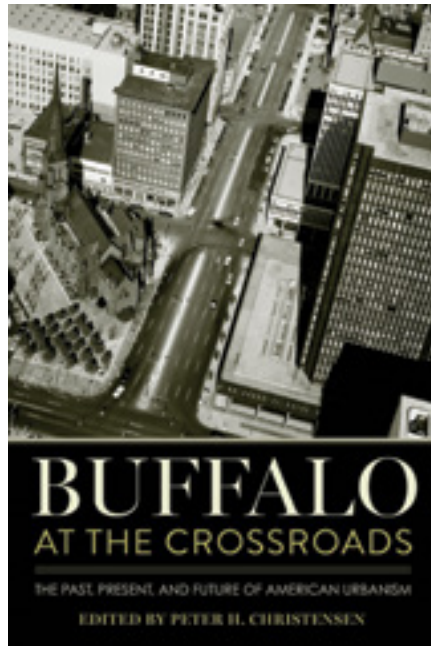
BY CHANA R. KOTZIN, PH.D.

The growing bookshelf on Buffalo's urban architectural legacies gained another title this fall, and includes an article about an iconic Jewish religious building in the city: Temple Beth Zion. In Peter Christensen's edited book, *Buffalo at the Crossroads: The Past, Present and Future of American Urbanism* published by Cornell University Press, architectural historian Frank Kowsky, makes a forceful argument for its inclusion as a more prominent part of the array of architectural masterworks in Buffalo.

Kowsky is the creator of a recent and successful National Register of Historic Places Registration for Temple Beth Zion and an editor of the classic book on Buffalo architecture: *Buffalo Architecture: A Guide*. He has also been teaching and writing about Buffalo's architectural heritage for decades. Within a group of 12 articles and an introduction by Peter Christensen that issues a call for more work on Buffalo's twentieth century urban legacies, Kowsky interweaves Max Abramovitz's work as an architect of industrial scale with his lesser known works of intimate spiritual spaces. He notes as others have, that in the building of Temple Beth Zion, Abramovitz realizes his own dreams as he moves from small scale university and military chapels to his first and only synagogue, and from his signature International Style to brutalism and neo-expressionism to create, what Samuel Gruber, architectural historian, has described, as one of the few uplifting synagogue "responses to architectural modernism in the United States."

As this chapter reveals, in the 1950s and 1960s, Buffalo's architectural resurgence produced an array of signature buildings by nationally and internally renowned architects including Minoru Yamasaki, Edward Durell Stone and Gordon Bunshaft. In the Reform Jewish congregation of Temple Beth Zion, Abramovitz found patrons who were willing to reflect a Buffalo of experimentation and daring and continue a legacy of earlier twentieth century architects active in the city from Frank Lloyd Wright to Eliel and Eero Saarinen.

In 1962, at its commission, these liberating conditions allowed for the creation of a unique sanctuary building that was dedicated in 1967. Fascinated



Book cover art courtesy of Cornell University Press used with permission.

with the possibilities of concrete as a material, immersed in cutting edge building techniques and part of a growing group of architects interested in working with artists, in Temple Beth Zion, Max Abramovitz and Ben Shahn created a building of two natures and emotions.

The outside of the building is a statement of engineering feats of angle and cladding, that together assume a minimalist mid-twentieth-century aesthetic. The inside of the sanctuary abandons this starkness for a seemingly unbounded place of rolling curves and light that streams from the ceiling skylights, elevated further by art windows that wash the sanctuary with shades of sapphire, amethyst and gold. This marvel on Delaware Avenue appeals to Jewish and non-Jewish visitors alike as growing interest by architectural tourists demonstrates.

With a focus on Temple Beth Zion's architectural legacy and its structure, we get a strong sense of the building and its creators intents while also seeing further avenues for discoveries that Kowsky seeks to encourage. The article is illustrated with the author's own photographs, each highlighting the architectural features engineered as part of the build: the supports for the Ben Shahn windows, the internal concrete curved walls and the imposing exterior. Together, they remind us of the awe expressed by poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko during his visit to Temple



Exterior, Temple Beth Zion, created by Paul Pasquarello, printed with permission of the photographer and courtesy of Temple Beth Zion, Buffalo, NY.

Beth Zion, as a place "Where the Soul Takes off for Heaven." It also explains why members and visitors, Jewish and non-Jewish, view it as a contemplative spiritual space that continues to speak to them as its creators hoped it would.

As Jewish Buffalo History Center (JBHC) Coordinator, Chana Revell Kotzin, Ph.D., is creating an online Buffalo Jewish history portal powered by the Buffalo Jewish Federation that will debut in 2021.

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**Saturday, February 13**  
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**The Jewish Vote:**  
**Myth and Reality**

**Saturday, February 20**  
**7 p.m.**

**Babe Ruth and the Holocaust:**  
**Unlikely Allies of the Jews,**  
**Then and Now**

**Saturday, February 27**  
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**Multi-media presentation:**  
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# CSS Outreach Program Creates Unexpected Friendships

BY PETER SIMON

Over the years, Congregation Shir Shalom has earned a reputation for strong and diverse community service efforts. They include—among many others—organizing fundraising events to feed the needy; providing dozens of classroom volunteers at a Buffalo school; leading Shabbat services for inmates at two state prisons, and producing braille books for agencies serving the blind.

So when the pandemic first hit Western New York, Shir Shalom was eager to help. “We knew right away we had to reach out to those congregants most in need,” said Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein. “The only problem was that we did not even have a proper list of them.”

That’s when Nancy McGory, the Temple’s Administrative Assistant, took charge. She identified about 100 congregants—most of them over 75—she felt might appreciate some help or simply a chat with a caring temple congregant. Initially, 22 volunteers called about 100 Shir Shalom members. Of those 100, thirty said they would appreciate being contacted regularly.

Zella Glickman, who is 90, is able to handle grocery shopping on her own. But she decided to instead have volunteer Judi Stern pick up her food for some time because the elderly are especially vulnerable to the Coronavirus. After dropping off the groceries, Stern stood outside, a safe distance from Glickman, and they crafted a friendship around a common interest in cooking, exercise and travel.

“Our Temple really went out of the way to help people,” said Glickman, a former kindergarten teacher. “It’s just nice to know they are there.” Stern, a former social worker, said the friendship is especially valuable because Glickman does not have relatives in town. “It was enjoyable,” she said. “I was glad to help somebody out.”

Michelle Giles, who lives in Orchard Park, was one of the more active callers. “Don’t suffer alone,” she told her phone partners. “If it’s two in the morning you pick up the phone and call.”

Rabbi Lazarus-Klein said the Outreach Program helped reduce the sense of isolation many people are experiencing, and that the “true magic” is the lasting friendships that formed. “I am especially grateful to Nancy McGory for all her work in making it happen,” he said. McGory said she was “fortunate” to organize the program. “I am continually impressed by our congregants’ generosity and



Judi Stern



Michelle Giles

willingness to help,” she said. Also impressive was the self-sufficiency of older temple members. Stern called to check up on Glickman during a power outage and found everything under control. “I went and got my flashlights and candles,” Glickman said. “I said: I’ll be fine.”

*Peter Simon is a retired Buffalo News reporter and was president of Temple Beth Am, the predecessor to Congregation Shir Shalom.*

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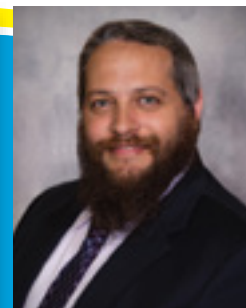
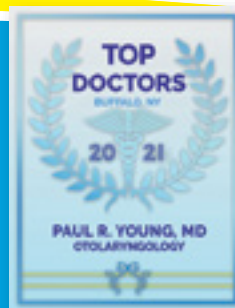


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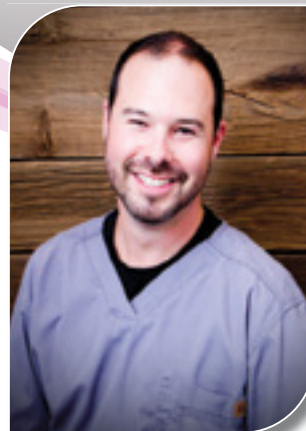


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## Ohr Temimim Students Study Africa in a Unique Way



Pictured above are Gila Gellman, Miriam Gurary, and Mushky Labovski holding up social studies projects highlighting different African nations; Pictured below Riva Berg, Miriam Gurary, and Mushky Labovski are holding the spider plants they are growing in planters which they created.

The fifth and sixth grade students, in Mrs. Bolles's class at Ohr Temimim School, spent part of the fall engaged in an integrated study of the African nations. In English Language Arts class, the students read *My Furthest-Back Person*, the autobiographical story of Alex Haley's search of his ancestry which he traced back to Kunta Kinte in Africa.

Ethnomathematics, the study of the relationship between culture and math, included creating a *mancala* game. Each student selected a different country to research during social studies and incorporated this information into a visual display.

In science class, the students clipped the *chlorophytum comosum* located in the school's office. This plant is commonly known as a spider plant, but is actually native to Africa. After allowing these clippings to grow roots in water, the students potted the young plants in containers which they made from recycled materials. Science lessons included the study of the continent's various ecosystems. Art included creating a depiction of an African sunset through the use of mixed media.

"Going into the unit, the students' had a lot of background knowledge about Egypt from their Judaic studies. However, they were really surprised to learn about the diversity in the other countries from the variety of languages spoken there to the types of foods eaten," Bolles explained.

With Covid-19 guidelines in place, Ohr Temimim students have practiced donning masks, maintaining social distance, and learning outside when practical.



## Hanukkah with Miss Rivky

A large group of moms and children enjoyed Rivky Greenberg's exciting Pre-Hanukkah Music Class in December on Zoom! The children met Big Mr. Dreidel, jumped into the Magic Dreidel, learned about the Hanukkah miracle, sang various Menorah counting songs, did a fun Maccabee March and had so much fun—all from the comfort of their own homes. Then they attended a special Drive-By Parade, where each child received a Holiday Gift Bag, with delicious Hanukkah treats- doughnuts, dreidel cookies, gelt and more! The children also made Hanukkah pictures, to be entered into a raffle and win a fun Hanukkah gift!



"Music with Rivky" is a program of the Jewish Discovery Center and due to COVID, is currently held virtually via Zoom. For more information about upcoming music classes, please log on to [www.musicwithrivky.com](http://www.musicwithrivky.com) to sign up for the mailing list or contact Rivky at [rivky@musicwithrivky.com](mailto:rivky@musicwithrivky.com) or (716) 906-8890.



# Cousins for a Cause

Avremmy Young of Buffalo and his cousin, Ziggy Burston of Monroe, N.Y., spent time together recently raising money for charity. Their campaign, which they titled “Cousins for a Cause” raised significant funds for “Chai Lifeline”, an organization for children who are battling terminal illnesses. The nine-year-old boys did a combination of kayaking and paddle boarding for six miles each and asked for pledges from friends and neighbors. Their original campaign goal was \$1200, and they surpassed it by raising a total of \$1600.

*“We are proud that the children used their energy and time to accomplish this good deed”*

The social media campaign was full of encouraging messages to the boys. Accompanying a donation, Melissa Crowe of Monroe, N.Y. wrote, “What a beautiful thing you boys are doing.” Inna Rozov of Buffalo, commented, “Way to



go, boys! What a great adventure, and a great cause!” along with her donation.

“We are proud that the children used their energy and time to accomplish this good deed”, says Chana Burston, Ziggy’s mother. “The community in both Orange County and Buffalo responded generously to the campaign. Although the pandemic has made social community gatherings more challenging, it has also enabled communities to come together to support each other in a special way.”

“Many children found themselves with more free time, especially outdoors, due to the Pandemic,” added Dr. Pinny Young, father of Avremmy. “These boys found a way to enjoy nature and time together as cousins while helping a great cause.”



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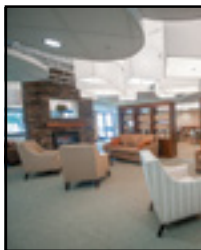




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### Chai Early Childhood Center

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# Remembering Stuart Young

## 1941-2020

*This remembrance of Stuart Young was compiled by his son, Dr. Pinny Young, and daughter-in-law, Sonia Gellman Young.*

Stewart Young (Shlomo Ben Yaacov) of London, England passed away suddenly on the 27th of Tishrei (October 15th). He was 78. Stewart was born on December 6, 1941 in London, England. As a young man he enjoyed traveling and participating in the sport of boxing.

He later married Lynne (Leah) Symons, (OBM) and together they had three children. Stewart was a business owner and a proud member of the London Jewish community. In addition to English, Stewart was fluent in Yiddish and French. He attended synagogue regularly and valued Jewish education.

He was quick and witty and always had a joke to share with perfect comedic timing. He loved making people laugh and enjoyed crossword puzzles (and completed them at lightening speed)! He was excellent at playing games, such as bridge. "Zaidy from England" as our kids called him, was one-of-a-kind. He loved traditional, Eastern European Jewish cuisine such as gefilte fish, herring, p"chah, and kugel. He always liked anything we made him and never let food go to waste. He enjoyed being a member of the Jewish community.

He was modest in every way and was always pleasant to have around. He was not materialistic and anything he had, he would



Stewart Young with his sons in Israel. (Left to right) Zev Young, Harvey Young, Pinny Young, Stewart Young.

gladly share. He was highly intelligent and studious. He loved history and he was an avid reader, looking particularly smart in his reading glasses. And he was a wiz when it came to trivia. He also enjoyed long walks on the streets of London.

He was unfortunately also a widower for 29 years after he lost his beloved wife, Lynne (Leah), OBM. He loved being surrounded by his family, which wasn't always easy considering many of us live on different continents. Though he was a man of few words, he was so very proud of his sons.

"When going through the house after his passing, we found a receipt for his best friend's funeral. The man, Warren Miller, died and had no one to bury him. My father took it upon himself to make sure Warren had a Jewish burial and that it was paid for, and that he had a headstone, and that also was paid for. None of the family knew he had done this Mitzvah," said his son Dr. Pinny Young. "That's the kind of person he was; a man of few words and many good deeds."

"He was an extremely open, generous, giving person," said his son Zev Young, "even though there were times he had financial

difficulties himself. If he could do something for somebody else, he would. He was never scared to put his hand in his pocket and help somebody out. On many occasions, he always did what he could to help my family. While we were living in Israel, he helped families that didn't have any money. He would buy their children clothes for holidays; he would buy them food. Any time we ever went out for dinner, he always wanted to foot the bill. He was an extremely generous person," Zev Young concluded.

He will be greatly missed by his family and friends. Stewart is survived by his sons, Harvey, Pinny and Zev and their spouses. He is also survived by his grandchildren Tom and Jack Young of London, England; Leia (Moshe), Yaacov, Michel, Dov Ber, Avremmy, Mendel and Rosie Young of Buffalo, NY; and Leah, Ari and Mendel Young of Silver Spring, MD. He is also survived by his sister Cynthia Greenspan (Lawrence) and several nephews, nieces and cousins. Memorial donations may be made to: Jewish Heritage Day School/Ohr Temimim, 411 John James Audubon Pkwy. Amherst, NY 14228



Stewart Young, on a trip to Israel with some of his grandchildren and sons.



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# In Remembrance

The following individuals in our community passed away during the period from November-December 18\*. May their memories forever be a blessing, and may their loved ones be comforted among the mourners of Zion.

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If we inadvertently missed printing the listing of your loved one, please write to [ellen@buffalojewishfederation.org](mailto:ellen@buffalojewishfederation.org) and we will include the name next month.

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## The Blessing of Comic Relief

BY NANCY DAVIDOFF KELTON

My niece through marriage died at age 40. We sat shiva at her brother's house in Needham, Massachusetts. His 6-year-old daughter, Kaitlin, helped serve drinks; she made \$50. Kaitlin's tip collecting began six hours after the funeral, when her grandpa, father of the deceased, asked her to get him a glass of wine. In a playful way, he gave her a dollar. I then asked her for a club soda. "That'll be a dollar," she said. Grandpa pulled out another one. Other relatives followed.

I met the clan five years earlier on the evening of my then-boyfriend's father's funeral. Our kindergarten bartender, 13-months-old and clinging to her mother, would not get near me. Now she hugs me when I come and go, sits on my lap at the piano as I guide her pointer for "Happy Birthday" and "Heart and Soul"



and, with her 9-year-old brother, takes my hand when we go on walks and jump waves at the beach

I have developed what my grandmother jokingly called "great rappaport" with the "littles"—my sister-in-law's name for her

grandchildren—and with the three older generations: the "bigs." The night before the funeral we ate pizza. The leftover pies became snack food and a part of our conversations for the rest of the week. So did the insensitive relative who even 20 minutes before the funeral made a stupid remark and the acquaintance who called herself "spiritual" but we called "garrulous," among other things.

"Death, a necessary end, will come when it will come," wrote Shakespeare. To our niece, it came way too soon. My 96-year-old mother-in-law keeps saying that life is unfair and she should have been the one to go. As Kaitlin continued adding dollars to her red plastic cash register on the beverage table, I steered customers her way.

The day after the funeral, when my husband and I took his grown children

to the train station for their return trip home, my daughter called from New York. I told her about Kaitlin so she would laugh and so my stepchildren in the backseat would, too. They could board the trains holding on to that one funny occurrence. In my telling, I felt particularly close to "our" children. And to Kaitlin.

At age 7, I was the "family cheerer-upper"—my father's name for me—when my mother had a nervous breakdown. I wrote and recited poems to amuse her as she retreated into herself. When she was institutionalized, I played ping-pong every night with my gloomy father, learning to return his toughest shots both on and off the table. I sang to my grandmother, who stayed with us and cried. When her sobbing took over and she would ask me—me—where she went

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wrong with Mom, I reassured her she was not to blame.

As an adult, I still like spreading cheer. Last summer, when I told my cousin, a rabbi, about my niece's death and Kaitlin's bartending, he said that children, like the mounds of food, discussions of peculiar people and funny moments, are important—even necessary—in a house of mourning. He reminded me of a family moment 50 years earlier. In 1964, a week after my Grandma Davidoff died from complications after surgery, my Grandma Cohen was hit by a car, on her way to pay a shiva call. She was carrying food in a casserole dish. She died immediately.

During our second week of mourning for my second grandmother, my mother told my father to make tea for our rabbi, sitting in our living room exactly where he sat the week before. Flustered, Dad asked my older sister, Susan, and me to help. We boiled water. Dad carried in the kettle. Susan followed with a teabag. I followed with an empty cup. We stood in front of the rabbi. Susan and I cracked up and could not stop laughing. Years later, she and I still laugh about how we served the rabbi tea.

On the second night of shiva for our niece, Kaitlin was told to put her cash register away. The tipping stopped. For that first day, though, her bartending provided the “biggs” with a few smiles in the middle of a huge cry. The family still talks about Kaitlin's accumulation of cash.

The late writer Mavis Gallant said, “... everything, no matter how grave, holds the possibility of laughter. Look at the fits of laughter you get at a funeral, at a wake. It's emotion and in a way it's a relief that you're alive.”

I plan to tell my grandchildren all about Kaitlin's bartending when they are older. If I am still here.

*Nancy Davidoff Kelton, raised in Buffalo and now living in New York City, is the author of seven books, including Writing from Personal Experience, and her memoir, Finding Mr. Rightstein, which she adapted into a play with the same title. A staged reading of it will be part of the JCC Book & Arts Fair Thursday, January 21 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom. It is free, but registration is required. For more information visit [www.jccbuffalo.org](http://www.jccbuffalo.org) or email [Katie.Wzontek@jccbuffalo.org](mailto:Katie.Wzontek@jccbuffalo.org).*

*Nancy's essays have been published in The Buffalo News, The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The Forward, AARP, Parents, and elsewhere. Her recent essay on the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg appeared in the November 2020 issue of The Jewish Journal of WNY*



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