

Super Sunday to kick off Federation's Campaign 2027

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold its annual Super Sunday phonathon on Sunday, August 23, at the Jewish Community Center, starting at 10 am. Follow-up calls will be made through September.

"We are grateful for community members who pledge early. It truly reduces the burden for our Campaign volunteers," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "August 23 will be the beginning of our phone campaign for community members who have yet to pledge."

The theme of this year's Campaign is "Your Jewish Community – Embracing our future together."

"We really want this year's Campaign to be about creating one Jewish community, under one umbrella, that is united and welcoming. That is how we came up with the Campaign theme. We look forward to connecting with our donors and having a successful Campaign," said Campaign Chairwoman Jodi Sampey.

This year's Campaign has a goal of \$300,000 to support community organiza-



tions, including Jewish Family Service, the JCC, The Reporter, Hillel Academy, Hillel at Binghamton University, the community mikvah at Beth David Synagogue, Jewish

Federations of North America, the Jewish Film Fest and PJ Library, as well as communitywide security initiatives. Campaign dollars also support community programming such as Holocaust remembrance, antisemitism education, security trainings and more.

"Your support helps to keep the Binghamton Jewish community vibrant and connected," Hubal noted. She thanked donors for their generous support during

Campaign 2026 and gave her outlook for Campaign 2027.

"Due to cuts in federal spending, there is a greater burden on not-for-profit organizations," she added. "We understand this means our donors are being spread thin. When you support the Federation, you are giving to a multitude of local Jewish organizations and helping our neighbors in need. We thank everyone for their enduring support."

Federation announces new Campaign chairwoman

By Diana Sochor

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton has announced that Jodi Sampey has been named the new chairwoman of the Federation's annual Campaign, succeeding longtime Chairwoman Marilyn Bell.

"I am so grateful for the many years of hard work Marilyn Bell put into the Federation Campaign. She has honestly had a huge positive impact on our community.

Her legacy will be felt for many years," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "I am delighted that Jodi has agreed to be the new Campaign chair. She genuinely cares about the Jewish community and is enthusiastic and compassionate. I hope everyone will join me in welcoming her in this new role."

In an e-mail interview, Sampey noted, "I lived here for my first 18 years and then

moved back from Niagara Falls, NY, in 1999. My daughter and I have been involved with Temple Concord since 2010. Growing up, my family were members of the JCC and always subscribed to *The Reporter*. I enjoy expanding my knowledge of Judaism at all the local synagogues and Chabad. I met my husband, Ilya Stein, at the Chabad Passover seder in 2014. I have always had a warm See "Campaign" on page 11

TI to celebrate building's anniversary on July 26

The Temple Israel congregation invites the community to join the 10th Anniversary Celebration of the new temple building on Sunday, July 26, at noon, at Temple Israel.

"Ten years ago, the doors of a beautiful new synagogue opened in Vestal – and a decade of memories, growth and connection began," said organizers of the event. "This July, Temple Israel invites everyone

to come together to mark that milestone in the warmth and spirit it deserves. The 10th Anniversary Celebration is open to all, and the congregation hopes to fill the day with familiar faces, new friends and a shared sense of gratitude for everything that the building – and the community within it – has come to represent."

The day's program will include a com-

memorative march to bring participants together before a sanctuary program reflecting on the past 10 years. The afternoon will continue with a barbecue, raffle baskets and a 50/50 raffle.

"We hope you'll join us – not just to look back on how far we've come, but to celebrate the people who made it all possible," said organizers of the event. "Every

friendship forged, every service shared, every life-cycle moment celebrated within these walls has woven together something truly special. We'd love nothing more than to share this day with you."

Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP by Friday, July 10, by e-mailing office@templeisraelvestal.org or calling the temple office at 607-723-7461.

Reporter wins Rockower Award

By Reporter staff

The Reporter won a 2026 Simon Rockower Award for Excellence in Jewish Journalism, which was announced at the American Jewish Press Association's annual conference in June. Arieh Ullmann won second place in the Excellence in Writing about Women category for his article "Discovering the fascinating life of a Tunisian Jewish female performer." (To read the article, visit https://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-131/2/bng0711_25.pdf.)

"As a lifelong academic researcher, I'm applying my training to investigating the background of each stamp that I acquire," Ullmann said. "Discovering the astounding number and variety of Jewish personalities, the breadth of their endeavors and accomplishments spread across the globe, to me is the most exciting aspect of my hobby."

In his article, Ullmann had noted of his research that, "Occasionally, there are surprises. One of them is my most

recent purchase, an FDC from Tunisia featuring Marguerite Habiba Msika (1903-1930) issued in 2023 to mark the 120th anniversary of her birth. Who was this Habiba Msika? Thanks to Google it's easy to find out. She was a Tunisian actress and singer, often called the 'first star of Tunis.' I suspect I am not the only one who had no knowledge of the brief, but extraordinary, career of Tunisian Jewish superstar Habiba Msika."

This is Ullmann's second Rockower

Award. In 2024, he took second place for Excellence in Writing about Jewish Heritage and Jewish Peoplehood in Europe for his "Soccer memories of Zurich."

"I was so pleased to hear that Arieh had won a Rockower Award for his interesting article on Habiba Msika," said Diana Sochor, executive editor of *The Reporter*. "I loved that a postage stamp inspired his research and well-written article, and can't wait to find out what inspires him to write again."

Spotlight

Penn York Jewish Community celebrated legacy and continued impact at Shabbat service

By Beth Herbst

The Penn York Jewish Community and Congregation Kol Ami in Elmira came together on May 29 for a joint Shabbat service celebrating nearly nine decades of Jewish life in the Twin Tiers and the legacy of a small community whose influence continues to reach far beyond the Valley, which includes Sayre, Athens and Towanda, PA, and Waverly, NY.

The evening included a historical reflec-

tion on the Penn York Jewish Community, delivered by longtime member Jeff Dann, who has been part of the organization for 55 years. The remarks were written by Harvey Chernosky, whose more than 40 years of leadership and service, along with that of his wife Linda, are said to have helped sustain and guide the community through decades of change.

The Penn York Jewish Community traces its roots to 1939, when local residents

purchased a building at 325 Chemung Street in Waverly and transformed it into Beth Israel Synagogue. For more than 75 years, the synagogue served Jewish families from Sayre, Athens, Waverly, Towanda and surrounding communities as a center for worship, education, celebration and fellowship.

As demographics shifted and membership declined, the community adapted. Following the sale of the synagogue building

in 2015, the Penn York Jewish Community continued its mission through charitable giving, community programming, support of Congregation Kol Ami and efforts to maintain a Jewish presence throughout the region.

One of the evening's discussions focused on the five Torah scrolls that once belonged to Beth Israel Synagogue. Rather than allowing the sacred scrolls to remain unused See "Legacy" on page 9

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Ithaca College Hillel
Ithaca College Hillel has announced its new executive director.
.....Page 3

Community Spotlight
The "Community Spotlight" features Chelsea Rego, Hillel at Binghamton's executive director.
.....Page 9

Congregational notes
Area congregations announce their services and upcoming events.
.....Page 10

Special Sections
Women in Business..... 4
Celebrating Jewish Literature..... 5-8
Family Living..... 11
Classifieds 12

Opinion

Ed Koch: “How am I doing?”

By Bill Simons

No one, except possibly Fiorello La Guardia, enjoyed being mayor of New York City more than Ed Koch. A shameless booster, Koch loved his city. He epitomized the Jewish New Yorker of his generation. Koch’s loud but warm know-it-all style reminded you of cabbies, deli counterman and your favorite uncle. With his quintessential chutzpah, Koch recorded a video that prefaced his *New York Times* obituary, asking: “Do you miss me?” Yeah, Ed, we do.

Koch died over a decade ago, but he is timely again. The late Lenny Bruce, a brilliant satirist, asserted, “[I]f you live in New York, you’re Jewish.” New York City was and is a kaleidoscope of diverse ethnic and racial groups. In terms of cultural sensibility, albeit not strict demographics, there was, however, an element of truth to Bruce’s observation. Koch epitomized that New York, which in the era of current Mayor Zohran Mamdani appears to many an artifact of a yesterday. Koch is a handy benchmark for differentiating the city’s past from its present. Referencing that change, one of my correspondents offered an aside, “Ed Koch!? He is probably turning in his grave.”

Koch would not have found it problematic that Mamdani is a Muslim. He would have taken strong issue, however, with Mamdani’s refusal to reject the rhetoric of “globalize the intifada” and “from the river to the sea” as well as advocacy for withholding defensive military aid to Israel. Since the founding of the modern State of Israel, every New York mayor has journeyed to Israel either during his tenure or subsequently. Mamdani’s failure to affirm that tradition, alone of the 2025 candidates, would have further raised Koch’s hackles. And Mamdani’s claim that he will order the arrest of the Israeli prime minister when Benjamin Netanyahu next comes to New York City would have elicited a lecture on the law from Koch.

Today American Jews are divided amongst themselves,

partly reflecting the sharp polarization of contemporary America but also because numbers of us in the diaspora believe that the Netanyahu government has pursued policies that violate Jewish ethics. Thus, for many Jews of a certain age, the Koch years elicit nostalgia, enhanced by rose-colored glasses, for a bygone era when antisemitism appeared on the retreat, Israel a beacon of democracy, and a Jewish sensibility flourished in New York.

Several Jews have sought the NYC mayoralty, but only three have won the position. (La Guardia, the son of a Jewish mother, identified as an Episcopalian.) The first, Abe Beame, was undone by the city’s mid-1970s fiscal woes. Billionaire media mogul Michael Bloomberg governed New York (2002-13) ably but possessed a refined reserve at odds with the tempo of NYC. The emotive Koch was the most haimish of New York’s mayors.

Born in the Bronx to Jewish immigrant parents, Koch grew up in Newark, NJ. During World War II service in Europe, Koch attained the rank of sergeant, earned two battle stars and demonstrated bravery in combat. After the war, he graduated from CCNY and New York University School of Law. During the 1960s, attorney Koch emerged as a Democratic leader in Manhattan, the borough that became his permanent home, and won two terms in the city council before serving as a Manhattan congressman from 1969-77.

During the 1977 mayoral campaign, supporters of Koch’s main opponent, Mario Cuomo, exploited speculation about Koch’s bachelor status by hanging posters that read “Vote for Cuomo, Not the Homo.” As a counter Koch frequently appeared in public with Bess Myerson, the first Jewish Miss America, sometimes engaging in hand-holding and kissing. After his death, *The New York Times* published a front page, investigative article claiming that Koch was a closeted gay attuned to the political

consequences of coming out of the closet.

Koch defeated Cuomo in the 1977 primary and general elections to win the mayoralty. A self-proclaimed “liberal with sanity,” the Democratic Koch, over 12 years, served three consecutive terms as mayor (January 1, 1978-December 31, 1989). Bluntly admitting that he would hate leaving NYC for upstate cost Koch the 1982 gubernatorial race. Nonetheless, he was highly popular during most of his run as mayor. Koch garnered landslide shares of the vote in his 1981 (74.6 percent) and 1985 (78 percent) re-elections.

History demands notation of serious failures, notably Koch’s belated and underfunded response to the fearful toll of the AIDS epidemic. His pugnacity roiled race relations. And Koch dispensed political patronage.

A fair recounting of the Koch mayoralty, however, also acknowledges substantive achievements. He brought the city’s finances back from the fiscal precipice, reduced crime, enlarged the housing stock, secured federal loans, achieved détente with unions, championed neighborhoods, and moved lesbian and gay rights from aspiration to law. Historian Jonathan Soffer contends that Koch’s record is “stunning in its dimensions, especially considering the fiscal and political obstacles he faced.”

Quite apart from his deeds, Koch’s energy, bombast, brash wit and omnipresence helped New York regain its bounce. At street corners, subway exits and virtually anywhere in the city, New Yorkers grew accustomed to their 6’2”, depilated mayor greeting them with an exuberant “How am I doing?”

Corruption scandals of subordinates, sans any evidence of his involvement, cost Koch his 1989 election quest for an unprecedented fourth term. In the generation that followed, Koch retained a robust schedule, never passing up an opportunity to share his opinions. Donning judicial

See “Koch” on page 12

One Perspective from Israel

Diamonds up the hill: part one

JEREMY M. STAIMAN

This article originally appeared in the Times of Israel and is being reprinted with permission.

Fair warning: this is going to start out a bit preachy. I promise you it gets better!

When I was younger, there was an oft-told *marshal* (parable) about a family that lived in desperate poverty. The family heard tell of a faraway land where the streets were littered with diamonds. They decided that the husband would undertake the arduous trek to save their family, though it would mean that he would be away for years.

After months and months of navigating his way, he arrived to find that the stories, if anything, had undersold this magical destination. The land glistened with diamonds everywhere. The roads were paved with them. The buildings were constructed from them. The whole city shimmered like a royal palace.

His eyes wide and mouth agape at his good fortune, the eager man wasted no time in dumping the ragged contents of his suitcases so that he could use every nook and cranny to bring the jewels back home and share his newfound riches with family and friends.

As he began scooping the treasures into his bags, passersby began looking at him as if he were crazy. “Sir,” one of them asked. “May I ask what in the world you are doing?”

Correction

In the Jewish Federation’s annual meeting article in the June issue of *The Reporter*, Chelsea Rego, executive director of Hillel at Binghamton, should have been listed as an affiliated organization representative for the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton’s Board of Directors. The Federation apologizes for the error and any confusion it may have caused.

“I’m collecting diamonds to take home to my poor family! These will allow me to fill the hungry stomachs of my children and provide for my family for the rest of our lives,” he explained.

The onlookers began to laugh. “Those won’t be anything but trouble,” they replied. “They’re worthless! As you can see, they are everywhere, so they have no value. If you’re looking for something truly precious, you should search for stones. Those are the truly rare and valuable commodities!”

The man thought them crazy and continued gathering diamonds, only to have similar conversations repeatedly with other locals.

Finally, the man began to second-guess himself: “Perhaps during my long journey I forgot my true mission. Maybe I was supposed to gather rocks rather than diamonds! I had better dump these shiny, worthless baubles and search for stones.”

That search took time. Precious objects are not so easily found. But after many months of searching through mountains and caves, the man managed to fill a suitcase. He bade the townspeople farewell, and set off for home, anxious to see the faces of his wife and children when he revealed the bounty he had brought.

At long last, he reached his little town. Dragging his bag to the door with his last ounce of strength, he knocked and entered. The enthusiastic crowd greeted him with warm embraces, smiling from ear to ear when he told them he had returned with unimaginable treasure.

In great haste, he opened the suitcase, and rocks began to fall to the floor. He began dancing with glee at his good fortune, only to be met with the cold, confused stares of his family. “Where are the diamonds?” they asked.

“Diamonds?! Who needs worthless diamonds? I found rocks!” he explained.

Despondently, the family responded: “We have rocks

everywhere here. These will do nothing for us. You were supposed to bring home diamonds. They have true value.”

—

The *nimshal* (interpretation of the parable) is that our souls are sent to this world to do mitzvot and make the world a better place. Opportunities abound – moments to be seized, people to be helped.

Yet once we get here and see the jewels glistening all around us, that spectacle becomes commonplace. Instead of seeking out the diamonds, we start chasing the misplaced values of this world. We can easily lose our priorities and end our mission here with a suitcase filled with rocks.

—

I warned you it would be preachy, but I will get back to the diamonds in our story after a rather significant tangent. Or maybe two.

Let’s call it one and a half.

—

When I was a wee lad of 13, just days after my bar mitzvah, I went on my first trip to Israel, headed for Camp Yaron, in the picturesque Carmel Mountains. I didn’t know much about the program or about Israel, but I knew about camp, because I had been going away for the past four summers.

What I knew most was that I got really, really homesick. True to form, I suffered from that malady on my Israel trip. Most of the other kids were not my speed, so overall it was a rather unpleasant experience. I may have held it against the camp at the time, but looking back with 50-plus years of hindsight, the camp was probably fine. My older brother had enjoyed the program a number of years prior, and my younger brother did so equally two years later. So I guess we know where to really place the blame.

With that confession off my chest, let me tell you more

See “Hill” on page 4



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Ithaca College Hillel names new executive director

Ithaca College Hillel has announced that Calle Schueler will serve as its next executive director. In this role, Schueler will oversee IC Hillel and “create meaningful experiences, programming and community” for the 1,100 Jewish undergraduate students at the college. Schueler will succeed executive director Julie Boden Adams, who served IC Hillel for the past two years.

Schueler currently serves as director of engagement and education at Temple Beth-El in Ithaca, where they directed the religious school, restructured teen programming, and led family and intergenerational programming initiatives. In addition to their work with Temple Beth-El, Schueler is already deeply connected to the IC Hillel community, having led Shabbat services throughout the past year.

“I am thrilled to be stepping into the role of executive director of Ithaca College Hillel and to build on the strong foundation laid by Julie Boden Adams and the many dedicated students, staff, alumni, and campus partners who have shaped this vibrant organization,” said Schueler, the incoming executive director of IC Hillel. “I look forward

to partnering with students to create a Jewish home on campus that reflects the diversity of their experiences and interests, giving them opportunities to learn, lead, connect, and find their own place within Jewish life and community. I am also excited to collaborate with the staff and student leaders of Muller Chapel to create spaces for dialogue, learning, and friendship across traditions and identities. My hope is to foster a welcoming center for Jewish life where all students can come together, build lasting relationships, and feel a genuine sense of belonging.”

“Calle will bring significant higher education experience and deep knowledge of both Ithaca College and the broader Ithaca Jewish community. We’re delighted to have Calle stepping in to lead Ithaca Hillel at this critical juncture,” said Adam Lehman, president and CEO of Hillel International.

Schueler holds a master of arts in Jewish education and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Nonprofit management at Northeastern University. They will officially assume their role on July 1.

About Ithaca College Hillel: As part of Hillel Interna-

tional, Ithaca College Hillel offers a variety of opportunities for Jewish campus involvement – cultural, political, social, secular and religious. Hillel supports a visible and positive Jewish presence on campus, participates in interfaith and multicultural activities, and works with other organizations in the Jewish community. Hillel’s goal is to foster Jewish identity, provide leadership opportunities and enhance a commitment to Jewish life that will continue after college.

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to the family of
Dr. Edwin Ansel (“Ed”) Bronsky

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to **Jane Whitelaw Mason** on the death of her son,
Todd Gardner

JCC centennial campaign ongoing

The Jewish Community Center’s centennial campaign is ongoing this year, with a goal of \$800,000. The JCC will celebrate its 100th anniversary on August 15, 2027.

“Every dollar is being generously matched by funds from the Eisenberg Foundation,” said Sue and Mark Walker, co-chairpersons of the campaign. “Please reach out to the JCC today with your pledge. *L’dor v’dor*, let’s keep our JCC here for the next 100 years. In these uncertain times, our JCC remains a safe and

welcoming place for us all. Thank you.”

Donations may be made immediately or pledged over the campaign period through Sunday, October 31, 2027. The David Eisenberg Donor Advised Fund will match all contributions up to \$400,000. There are donor recognition opportunities available. To donate, checks may be sent to the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850. For more information, contact the JCC at 607-724-2417.

TI celebrated Shavuot

At right: Part of the crowd at Temple Israel’s pre-Shavuot concert on May 21.



Below: The Empire Saxophone Quartet held a concert prior to the start of Shavuot on May 21 at Temple Israel.



OF NOTE

Dickman

Dr. Steven Dickman, professor emeritus of Earth Sciences at Binghamton University, has published a book, “Earth System Geophysics.”

Krasno

Dr. Jonathan Krasno has been named Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Binghamton University.

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August	July 8
September	August 12
October	September 9
November	October 7

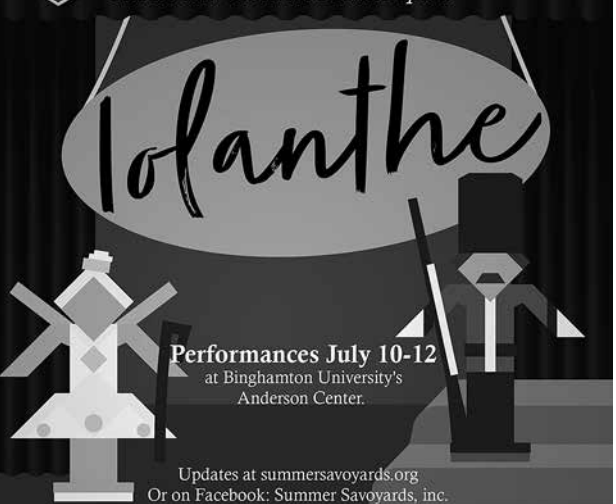
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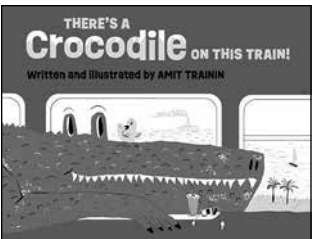
New in Books

Kalaniot Books to release new children’s books for summer/fall

Kalaniot Books announced that it will release two new children’s picture books for the summer and fall 2026 seasons:

◆ “There’s a Crocodile on the Train!” written and illustrated by Amit Trainin with a translation by Ilana Kurshan (Release date: August 25)

The morning train is bustling with passengers chatting, laughing and telling their favorite jokes – until a great green crocodile squeezes into the car. Everyone



“There’s a Crocodile on the Train!” book cover (Photos used with permission of Kalaniot Press.)



“Hear Me Roar! I’m a HANUKKAHsaur” book cover

grumbles, but no one dares to say a word... except a tiny chick named Peep. With a brave heart and gentle manners, Peep steps forward to talk to the newcomer – and discovers that the crocodile isn’t scary at all, just shy and kind. Together, they show the other passengers that when we treat others as we wish to be treated, amazing things can happen. Told in lively rhyme with bright, whimsical illustrations and with themes that are rooted in ancient Jewish

teachings “There’s a Crocodile on This Train!” celebrates courage and empathy.

◆ “Hear Me Roar! I’m a HANUKKAHsaur” by Naomi Gruer and illustrated by Mel Zohar (Release date: September 29)

Miles loves Hanukkah almost as much as he loves dinosaurs. Each night of the holiday, his dino-sized enthusiasm leads to big messes – and even bigger fun – as he becomes VeLATKEraptor, TriceraTOPS, MENORAHsaur, and more. From lighting candles to spinning dreidels, Miles discovers that whether you stomp, chomp, or roar, “Dinos can do it!” With bright and colorful illustrations and appealing wordplay, this book is sure to be a read-aloud favorite. Includes a glossary and a dinosaur guide.

Hill.....Continued from page 2

about the setting. Camp Yaron was situated in the Yemin Orde Youth Village, nestled in the pastoral woods of the Carmel Forest, south of Haifa. The year was 1974, and the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War (which had transpired the previous fall) was still keenly felt. With many young men and women still on active military duty, Yemin Orde suffered a staffing shortage and the pool on the grounds was closed all summer.

You can’t have a summer camp without swimming, so the organizers arranged to have us bused to a lovely nearby pool several times a week. We would board a “tender,” which was, as I recall, a rickety shuttle bus with side benches, no seatbelts and an open back. It was the kind of vehicle that must long ago have been forcibly retired due to its patently unsafe nature.

Unfortunately for us, the tender was the safest part of the journey.

In our quest for a plunge in the water, up we traveled toward the top of Mount Carmel. Up and up along the thick forest on a narrow, winding, unpaved, single-lane, two-way road. A tender is not a slim vehicle, so when a car (or heaven forbid a truck!) approached from the other direction, each vehicle had to scooch to its respective side, proceed slowly, utter a prayer and hope that there was enough room for both to proceed.

Did I forget to mention the drop-off at the side of the road? No guard rail. No white or yellow lines. Just a jagged, pitted dirt road which abruptly vanished on the side where a steep precipice began. The bottom was down hundreds of feet. We could actually see the remains of cars down below that hadn’t made it!

Thirteen-year-olds generally think they will live forever.

Not so true for those of us on the tender.

Spoiler alert: We all lived to tell the tale of the serpentine, death-defying trek to the pool on the mount.

It would be more than half a century before I saw that road again.

Fast forward to this week. These times have been challenging for everyone in Israel, each in his or her own manner. As parents of *miluimnikim* (reservists) who have pulled many days of service, we have tried to be there for our kids’ families with whatever they ask. Both of our boys were serving for significant portions of the holiday and my wife, Chana, went all out, cooking up an amazing take-out menu packed with their favorites. One of the two families moved in with us for five days, which made for a fun time (you can read “fun” in any tone of voice you’d like and it would probably be true!), we hosted a lone soldier for the last day, invited tons of company, and there were 11 loads of laundry (lots and lots of sheets) awaiting us after the *chag*.

Chana deserved a break. She had scheduled a girls’ trip the following week to the Carmel Forest Hotel Spa for some well-earned R&R, but the other “girl” involved didn’t make it to Israel due to the war. I’ve not identified as a sister before, never even served as an understudy, but I was forced to bite the bullet, assume the role, play the part and become the other sister. Call me selfless, but off we went together to the spa for a few days!

Though I may never have identified as a sister, I do identify as a religious Jew. So the thought of a spa, with its emphasis on the more hedonistic side of things, was a bit discomfiting. I was concerned about what I might find there.

In the exceptional company of my wife/sister, the trip up was quick, scenic and enjoyable. We stopped in Caesarea and visited its national park, including the ancient racetrack, amphitheater and beachside ruins. We thoroughly enjoyed a delicious lunch of whole fish and steak at a seaside restaurant, sitting outside and basking in the sun as we dined.

Following lunch, we continued on our way to the hotel. It was then that the terrain began to assume a familiar look, tickling awake long-hibernant images from my youth. As our car ascended into the hills of the Carmel, the recognition dawned. This road was either the same one our tender had battled all those years ago, or one very similar.

There were improvements, to be sure. It was now paved, two lanes and a short protective wall guarded the side. The old, wrecked cars had been removed from the hollow between the mountains. Oncoming traffic sailed effortlessly past us without a care. While I rarely trust my memory (and certainly not from 52 years ago), it felt like the same journey, minus the fear of losing my life.

From the moment we walked through the sliding doors of the hotel, it was clear that we had entered another universe. The service was unlike anything we had ever experienced, and the atmosphere was warm and soothing. The air was fresh and mountainous, sweetened by subtle infusions of scented oils.

This piece is not meant to be about the hotel, but we’re not quite finished with our one and a half tangents (it’s probably more, but I’ve lost count). Rather, it’s about unexpected discoveries at the hotel.

Let’s start with the outdoor pool. When I saw it, my earlier sense of déjà vu was confirmed. Not only was the road up the mountain the same one we took to the pool as we traveled from Camp Yaron, this was our very destination. This was our pool! It had been updated and upgraded, and the grounds were different than I remembered, as the building was not an upscale hotel back then. In those days, I learned later, this was a recovery home where Holocaust survivors came to find rest and help bring some peace to their shattered bodies and souls. As campers we knew nothing of this, but I’m honored to know now that I was once in their company.

Women in Business

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E-mail: a dvertising@thereportergroup.org

Website: www.thereportergroup.org

Facebook: The Reporter Group

Hours: Mon. 9 am-4 pm, Wed. 9 am-3 pm, Thurs. 9 am-4 pm

Advertising was a new field for Kathy when she started five years ago, but she’s discovered the pleasure of working with the clients, giving them ideas on how to promote their business using print ads. Her motto is “the client comes first” and, to prove that, she researches each client to see what they have done in the past and tries to figure out if there is a way to improve their ad-image. She also works with them to discover the ad sections that will best highlight their business.

Kathy has lived here for 40 years, moving from Long Island to meet and marry her husband. She loves the outdoors, even in the winter. She is ready to help you advertise your business in *The Reporter*, in Binghamton and Scranton, the best way she can. Call or e-mail her to discuss options.

The hotel was far from what I feared in terms of its environment. Even the dress standard was better than expected. Spa culture has people walking around in robes and slippers, and that was certainly the case. But the robes were long, and far more modest than the scene of shorts and bathing suits at most hotels.

The vibe was one of tranquility. Perhaps we would actually be able to relax, a sharp departure from the daily routine to which we had become accustomed – jumping at the sounds of sirens, and running for shelter at all hours.

It was here in the hotel that I started noticing the diamonds.

Stay tuned for part two...

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Celebrating Jewish Literature

Everyday life in the modern period

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

European Jewish history has largely focused on the lives, activities and religious practices of Jewish men. One reason for this emphasis is that men wrote the materials that have been passed down to us: information about the female population was often not considered important enough to include. However, as Debra Kaplan and Elisheva Carlebach note in their excellent “A Woman is Responsible for Everything: Jewish Women in Early Modern Europe” (Princeton University Press), that was not true of the early modern period of Europe (1500-1800). Rather, scholars have overlooked or ignored the community records and ledgers from this period of increased literacy among men and women. What becomes clear is that women were indispensable to the workings of the Jewish community, something that was probably also true of previous periods whose records of community activity contain less information.

The authors note three major factors behind the changes that occurred in the Modern Era: “First, during this period, Jewish communities flourished and developed, and the community as an organized entity had greater power than ever before. Second, along with the community’s development came an increase in communal recordkeeping, which created an archive of documents that preserved the rhythms of men’s and women’s daily lives. Third was the advent of print, the concomitant rise of female literacy, and its stimulating impact on women’s reading and writing.” Kaplan and Carlebach realize the limits to what can be learned from primary sources since it was not written to show a complete picture of communal and personal lives. It also assumed its readers had a basic understanding of what is not included; the writers would have assumed that community members were familiar with customs and behaviors that are not always obvious to outsiders.

Understanding the role of the Kehillah (which refers

as the Jewish community as a whole, but also to those making the rules for its members) is extremely important to understanding Jewish life during this period. In most cities, the Jewish population was forced to live in one area, which gave the Kehillah a great deal of power. Families not only shared houses, but rooms. One of the most important things the Kehillah did – and perhaps one of the most difficult to understand in contemporary times – was decide who could be a member of their community. They preferred those who were self-supporting enough that they would not need financial help from the community. The Kehillah also collected and doled out funds for a communal hospice, relief for the poor and the care of the synagogue. The Kehillah decided who could marry by requiring them to have enough money to not need access to communal funds. These requirements made it more difficult for people to wed and the age of marriage increased as people needed years to save enough money. However, money was not the only reason the Kehillah might not approve of a marriage: other reasons ranged from pre-marital behavior (even if the woman was pregnant) or those seeking to marry not following other communal rules. The Kehillah even decided the part of a cemetery in which a person could be buried.

Kaplan and Carlebach show how Jewish households in this period revolved around women’s activities. These included not only women handling the daily needs of the family, but many of the religious and ritual ones. It was women who prepared for Shabbat and holidays, not only cooking the food, but making certain all the household was ready. The authors note that, due to economic circumstances, “Jewish men were often on the road the road for long periods, and even if they lived at home, they spent most of their days outside the house for religious services, economic transactions, and civic engagement.” Even those women who had servants to help would have spent a great deal

of time making sure that everything was done correctly. Many of those servants were young Jewish women working to make enough money for a dowry in order to be able to marry. However, women were not only concerned with the household: records show that an increasing number of women worked with their husbands in a business, had their own businesses, or worked for the Kehillah. Included in this latter work was caring for the sick in the hospice and taking part in the burial society preparing those who died for burial. Since the sexes were strictly segregated during this time, only women would have been able to take care of ill women and cleanse the bodies of those women who died. Women were also midwives: they, rather than doctors or male healers, helped women give birth.

The printed word was also important to women during this period. So many women were now able to read that books began to be printed specifically for them. This increased literacy helped women in business when they needed to keep track of transactions. Women also wrote or dictated wills as a way of ensuring their property went to the correct person. The authors discuss the journals of several women whose writings were published after their deaths; these works give a personal view of what life was like for these women. While their experiences can’t be extrapolated to all women of the time, they do offer general insights into the period.

This short review can’t do justice to the depth of material offered in “A Woman is Responsible for Everything.” This impressive work of scholarship is easy to read, although the writing is dry as befits a scholarly work. The amount of detail offered can almost feel overwhelming at times. However, the insights offered by Kaplan and Carlebach are eye-opening for those who think that Jewish women were not active participants in Jewish life. This work is highly recommended for anyone interested in Jewish history.

Jews, toys and childhood

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Toys, comic books and comic strips: Immigrant Jews played a large role in the development of all three industries in the United States. In his “Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America” (W. W. Norton and Company), Michael Kimmel notes that Jewish immigrants – the ones who never experienced a carefree childhood – helped create the modern version of childhood that came into being during the 20th century. He boldly claims that his work “is the story of the creation of the idealized childhood that these poor, often Yiddish-speaking, tenement-dwelling children of immigrants from Russia and eastern Europe never got to live for themselves. They imagined a world where other children could have the experiences they lacked – and in doing so, they transformed America.”

While I’m not certain that Kimmel proves that these men and women were deliberately seeking to change childhood, that doesn’t take away from his entertaining and informative work. “Playmakers” contains an almost overwhelming number of stories about those who participated in these industries and those who considered them dangerous. It might surprise people to learn that the teddy bear was thought to corrupt young girls, making them unfit for motherhood, or that congressional hearings about comic books were held in the 1950s because comic books were thought to create juvenile delinquency.

Kimmel’s original plan was to just write about his own family: his great-great-uncle Morris Michton, the founder of the Ideal Toy Company, invented the teddy bear and later sold the popular Shirley Temple doll. However, the author soon came to realize that there was more to the story of toy makers than his family. What surprised him was how many immigrants formed their companies and offered toys ranging from baby dolls to action figures to games. Perhaps the best known of all of these is the Barbie doll, which is still so popular today that a live-action film featuring her was a box office hit recently.

Kimmel is correct in noting that it was only during the 20th century that childhood became a distinct period in a person’s life and development. He writes, “A century ago children enjoyed little parental attention or warmth, had little time for play, and received little encouragement to express themselves. Childhood as a separate and distinct stage of life, one that required special attention, emerged as the product of economic and social shifts – declining birth rates, urbanization, educational reforms, labor reforms – that led to shifts in our ideas about child-rearing, child development, and proper parenting.” However, it seems that the Jews who were involved in creating the toys children played with and the comics they read were less

interested in creating a new version of childhood than with making a living in a country where antisemitism limited their opportunities.

One excellent example is the comic book industry. It’s clear from the comic book creators that Kimmel interviewed that they worked in that industry because more mainstream jobs in art were closed to Jews. Starting a small toy business was relatively easy then: the story of the teddy bear’s creation is an example. Kimmel’s great-great-uncle Morris owned a candy store and, inspired by a tale of President Teddy Roosevelt and a bear hunt, had his wife Rose stitch together a small stuffed bear. The plan was not to sell it, but just display it in the store window. However, customers asked if they could buy one. Morris first turned to local tailors to make the bears until he realized how much money he could make if even more were produced. He contacted a local manufacturing firm and what began as one doll turned into an industry whose product is still actively sought by parents and children today.

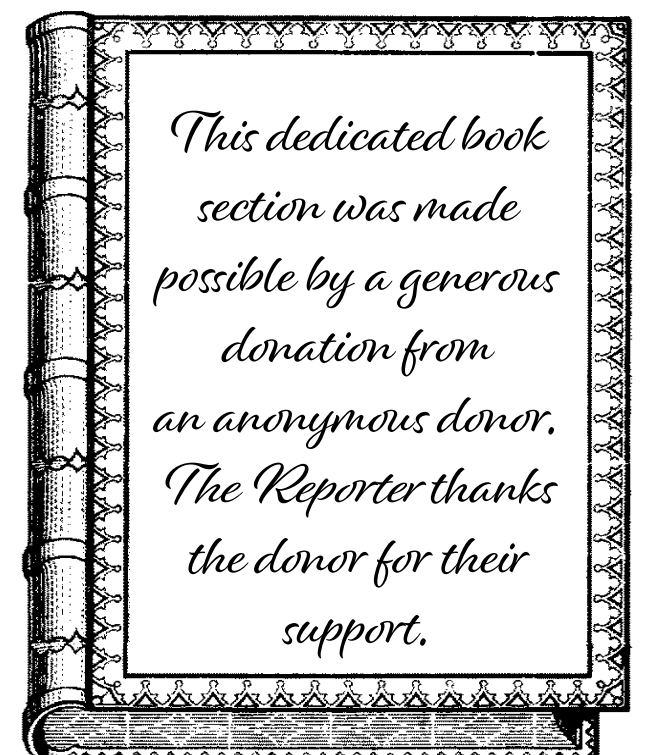
It feels ironic that Jews dominated the toy industry, when, even today, the largest number of their products are sold during the Christmas season. Many of these toys were originally sold in department stores; to add to the irony, many of those stores were also owned by Jews. Kimmel notes that “Yiddish Jews created the toys and dolls and manufactured them, and an enormous sales force hawked them to the buyers at department stores owned by German Jews – all to ensure that the Christmas season would be at least as happy for Jews as it was for gentiles.”

Creativity played a role in the toy makers’ success. They managed to survive through embargoes during two world wars that prevented materials they needed from entering the U.S., as well as the Great Depression. That meant finding new materials to use and ways to make their dolls/toys stand out from the crowd. Kimmel narrates how they sought to manufacture new products, for example dolls and action figures with bendable limbs, and baby dolls that had the ability to cry, wet a diaper or speak. New types of toys were also invented: Silly Putty was originally seen as a possible replacement for rubber during World War II. It proved an unsuccessful substitute. An unnamed toy store owner came across the material and successfully marketed it.

Readers of comic books and comic strips will be interested in the sections that focus on these industries. What was surprising to this reviewer is the creators of what could be considered the least Jewish of these works – the Archie comic books and the Li’l Abner comic strip – were produced by Jews. While admitting that the Archie comics are not about Jews, Kimmel does see a connection between Li’l Abner and Jews: he writes that “what, after all, was Appalachia but a mountainous area filled with little hamlets of strange folk traditions and meager living – a region of

shtetls with a Southern accent, an American Pale of the Settlement? At least that was what Al Capp created with his family of rural hillbillies from Dogpatch, the Yokums. Pappy Yokum was Tevye with a drawl and fewer teeth.” There is also a discussion about whether Popeye should be considered Jewish, something I never considered, but the author notes that the character was based on Frank “Rocky” Fiegel, a real-life Polish Jewish immigrant who “had massive forearms, a deformed eye, and a ubiquitous pipe in his mouth.” Of course, there is a discussion about whether or not Superman is a member of the tribe, although Kimmel notes, that while created by Jews, Batman is clearly a Gentile.

Readers may argue whether Kimmel proves his thesis, but the pleasures of “Playmakers” are so many that for most the argument will be irrelevant. It helps that I love reading about toys, comic books and comic strips, but the lives of those involved in creating them are also interesting. Kimmel does successfully show how the Jewish immigrants he writes about looked to assimilate into American culture, although whether they realized that they were playing a major role in creating that culture is open to debate. However, what they created still affects not only children, but the adults who buy these toys and books for their children and, sometimes, for themselves.





Celebrating Jewish Literature

Slavery in Medieval Egypt

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

It can be difficult for contemporary readers to comprehend just how integral slavery was to ancient and medieval civilizations. That was certainly true for Medieval Egypt during the 11th-13th centuries. As Craig Perry shows in his “Slavery and the Jews of Medieval Egypt: A History” (Princeton University Press), Muslims, Christians and Jews living in Egypt during that time owned slaves. However, due to writings found in the Cairo *geniza* (a repository for documents located in a room in a Cairo synagogue), there is a greater record of Jewish owners of slaves and those Jews who were slaves than for Muslims or Christians.

Perry, an associate professor at the Department of Middle Eastern and Asia Studies at Emory University, focuses on what he calls urban slavery: those owners and slaves who lived in cities since most of the information available focuses on them. He also explores the status Jews held in Muslim society: while subordinate to Muslims, Jews were a protected class, but with limited rights. That meant that Jews were allowed to own slaves; however, they and Christians could not own slaves who were Muslim. That included slaves who converted to Islam: that did not negate their status as slaves, but they now had to be sold to fellow Muslims.

The type of slavery found in Egypt was different from that practiced later in the Americas. For example, slaves who were part of a Jewish household were expected to

follow Jewish law, at least the limited ones that the free Jewish women of the household observed. Having slaves meant that these women did not have to go out in public to perform tasks, something that led to an increase in their status. Perry notes there seem to be far more female slaves than male slaves in these households. He posits one reason may have been that more females were available: they were more likely to be captured during slave raids on neighboring territories and, within Egypt, parents were more likely to sell their daughters than they were their sons.

The treatment of the slave depended on the household. There were Jews who freed their slaves and provided for them afterward, helping them find a trade or arrange a marriage. However, their lives were not always easy: many of them are found on the lists of those who needed charity from communal funds. Those who did convert were accepted as Jews, although their status as a freed person was known. Their children were known as the child of a freed person. However, there was no trace of this status in the following generation: by the third generation that label disappeared. This led to a more multicultural Jewish community than one might have expected since some of these slaves were not native Egyptians. Perry notes, “What we do know about the fortunes of freed people shows that their lives largely resembled those of free people in their variety and in the many factors that shaped their life chances.”

Although Muslim, Christian and Jewish clergy disap-

proved of the use of slaves for sexual purposes, members of all three religions were willing to risk community disapproval and punishment by using slaves as sexual partners. Some slaves were traded and brought to Egypt just for this purpose. Others were members of households bought for different reasons, but who attracted the attention of men living there. While there are records of arguments and legal battles between husbands and wives due to men’s use of a slave for sex, the records are far more sparse when it comes to the use of violence against slaves. Instances of that seem to have gone largely unrecorded.

Although Perry acknowledges the irony contemporary readers might feel about slave-owning Jews celebrating their release from slavery during the holiday of Passover, Jews of that time period may not have felt the same. Slavery is not outlawed in the biblical text, only limited in its scope. Since slavery was ubiquitous during this time period, it might have felt strange to suggest that it should be abolished. Slavery was simply part of everyday life.

“Slavery and the Jews of Medieval Egypt” is a scholarly work, rather than a popular work of nonfiction. However, Perry keeps jargon to a minimum, which will make his book appeal to the non-scholar. The author also offers a handy glossary of Arabic and Hebrew words readers will encounter in the text. Those interested in Jewish life during the medieval period will surely discover much that challenges or changes their idea about Jewish life during that time.

Family is complicated

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Family dynamics and relationships are complicated in ways that other connections often are not. One wrong move can forever sour a connection, leaving at least one person bereft when their mistake/misstep is never forgiven. Two recent works of fiction explore different family dynamics: “This Is Not About Us” by Allegra Goodman (The Dial Press) and “Evening Begins the Day” by Jessica Brilliant Keener (Koehler Books). Readers may have different reactions to the characters’ actions depending on whether they believe someone’s offense was justified or should be forgiven.

“This Is Not About Us” is labeled fiction, which fits because it is really a collection of stories, rather than a novel, about different members of the Rubenstein family. The first story, “Apple Cake,” sets up the conflict that underlies many of the following stories. Sylvia and Helen are at a loss when their baby sister, Jeanne, is dying. Juggling their personal preference with what they each think their sister would want, one sister does something the other considers unforgivable and afterward wants nothing to do with her. What was done may surprise readers so it won’t be revealed here, but it will certainly lead to differing opinions about the offense. What makes this story stand out is that Goodman also offers the point of view of the dying sister, which allows readers to see how her concerns differ from those of the relatives visiting her.

An outsider’s point of view makes the story “Wendybird” an excellent reflection on family dynamics. Jill is married to Wendy, Helen’s daughter. Helen’s other daughter, the unmarried Pam, has mental health issues and has ignored a gift sent to her by her sister. Jill finds Helen and the rest of the family suffocating,

but spends time with them to protect Wendy from parents who prefer and baby her younger sister. In a wonderful section, Jill proves just how much she cares about her wife. This story also contains a brilliant line about Jewish life: that imagining disasters is a “Jewish superpower.”

“This Is Not About Us” contains 17 stories, so it is impossible to write about them all, but every story was consistently well done, with not only interesting moments, but great insight into the characters. Anyone who thinks their family drama is special will be particularly interested in “Redemption Song,” when Jeanne’s sons Steve and Dan show just how different are their ideas of how Passover should be celebrated. “The Days of Awe” contains a very moving visit to a cemetery, while also showing how the holiday is not particularly meaningful to the youngest members of the family. Goodman’s ability to capture moments of joy, sorrow and regret is extremely impressive.

While “This Is Not About Us” is a collection of short stories, “Evening Begins the Day” is a novel that offers the viewpoints of a variety of characters. The plot mostly centers around two women: Rachel Cohen, who learns that her husband has been having an emotional affair (that means there was no sexual contact), and Cynthia Meyers, whose seemingly perfect family has its own problems. When Rachel decides to separate from her husband so she can explore whether she wants to remain married, she moves into a rental house by the Meyers. The two women know each other – Cynthia works for a corporate giving firm that has funded Rachel’s latest educational project – but they are not friends.

Cynthia’s life is upended when she comes home to find her daughter, Lauren, unresponsive. Lauren,

who has been skipping school because she has been involved in political causes, has also been smoking pot and drinking, which left Cynthia worried that Lauren had overdosed. Cynthia’s 911 call leads to a breakdown in family relationships, with Lauren resenting her mother and Cynthia’s husband, David, being less than supportive of his wife.

David does have a practical suggestion about how all of them might be able to connect to their feelings: the synagogue is offering information on counting the *omer*, the days between Passover and Shavuot. The version they use is a *kabbalistic* one, which offers different ways of thinking about the world and themselves. While the Meyers family tries to reconnect by counting together, their efforts are not always a success. Rachel does her own count, even going on a retreat focusing on the *omer*; the small group of women there share the difficulties they have faced in life and how they deal with them. Rachel uses this time to decide whether her marriage is worth saving. Unfortunately, the counting of the *omer* didn’t always feel integral to the plot; it felt more tacked on, rather than part of the characters’ religious lives.

“Evening Begins the Day” lends itself to discussion as readers decide which characters are following the correct path. I had a great emotional response to the work because I felt Cynthia’s family was unfair to her. Yes, she is far from perfect, but no one seems to understand how her reactions are based on her early life. Plus, she was afraid her daughter was dying: how wrong was it to call 911? That seems to be something neither Lauren nor David understand. However, my reaction just shows how involved I was with the plot and the characters. That makes this an excellent work for book clubs.

Hollywood and Nazis in fact and fiction

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

During the past decade, an increasing number of books – fact and fiction – have been published that offer information about the Nazi movement in the United States during the 1930s and early 1940s. Several discuss how Germany hoped these groups would sabotage the American military industry in preparation for a Nazi takeover of the U.S. government. The books also include lists of those their agents hoped to assassinate, many of whom were Jewish and, at least in California, part of the motion picture industry. Two recent works discuss this time period: “Hollywood vs. Nazis: How the Movie Studios Took on Nazis Infiltrating Los Angeles” (Citadel Press) is Michael Benson’s second nonfiction work focusing on Nazi activity in the U.S. (*The Reporter* review of his first work, “Gangsters vs. Nazis” can be found at www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-criminals-or-heroes.) “Midnight Patriots: An Einstein Chaplain Thriller” by Paul Levine (Herald Square Publishing) is the author’s second novel featuring real-life characters who sought to stop the Nazis. (*The Reporter* review of Levine’s first novel in the series can be found

at www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-gangsters-detectives-and-spies?entry=509021.) What prompted me to review these works together is that they both contain fictional and nonfictional elements: Benson notes that he created some of the dialogue in his book, along with adjusting the chronology to make the work easier to read. Levine includes a section at the end of this work explaining which characters and events are real, and which are from the author’s imagination.

Many books about Hollywood’s actions during this period suggest that the studios were not actively involved with stopping the Nazi menace. Those writers felt the studios were more concerned with the income they received from their films being shown in Nazi Germany than they were about any threats to the U.S. The studios were also willing to censor films that criticized Germany or the Nazis so those works could continue to be screened. Benson disagrees with that assessment, not so much about the films not openly criticizing Germany, but whether studio executives helped fight against Nazis in the U.S. He believes their secret monetary support of Nazibusters, as he calls those agents who risked their

lives to work against the Nazis, proves they supported those actively working to stop the Nazi menace.

The head of the Nazibusters was Leon Lawrence Lewis, a 45-year-old Jewish lawyer, whom the Nazis would come to consider the most dangerous Jew in Los Angeles. Benson writes of the numerous spies – male and female – whom Lewis recruited to infiltrate groups that were considered dangerous. Most of these groups were not publicly known as supporting the Nazi cause. Rather, they portrayed themselves as patriotic Americans of German extract who wanted to keep the U.S. from becoming involved in European politics. Many offered antisemitic material, though, that said that Jews ruled the U.S., some even going as far as suggesting that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was Jewish. Since they were not openly supportive of Nazi Germany, many in law enforcement saw them as legitimate patriots.

However, even when these groups were known to be pro-Nazi, the Los Angeles Police Department and other law enforcement agencies did not originally see them as a problem. In fact, law enforcement focused

See “Nazis” on page 8



Celebrating Jewish Literature

Finding their place in the world

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

The wide range of novels for Jewish teens and tweens in the 21st century feels amazing to those of us who grew up when there were little to no works for this age group that featured Jewish characters. The novels in this review focus on three different time periods: World War II, the early 1950s and contemporary times. However, they all have something in common: these young adults are looking for ways to live a meaningful life.

“Somewhere in Nowhere”

At first glance, Steven Gellman’s “Somewhere in Nowhere” (NineStar Press) looks like a light rom-com about Simon Bugg’s senior year of high school. Unfortunately, he’s at a new school for just that year after his family moved when one of his moms found her dream job in a different town. Simon faces two problems: he hasn’t been able to tell his moms that he is gay and he made a mess of his first date with the cute PJ whom he met in drama class. To add to his difficulties, Simon’s dad, who hasn’t been actively involved in his life for years, moves back to the area and wants to have a relationship with him. Simon’s mother is also spending way too much time at her new job, leaving her exhausted and with little time for him and his other mom.

However, the novel ultimately deals with far more serious topics not limited to the panic attacks that Simon starts having at 11:22 pm every night, which lead him to worry he is going to die. Since he feels that anyone he tells will think he is crazy, he keeps the attacks to himself. But a variety of other events and actions – to reveal them would spoil the plot surprises – show not only the reason behind these attacks, but how Simon learns to deal with the unexpected tragedies that occur.

“Somewhere in Nowhere” is easy to read at first because readers will find themselves drawn to Simon and his friends – those from his new and old schools whose quirks are endearing and fun. Some of the later events in

the novel may disturb readers, though, so parents may want to read the work with their teen and discuss what occurs.

“Silver Wolves”

Although the publicity material mentioned that the main character in “Silver Wolves” (Seven Stories Press), Jerome Charyn’s first novel for teens, is Jewish, it is only late in the work that a Jewish connection is mentioned. However, since the novel is based on Charyn’s life as a teenager in the Bronx, readers get a view of working class Jews’ lives in the 1950s, and those Jewish teens who formed gangs to protect themselves and their neighborhood.

Jonah Salt’s life is not an easy one: His father is unable to work due to an accident and mental health issues. His mother supports the family by working two shifts at a candy factory. Jonah’s older brother, Michael, had formed a gang called the Silver Wolves, but, after getting into trouble, was given the choice of jail or the Army. Although he chose the Army, a fight with an officer means that Michael is now serving a 20-year sentence in a military prison. That leaves Jonah to keep the gang going, something even the local police support since the gang protects the neighborhood and helps those in need.

Jonah’s life becomes even more complicated when he is released from juvenile detention after being arrested on a burglary charge: he is given a chance to attend the High School of Music and Arts because of his drawing talent. There he meets Merle, a smart and talented student who is confined to a wheelchair. Welcomed by her rich family who offer Jonah a vision of a different type of life, Jonah is torn between the two worlds to which he belongs: the school and the Silver Wolves. His decision becomes even more difficult when rival gangs enter the Silver Wolves’ territory, and begin to terrorize and steal from shop owners. Should he pursue the dream that would take him out of his neighborhood to a new life, or does he have an obligation to his neighbors?

The prose in “Silver Wolves” is blunt and plain with

few descriptions, but that fits Jonah’s first person narrative. While the novel’s ending did not feel totally convincing, the work is said to mirror the author’s life, and it does do an excellent job showing the hardships and heartbreaks of poverty.

“The Secret Buttons”

While the other two novels in this review are aimed at teens, “The Secret Buttons” by Ellen Shapiro with illustrations by Caterina Baldi (Visual Language Books) offers a work for the slightly younger tween crowd. The work focuses on 12-year-old Anni Blum and her younger sister Rosie, who are able to leave Nazi Austria by pretending to be non-Jews traveling to England to work as domestic workers. It’s difficult for the girls to leave their home, but their father is in a concentration camp and the future of their mother and grandmothers, who must remain in Germany, is unknown.

The girls are greeted in England by relatives they’ve never met before. That family has moved from its city home to a country cottage because it’s safer there. Anni and Rosie are expected to help with household chores while also attending school with their cousin Ronald. Although they know some English, that is only partly helpful as they try to understand unfamiliar words and customs. They also face prejudice because of their Austrian accents. However, it’s not just adjustment to English culture they must deal with: the girls’ parents were not religious and, while their British relatives are not Orthodox, Anni and Rosie learn to celebrate Passover during a wonderfully moving section of the novel.

“The Secret Buttons” is based on a real story, but to offer more details would spoil the surprises. The design of the book is lovely: the publisher uses a variety of font styles and italics to differentiate between events occurring in England and those that took place in Austria. This charming work will appeal to tweens interested in World War II as seen from Great Britain.

Changing the past and present

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

What if you could change one thing in your life? You could prevent an illness or an accident and save the life of someone you love. Or make a different decision about who to marry or what job to take. The catch is that you only have one do-over. That means you have no way of knowing whether you’ll regret making the change you’ve made because your life didn’t get better. Or you’ll later wish you’d waited because you need that redo to undo something else. Or, perhaps, you’ll wait too long and then regret the change you didn’t make. These questions underlie Rebecca Serle’s latest novel “Once and Again” (Atria Books). All of Serle’s works contain an aspect of magical realism: everything in her novels could happen in real life except for one important element. In the case of Lauren, her mother Marcella and her grandmother Sylvia, it’s that they received a silver ticket when they were born, one that allows them one do-over.

The women received this gift because of an act of kindness Lauren’s great-grandmother Irina performed for an old, poor woman. The family has been living in Ukraine at

a time of increasing anti-Jewish violence and the first ticket was used to undo a horrific event. Irina kept the wooden box the ticket came in even after she used it and moved to the United States. With the birth of each new generation (one daughter and one ticket for each of the women), a new ticket appeared. Lauren knows that Marcella used the ticket to save the life of Dave, her husband and Lauren’s father, after a car accident. Sylvia not only refuses to say what she did with her ticket, but has never revealed the identity of Marcella’s father or the reason for her frequent disappearances when Marcella was growing up.

The novel focuses on two different relationships: Lauren’s with her husband, Leo, and the connections/disconnections between the three generations of the women in her family. Lauren loves Leo, but their marriage has hit a rocky path because her attempts to become pregnant have not been successful. Leo is ready for them to stop the fertility treatments because he feels the treatments are negatively impacting their life. However, Lauren is unable to give up her dream for a child and worries one reason she can’t conceive is because she was in her 30s

when she finally married. Then Leo is offered a chance to advance his career, but needs to live in New York City for several months in order for that to happen. Rather than travel with him to New York, Lauren decides to spend the summer with her parents and grandmother at the house in Malibu in which she grew up. While there, her old flame, Stone, reappears. He returned to Malibu to spend time with his stepmother who is dying. Stone seems to regret their break-up, saying that maybe he should have never moved away. That leaves Lauren wondering about the decisions she made then, including the fact that she might have been able to have a baby if she and Stone had stayed together.

The novel’s other focus is on the two mother/daughter relationships. Readers learn about the characters from three different points of view, although the main focus is on Lauren. For example, while Lauren knows Marcella loves her, she wonders at times if her mother actually likes her. Marcella is so focused on Dave, the husband she almost lost and the health problems he still faces, that she seems distant and uninterested in Lauren’s life, at least, from Lauren’s point of view. Unlike many children, Lauren wants her mother to pry into her life, but also can’t bring herself to talk to her mother about her fertility problems. Marcella, on the other hand, has tried to provide Lauren with the stability that was missing in her childhood, but, at the same time, offer her the freedom that Sylvia experienced.

While this might sound as if the novel doesn’t contain a great deal of plot, the opposite is true. All these character interactions lead to several plot twists and turns, ones that may take readers by surprise. Readers will then find themselves re-examining their reaction to the different characters’ actions. It will also leave them wondering about some additional questions the novel raises: If you use the ticket to correct a mistake, does that mistake still count? If you have to return far into the past to change something, what might you lose as well as gain? Are there times when what seems like an unhappy ending is the best choice you can make?

“Once and Again” is a powerful, beautifully written work. Serle does an excellent job portraying her characters’ emotions and making them feel real to readers. The novel also offers a great deal to ponder, making it an excellent work for book clubs. Fans of Serle will not be disappointed and readers new to her work will find much of interest.

The Reporter reviews of three of Serle’s previous novels can be found at www.thereportergroup.org/opinion/off-the-shelf-family-friends-and-love-by-rabbi-rachel-esserman-362915; www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-reviewing-the-past-9-9-22; and www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-dealing-with-life-and-romance.

Contemporary and Victorian thrills and chills

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

When contemplating writing this review, I wondered how to define the thriller genre, as opposed to other genres that also feature murders. One definition I found noted that these works fall somewhere between a traditional murder mystery and a horror novel. I certainly get the comparison to mysteries because most thrillers do contain a murder that needs to be solved. The horror aspect could be considered because, even if a murder takes place at the beginning of the book, another murder or something equally horrible will almost certainly occur. However, rather than seeking to scare a reader, a thriller focuses on creating suspense and keeping readers turning pages. That is definitely true for two recent thrillers: “The Last Time We Saw Her” by Jaclyn Goldis (Emily Bestler Books) and “The Dreadfuls” by A. Rae Dunlap (Kensington Books).

Regular readers of this column know that I’ve read and reviewed the last three novels written by Goldis.* Those who enjoyed her previous works will be asking one question: has she done it again (meaning produced an incredibly suspenseful book filled with interesting characters and a great plot)? My simple answer: yes!

(I would add a few more exclamation points, but they would just be deleted by my editor because the newspaper’s style only allows one.) I do have one request for those of you planning to put the paper down now to order the book: please come back to read about the second, also excellent, book featured in this review.

Goldis always includes a Jewish element in her works and, in this case, most of her main characters attended a Jewish camp together in the United States. However, 10 years ago, when a chosen few took part in a heritage trip to the Azores, one camper, Sydney, disappeared. All that remained was a great deal of blood, but her body was never found. The police were unable to solve the mystery of what occurred, although many assumed that Olivia, Sydney’s sister, was responsible.

The campers and counselors are once again on the island a decade later because Sydney’s father has restored the local synagogue and is holding a memorial service in his daughter’s honor. One counselor has asked those attending to take part in a documentary about the death, hoping that someone will drop a hint

See “Chills” on page 8

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Celebrating Jewish Literature



Jewish fantasy and horror

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

My plan had been to review two fantasy novels. Although some fantasy novels take place in totally make-believe worlds, others alternate between this world and alternate realms. I knew that was what I would find in “The Kingdom of Almonds” by Ariel Kaplan (Erewhon Books), the third and concluding book in “The Mirror Realm Cycle.” The novel offers a Sephardic fantasy slant: it begins with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain during the Inquisition and continues in both our realm and a mirror realm, with the characters seeking to stop the destruction of both worlds. The surprise came during my reading of what I thought would be the second fantasy novel: “Odessa” by Gabrielle Sher (Little Brown and Company) takes place in Russia in 1905 and contains one of my favorite fantasy elements: a golem. However, it soon became clear that the work belongs to the horror genre because of the horrific and terrifying events that occur, only some of which are supernatural.

“The Kingdom of Almonds” opens with a six-page list of main characters and geographical locations, and concludes with a two-page glossary of Jewish terms. Since it’s been a year and a half since I read the second book in the trilogy, I had some difficulty remembering all the characters and the complex plot lines the author was juggling. That means this is definitely not a stand-alone novel: readers would do well to read the earlier books before attempting this one.

While the majority of this work takes place in the Mirror World, what happens there affects both worlds. Two of the most important characters – Toba and Naf-taly – originally came from our world and left Spain when the Jewish population was expelled. However, when they unexpectedly entered the Mirror World, they learned that they were part human/part Mazik, something which allows them to perform magic. However, Tarses, a full-blooded Mazik, who is also Toba’s father, schemes to control both worlds and is willing to kill anyone and everyone who tries to stop him. Toba and her friends see only one way of preventing his cruel reign: raise the city of Luz, which is under the sea in both worlds, so its rightful king can stop Tarses.

This summary, of course, does not do justice to the complex plot because it is impossible to list all the characters and their relationships and actions in this short review. Jewish fantasy elements include the Ziz (a gigantic bird) and the Leviathan (sea serpent). The

Mirror World also offers other Jewish elements, such as a wedding that greatly resembles a Jewish one, the use of a *get* (divorce document) and referring to God as Hashem.

Readers of the first two novels will be glad to know that the action and suspense continue here, as does the development of the characters, although the emphasis in his book is on the former rather than the latter. As for the ending, the author found a way to tie all the elements together in a very satisfying way. Those who loved the first books won’t need much convincing to read the trilogy’s conclusion. I envy those who now have the opportunity to read all three books together since they don’t have to wait years to learn how the plot is resolved.

While most of the action in “The Kingdom of Almonds” has no connection to Jewish history beyond the expulsion from Spain, the events in “Odessa” are informed by real life. In fact, readers may debate whether those actions are the true horror offered by the novel. The work offers three points of view: Frieda and Mordechai, who are married, and their daughter, Yetta. Both Frieda and Mordechai are afraid that their little shtetl will be attacked by Cossacks, since pogroms are occurring across Russia. However, they differ on what they should do. Frieda wants them to emigrate, but Mordechai believes they should not be forced from their homes and that nowhere is truly safe for Jews. He plans with the community’s rabbi and other men in the shtetl on ways to protect their families, one of which is to create a golem.

The writing about the attack that comes is gory and graphic, but extremely close to what occurred in real life Russia. (There is one line said by the Russians that did feel anachronistic.) The horror element emerges after Yetta is killed in the attack and her soul is brought back to life in the body of a golem, after her human body is buried. (This is not how a golem is formed in the traditional myth: no human soul is needed since the golem is solely created from earth.) Mordechai believes she will help them defeat those who tried to destroy their community.

However, Mordechai soon learns there is another creature in the forest outside their town, one that seeks to kill both Jews and Christians. But that is not his only fear: the community believes another attack by the Cossacks is being planned. Is it time to leave, or is it time to fight? As Mordechai seeks to defend their shtetl, Frieda worries even more will die. Yetta may

prove to be the answer, but does she have the power and will to help them?

“Odessa” is an extremely well done novel and contains a great deal of suspense and action, in addition to leaving readers pondering just how they want the plot to develop. I was pleased with the novel’s resolution, which, while not completely what some readers might have hoped for, was realistic enough to satisfy.

*The Reporter reviews of the first two books in “The Mirror Realm Cycle” can be found at www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-angels-alternative-worlds-and-jewish-themes and www.thereportergroup.org/features/cjl-jewish-fantasy-dybbuks-and-mirror-realms.

Chills. Continued from page 7

about what really occurred. Of course, since this is a thriller, there are numerous twists and turns, secrets that need to be uncovered and a killer to reveal.

As with her previous novels, Goldis features a variety of narrators and numerous clues, but it’s up to readers to interpret what is actually happening since the author’s very clever clues are often ambiguous. However, it’s not just the plot that will keep readers turning pages (although there is plenty of it: I read the last 100 pages in one sitting because I had to know what happened). I found myself rooting for characters not to be the murderer, even though, yes, some of these people got under my skin. For example, I really, really didn’t want... well, you didn’t really think I’d reveal the name, but I really, really, really not only didn’t want the person to be the murderer, but also not to have anything bad happen to them. (Again, you didn’t think I would use a pronoun that would make it easy to figure out which character that was.)

If you are a fan of Goldis or thrillers, I assume you’ve already decided to read the book. I’m planning on passing my copy to a friend, mostly because I can’t wait to talk to someone about the novel. That way I won’t have to worry about spoiling any of the many surprises.

While I have read all of Goldis’ previous works, I had not read anything by Dunlap. That is going to change because, even before I finished her novel, I’d already ordered a copy of her first work, “The Resurrectionist.” While it sounds strange to say that a book that features Jack the Ripper as a character contains some very funny parts, the work’s combination of humor and thrills made it fun and exciting reading. Admittedly Victorian-era England was not a wonderful place for a girl who prefers reading penny dreadful novels about murder to learning appropriate societal manners. That’s why Adelaide (Dell), the novel’s narrator, is sentenced to Whitechapel Hall Reform School. Well, to be fair, she did steal books, but only after her uncle burned those she owned, including ones left to her by her late mother. At least she makes one friend, Pippa. However, life at the school is boring, until Jack the Ripper starts killing people. Dell believes that, with all the skills she’s learned from reading penny dreadful detectives, she and Pippa will solve the crimes and uncover the murderer.

While Dell and Pippa are not Jewish, they are befriended by Noah, the son of a Jewish butcher, whose parents’ store supplies the reform school with meat. Since the police cannot believe someone British could be the Ripper, they look to the Jewish community for a suspect and, even when one man is cleared, assume someone else Jewish must be responsible. That leads to antisemitic attacks on Jewish stores and homes by Londoners. Even the rabbinic council ponders finding someone to hand over to the police so the rest of the community will be spared.

Dell is a wonderful creation: she’s funny and delusional at the same time. If she had her way, her life would echo the penny dreadfuls she loves and is, at first, disappointed that the reform school is not the Gothic horror she hoped it would be. However, real life offers its own horrors as she, Pippa and Noah search for the murderer. While those hoping for a revelation about the real life Jack the Ripper will be disappointed, lovers of thrillers will not be: the work contains enough twist and turns and excitement to please. The humor is just a great bonus. Dunlap is definitely a writer to watch.

*The Reporter reviews of Goldis’ previous works can be found at www.thereportergroup.org/features/celebrating-jewish-literature-two-mysteries-and-a-thriller-441939; www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-an-almost-pi-a-manipulative-mystery-writer-and-a-cynical-lawyer; and www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-a-thriller-and-a-mystery.

Nazis. Continued from page 6

on what they saw as the communist threat against the U.S. Benson also writes of how members of the LAPD at that time were also members of the antisemitic Ku Klux Klan. At first, the police refused to recognize that some Nazis were planning to destroy American military sites and assassinate Jews connected to Hollywood. (Among those who were on the list were Charlie Chaplin, although there is a debate about whether he had Jewish ancestry. It was clear, though, that he was anti-Nazi.) German agents worked with local groups and supported plans to overthrow the federal government and destroy American democracy. Fortunately, after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declared war on Germany, these threats were taken far more seriously.

“Hollywood vs. Nazis” is a popular history, rather than a scholarly work. The prose is newspaper style and the writing breezy. Each chapter is divided into short sections, each with its own headline, for easy reading. That means this nonfiction work reads as if it were a thriller because its focus is on action, rather than analysis. This is not a complaint because the book managed to be page-turning and educational at the same time.

While Benson’s work is clearly nonfiction that contains some fictional elements, “Midnight Patriots” is fiction that contains nonfictional elements. What ties both works is the Nazi threat to Albert Einstein and Chaplin, and their actions to prevent that threat from being successful. The two men were friends in real life, although it’s doubtful that they actually fought against Nazi spies. This second book in the series takes place in 1940 after Einstein and Chaplin has successfully prevented Nazi agents in Hollywood from assassinating the heads of movie studios and other prominent Jews.

However, that makes them even greater targets for Nazi supporters. One agent plans to assassinate Chaplin while a different one looks to kidnap Einstein and send him back to Germany. To complicate matters, the U.S. is hoping Einstein will be willing to help create a powerful bomb that the Army believes the Germans are already working on. Chaplin has his own problems, including trying to convince Charles Lindbergh, whom the Nazis want to run for president because he is sympathetic to Germany, that the U.S. should support England.

As if this wasn’t enough plot, the novel also features Mickey Cohen, a real-life gangster who first threatened Chaplin (for having an affair with a powerful man’s mistress) and who is now charged with protecting Einstein. Although this flamboyant gangster may not be someone readers would normally like or admire, he comes across here as almost a sweetheart and someone for whom to cheer. To add to the complications, all these characters are together on a train traveling to Los Angeles. That includes the potential kidnapper and the assassin.

Levine does an excellent job creating suspense, not an easy thing to do when readers with any knowledge of history know that Chaplin was not assassinated nor was Einstein kidnapped. What makes the book fun is that the author also acknowledges his characters’ flaws, particularly those of Chaplin, who, although married, seems willing to sleep with almost any attractive woman he meets. The debate for Einstein, who is a pacifist, is whether the Nazi threat of a bomb is enough for him to help the U.S. develop one of its own. Levine also offers insights into the mind of the Nazi spy and his reasons for supporting the German cause.

The work concludes with a section offering information about which characters are taken from real life and which are fiction. That means the work does offer historical information about the time period. However, lovers of thrillers may care more about the excitement and suspense than whether a particular event took place. Those who read the first novel in the series will not be disappointed. It’s also certain to win Levine new fans.

Rabbi Rachel Esserman’s previous book reviews can be found on The Reporter’s website under “Features” at: www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews.



PJ Library held Sheep and Shmears event



The PJ Library, sponsored locally by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, held a "Sheep and Shmears" event at the Miller family farm on May 31, with nearly 50 people attending. Above are some of the families who enjoyed the day.



Eliza Eggleston fed a sheep at the PJ Library's "Sheep and Shmears" event.



Elias and Eliana Miller, with their baby Dalia Miller, hosted the "Sheep and Shmears" event.



Elias Miller held a lamb for children to pet at the PJ Library's "Sheep and Shmears" event.

Legacy.....Continued from page 1

after the synagogue closed, community leaders ensured they would continue serving Jewish communities around the world. Two Torah scrolls were sent to Ukraine, one was donated to Hillel at Binghamton University, one was entrusted to Dov Gordon, and one found a permanent home at Congregation Kol Ami.

A special guest at the service was Gordon, who spoke about his long-standing connection to the Valley and the impact of the Penn York Jewish Community. Gordon shared how the Torah entrusted to him continues to be used in the Williamsport Jewish community and expressed gratitude for the community's support over the years. He reflected on how investments made by small Jewish communities often have far-reaching effects, strengthening Jewish life and leadership in places far beyond their geographic boundaries.

The donation of a *sefer* Torah scroll to Hillel at Binghamton University in 2019 was also highlighted as an example of how the legacy of the former Waverly synagogue continues to inspire new generations of Jewish students and leaders.

In reflections prepared for the occasion, Chernosky noted that the purpose of the Penn York Jewish Community extends beyond any single building or location. "Jewish community is never defined only by walls or buildings. We continue to exist because we continue to support Jewish life," he wrote.

The service concluded with an ONEG sponsored by the Penn York Jewish Community, providing members and guests an opportunity to celebrate the organization's history and its ongoing contributions to the region.

Today, the Penn York Jewish Community remains active through charitable projects, support of local food banks and libraries, sponsorship of community events, and partnership with Congregation Kol Ami. Through these efforts, members continue the work begun by earlier generations who first gathered in Waverly in 1939 to build a Jewish home for the Valley.

For more information about the Penn York Jewish Community, contact pennyorkjc@gmail.com.

Beth Herbst is treasurer of the Penn York Jewish Community.



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 **Jewish Federation**
of Greater Binghamton

Community Spotlight Chelsea Rego

The Reporter's "Community Spotlight" feature seeks to highlight community members and find out more about them. If you want to be among the participants, e-mail treporter@aol.com. Chelsea Rego is the executive director of Hillel at Binghamton.

◆ What is your hometown?

I grew up in Bricktown and Toms River, NJ, before heading to Boston, then Miami, and now Binghamton!

◆ What is your earliest Jewish memory?

My earliest Jewish memory is searching for the *afikomen* during Passover. At the time, finding it and winning felt like a huge victory.

◆ What is your favorite Jewish food or dessert?

My favorite Jewish food is my grandmother's matzah ball soup, may her memory be a blessing, which is comfort in a bowl and full of family memories.

◆ What is your favorite Jewish holiday?

My favorite Jewish holiday is Passover because it blends storytelling, tradition and family in such a meaningful way.

◆ What role does faith play in your life?

Faith shows up in my life through traditions, rituals and the intentional creation of core memories for my children, my family and the community I support.

◆ What has been the biggest influence on your Jewish identity?

The biggest influence on my Jewish identity has been the traditions I grew up with and now the opportunity to create those same meaningful experiences for others.

◆ What is your greatest achievement, or what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of how I have grown and advanced in my career in a relatively short amount of time while continuing to show up for my family.

◆ Do you have any children and/or pets?

I have two little ones who are my entire world.

◆ What are your hobbies?

In my free time, I enjoy weight lifting with my husband, who has been my workout partner since day one. We have been playing video games together since day two and love going to the movies, especially on opening days.

◆ What makes you happy?

What makes me happiest is spending time with my family and creating meaningful moments together.



Mid 2010s: Chelsea Rego and her husband, Reggie, posed at the gym after a workout, reflecting their shared commitment to fitness and healthy living.

◆ What do you like most about living in Binghamton?

Even though I have only been in Binghamton for nine months, I have come to appreciate the beautiful nature and the change of seasons. The mountains feel almost magical, especially after living in the flat land of Miami.

◆ Anything else you would like to share?

I feel grateful to be part of a community where I can help create connection, belonging and meaningful experiences for others.

Thank you for welcoming me and my family into this community with such warmth, kindness and open arms.



Chelsea and Reggie Rego's children, X and L (names withheld on request), participated in the family's Hanukkah candle lighting tradition. For the Rego family, the eight nights of Hanukkah are a time to celebrate Jewish heritage, spend time together and create lasting memories.

Dr. Edwin Ansel ("Ed") Bronsky, 93, of Salt Lake City, Utah, passed away peacefully on March 17, 2026, with his children at his bedside.



A devoted pediatric allergist, he cared for thousands of children and families, leaving a lasting impact on generations in the community.

Ed was the beloved husband of Marsha Flatow Bronsky for 59 years. He was a loving father to Dr. Sarah Bronsky (Rob Goodwin) and Dr. Stein Bronsky (Stacey Strock), and a proud grandfather to Zoe and Max Goodwin, and Rowan and Ryder Bronsky. Ed was pre-deceased by his brother, Dr. Donald Ansel Bronsky (2007) of Binghamton, New York, and was a beloved brother-in-law of Ms. Shirley Lang Bronsky, currently of Rye Brook, New York.

He had a remarkable knack for fostering and maintaining meaningful relationships with all those around him, connecting easily and genuinely with friends, patients, and community members alike. A dedicated supporter of the Jewish community, he was an active member of Congregation Kol Ami.

Ed had a deep and abiding love for nature. He found joy and renewal in the mountains and the desert alike, embracing skiing, hiking, camping, backpacking, and snowshoeing throughout his life. Whether in alpine settings or the quiet expanses of the desert, he was most at peace outdoors.

A lifelong learner, Ed remained curious and engaged with the world until the very end.

He will be remembered for his kindness, wisdom, nurturing spirit, intellectual curiosity, adventurous nature, and the many lives he touched.

Funeral services were held on Friday, March 20, 2026, at 1:20 p.m., at Congregation Kol Ami, 2425 E. Heritage Way, Salt Lake City.

Interment followed immediately after the funeral at Shaare Tzedek Cemetery, 1168 East 11th Avenue, Salt Lake City.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Ed's memory to Congregation Kol Ami's Ed Bronsky Memorial Fund.



Discovering the meanings of the 42 journeys

CANTOR ABBE LYONS, JEWISH CHAPLAIN, HILLEL AT ITHACA COLLEGE

In *parshat* Masei, in Numbers chapter 33, Moshe lists the 42 journeys of the Israelites from Egypt to the Plains of Moab by the Jordan River. “They set out from Ramses, and they encamped at Succot. They set out from Succot and encamped at Etham.” At first glance, this list of the 42 journeys might appear similar to other “lists” in the Torah such as genealogies, census listings and detailed listings of who brought which offerings on which days. Since graphic tables and charts were not easily created either digitally or in hard copy, these passages establish a formula to separate the specific details. The repetitive formula “they set out from A and encamped at B” can seem like a cookie cutter or a rubber stamp, stamping the same shape over and over again in the dough or on the page. In a way, it’s a kind of information overload, and it can be hard not to tune out as the repetition keeps going and going.

I learned from Hazzan Jack Kessler and Rabbi David

Zaslow that the meanings of the names in the 42 journeys can not only keep us tuned in, but also lead us to new levels of understanding. Suddenly, the Israelites are journeying to places like “Speaking freely before the hidden master,” “Towering Mouth of Freedom Caverns,” “Bitterness,” This-is-the-end Sea,” “Ultimate Revelation,” “Exploding Pomegranate,” “Beginning of Community,” “Goodness,” “Bottle Rattling Ghosts” and “Sporadic Moments of Transformation.” Each journey is unique and the place names don’t fit into a neat pattern. Taken together, these names reflect the dual nature of the overall path: both geographical and developmental. On a map, their overall route is winding and indirect. Likewise, the development of the Israelites from a mixed multitude of former slaves and other marginalized people into a purposeful community is not linear and doesn’t conform to a neat pattern.

And although the repetitive formula “they set out from A and encamped at B” repeats many times, the formula itself sometimes has variations, most notably when Aaron dies, though also:

“They set out from Alush and encamped at Rephidim; it was there that the people had no water to drink.”

Even when using a cookie cutter or rubber stamp, no two repetitions are identical. And even what seem like straight line journeys can be subject to variations large and small. And so, too, human beings, are not linear, are not cookie cutter. Despite our collective ideas that there is a norm, we humans are all, in our own way, quirky. We really are like a rainbow with our spectrums of physical and behavioral attributes. Even within groups that on the surface seem to be fairly homogenous, every person is unique. Some of our uniquenesses are known and accepted as “normal” See “Journeys” on page 11

Congregational Notes

Temple Israel

Orientation: Conservative
Rabbi: Micah Friedman
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Office hours: Mon.-Thurs., 8:30 am-3:30 pm; Fri., 8 am-3 pm
E-mail: office@templeisraelvestal.org
Website: www.templeisraelvestal.org
Service schedule: Tues., 5:30 pm; Fri., 5:30 pm; Sat., 9:30 am – all via Zoom and in-person
On Fridays and Tuesdays at 5:30 pm, services will be led by Rabbi Micah Friedman.
On Saturday, July 4, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Numbers 25:10-30:1 and the haftarah is Jeremiah 1:1-2:3. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:45 pm.

On Saturday, July 11, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Numbers 30:2-36:13 and the haftarah is Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:45 pm.

On Saturday, July 18, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22 and the haftarah is Isaiah 1:1-27. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9 pm.

On Saturday, July 25, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11 and the haftarah is Isaiah 40:1-26. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9 pm.

Upcoming events:
Tuesdays, July 21 and 28: “Torah and Our Times” class with Rabbi Micah Friedman at 4:30 pm.
Wednesday, July 15: Ritual Committee meeting at 10 am.
Sunday, July 26: Temple Israel 10th Anniversary event at noon.
Thursday, July 28: Tisha B’Av service and learning, time TBA.

Temple Beth El of Oneonta

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Cantor: David Green
Address: 83 Chestnut St., Oneonta, NY 13820
Mailing address: P.O. Box 383, Oneonta, NY 13820
Phone: 607-432-5522
E-mail: TBEOneonta@gmail.com
Regular service times: Contact the temple for days of services and times.
Religious School/Education: Religious School, for grades kindergarten through bar/bat mitzvah, meets Sunday mornings. For the schedule of services, classes and events, contact the temple.

Temple Brith Sholom

Affiliation: Unaffiliated
Address: P.O. Box 572, 117 Madison St., Cortland, NY 13045
Phone: 607-756-7181
President: Mark Suben
Cemetery Committee: 315-696-5744
Website: templebrithsholomcortland.org
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Temple-Brith-Sholom-114006981962930/
Service leaders: Lay leadership
Shabbat services: Services are usually on the third Friday of the month and led by a variety of leaders. Check the Facebook page or weekly e-mail for upcoming services. Contact the president to get on the e-mail list.
Religious School: Students are educated on an individual basis.
Temple Brith Sholom is a small equalitarian congregation serving the greater Cortland community. Congregants span the gamut of observance and services are largely dependent on the service leader. The Friday night siddur is “Likrat Shabbat.” The community extends a warm welcome to the Jewish student population of SUNY Cortland, as well as the residents of local adult residences. The Board of Trustees meets on the second Tuesday of the month.
Services and programs are held by Zoom usually on the third Friday of the month.

Beth David Synagogue

Affiliation: Orthodox Union
Rabbi: Zev Silber
Assistant Rabbi: Moshe Shmaryahu
Address: 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905
Phone: 722-1793
Rabbi's Office: 722-7514
Fax: 722-7121
Office hours: Tues. 10 am-1 pm; Thurs. 9 am-1 pm
Beth David e-mail address: bethdavid@stny.rr.com
Rabbi's e-mail: rabbisilber@stny.rr.com
Website: www.bethdavid.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/bethdavidbinghamton
Classes: Rabbi Zev Silber will hold his weekly Talmud class every Tuesday evening after services.

Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive
Address: 72 South Broad St., Norwich, NY 13815
Phone: 607-334-2691
Purpose: To maintain a Jewish identity and meet the needs of the Jewish community in the area.

Temple Beth-El of Ithaca

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Rabbi: Caleb Brommer
Address: 402 North Tioga St. (the corner of Court and Tioga streets), Ithaca, NY 14850-4292
Phone: 607-273-5775
Website: www.tbeithaca.org
President: Nommi Nadich
Director of Education and Engagement: Calle Schueler
Services: Friday 6:30 pm; Saturday 9:30 am, unless otherwise announced. Weekday morning minyan 7:30 am (9 am on Sundays and legal holidays).
Religious School/Education: September-May: Classes meet on Sundays from 9 am-noon and Wednesdays from 4-6 pm. Teen Midrasha meets Tuesdays from 6-8 pm.
Adult Ed.: Numerous weekly courses, several semester-long courses and a variety of lectures are offered throughout the year. Call the temple office, or email secretary@tbeithaca.org, for more information.

Congregation Tikkun v’Or

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
Address: PO Box 3981, Ithaca, NY 14852; 2550 Triphammer Rd. (corner of Triphammer and Burdick Hill), Lansing, NY
Phone: 607-256-1471
Website: www.tikkunvor.org
E-mail: info@tikkunvor.org
Presidents: Judy Saul and Eric Maroney, presidents__22@tikkunvor.org
Education Director/Administrative Coordinator: TBA
Bnai Mitzvah Coordinator: Michael Margolin
Services: All services currently on Zoom. E-mail info@tikkunvor.org for the times and links. Contemplative morning services every Tuesday from 8:30-9:30 am. Saturday mornings, Gan Shabbat and other special services at least once a month. Call for the weekly schedule.
Jewish Learning Experiences (JLE) for second through seventh grade classes meet on Sunday mornings. Sixth and seventh grades also meet on Wednesday afternoons. Family programs for kindergarten and first grade held monthly.
Adult Education: Offered regularly throughout the year. Check the website for details.

Friday, July 3, light candles..... 8:25 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, July 4..... 9:25 pm
Friday, July 10, light candles..... 8:22 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, July 11 9:22 pm
Friday, July 17, light candles..... 8:18 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, July 18..... 9:18 pm
Friday, July 24, light candles..... 8:12 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, July 25 9:12 pm
Friday, July 31, light candles..... 8:05 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, August 1 9:04 pm

Temple Concord

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
Rabbi: Leiah Moser
Address: 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton NY 13905
Office hours: Tues.-Fri., 10 am-2 pm
Phone: 607-723-7355
Office e-mail: TempleConcordBinghamton@gmail.com
Website: www.TempleConcord.com
Please contact Temple Concord for Zoom links.
Some services and programs are online only. For Zoom links, contact Temple Concord.
Services, ongoing classes and evening prayers at Temple Concord:
Fridays: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service (in person, on Zoom and on Facebook).
Saturdays: At 9:15 am, Torah study (in person and on Zoom) and at 10:30 am, Shabbat service (in person).
Wednesdays: At 5:30 pm, evening prayers (in person).
At 6 pm, adult education classes (in person and on Zoom).
Contact the temple office for more details.

Upcoming events:
Tuesday, July 21: At 7 pm, Social Action Committee meeting. For details, contact the temple office or committee Co-chairs Phyllis Weinstein (pweinste@stny.rr.com) or Debra Saltzman (dsmsw@yahoo.com).
Saturday, July 25: At 6 pm, Community Board Game Night in the social hall for all ages. Pizza and salad will be provided. RSVP to the temple office by Wednesday, July 22. Suggested donation is \$5 per person or \$20 per family to cover the cost of refreshments.
Sunday, July 26: The Temple Concord Social Action Committee has a partnership with Trinity Memorial Church at 44 Main St., Binghamton. Those interested help prepare and serve a Sunday lunch, meeting at Trinity Memorial at 10:30 am to prepare the meal, serve the meal at noon and finish up by 1 pm. The remaining future 2026 dates for the temple are September 27 and November 22.

Penn-York Jewish Community

B’nai B’rith: William H. Seigel Lodge
Purpose: To promote Jewish identity through religious, cultural, educational and social activities in the Southern Tier of New York and the Northern Tier of Pennsylvania, including Waverly, NY; Sayre, Athens and Towanda, PA, and surrounding communities.
For more information, contact the Penn-York Jewish Community at pennnyorkjc@gmail.com.

Rohr Chabad Center

Affiliation: Chabad-Lubavitch
Rabbi Aaron and Rivkah Slonim, Directors
E-mail: aslonim@binghamton.edu
rslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com
Address: 420 Murray Hill Rd., Vestal, NY 13850
Phone: 607-797-0015, Fax: 607-797-0095
Website: www.Chabadofbinghamton.com
Rabbi Zalman and Rochel Chein, Education
E-mail: zchein@Jewishbu.com, rchein@Jewishbu.com
Rabbi Levi and Hadasa Slonim, Downtown and Development
Chabad Downtown Center: 60 Henry St., Binghamton
E-mail: lslonim@Jewishbu.com, hslonim@Jewishbu.com
Rabbi Yisroel and Goldie Ohana, Programming
E-mail: yohana@Jewishbu.com, gohana@Jewishbu.com
Regular service times: Daily 7:30 am, Friday evening 6 pm, Shabbat morning 9:30 am, Maariv and Havdalah one hour after candle-lighting time, Sundays 9:30 am.
To join the mailing list, for up-to-date information on adult education offerings or to arrange for a private tutorial, for details concerning the Judaica shop and resource center, or for assistance through the Piaker Free Loan Society or Raff Maasim Tovim Foundation, call Chabad’s office at 797-0015.
Chabad will be holding pre-Shabbat virtual programs. For more information, visit www.JewishBU.com/S2020Partnership.



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BD Sisterhood held Donor Dessert

The Beth David Sisterhood Annual Donor Dessert meeting on May 13 featured Dan Miller, who spoke about Elise Hall, a woman saxophonist at the start of the 20th century who championed the saxophone as a classical instrument and commissioned compositions for saxophone. Miller played excerpts from several of those pieces.



Gina Santiago and Deborah Sliom prepare to take donations at the Beth David Sisterhood annual Donor Dessert meeting on May 13. (Photos by Cathy Velenchik)



L-r: Chaim Joy, Dora Polachek, Dan Dershowitz and Debby Gross enjoyed desserts at the Beth David Sisterhood Donor Dessert meeting.



Dan Miller played musical excerpts on the saxophone during his lecture about Elise Hall at the Beth David Sisterhood Donor Dessert meeting on May 13.



L-r: Eliyana Adler and Eileen Miller at the Beth David Sisterhood Donor Dessert meeting.



Dan Miller spoke about Elise Hall at the Beth David Sisterhood Donor Dessert meeting and played excerpts from saxophone compositions she commissioned.

At right, l-r: Gina Santiago, Judy Silber, Eliyana Adler and Eileen Miller enjoyed desserts at the Beth David Sisterhood Donor Dessert meeting.



At left: Dan Miller spoke about Elise Hall at the Beth David Sisterhood Donor Dessert meeting and played excerpts from saxophone compositions she commissioned.

BD Sisterhood held June meeting



Beth David Sisterhood held its final meeting of the season on June 10, when allen lutins spoke about the Marconi Tower, IBM, Link and AnSCO. Above: Guest speaker allen lutins. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)



Cathy Velenchik, president of Beth David Sisterhood conducted the business meeting. (Photo by Chaim Joy)



Toby Kohn read the opening prayer. (Photo by Chaim Joy)

At left: Stacey Silber, program chair and fund raising chair, prepared to give her reports. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)



At left, l-r: Josh Witter, Judy Silber, Eileen Miller, Stacey Silber and Gina Santago listened to speaker allen lutins. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)



Attendees listened to speaker allen lutins discuss IBM, Link, AnSCO and the Marconi Tower. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)

Koch.....Continued from page 2

robes, he did a TV stint presiding over “The People’s Court.” A movie maven, Koch rated films on an online series. Appearing in numerous network shows and films, Koch always portrayed his favorite character, himself. Post-mayoral, Koch also returned to the practice of law.

Koch, aged 88, died in 2013. He chose to be buried at the Episcopal Trinity Church cemetery in Washington Heights because it was the only cemetery in the borough with space for new graves, and Koch refused to leave his beloved Manhattan. When he purchased the plot, a

sign was installed at the section entrance announcing, “The Jewish Gate.” And, of course, Koch wrote the inscription on his gravestone. Following the Shema, it reads: “He was fiercely proud of his Jewish faith. He fiercely defended the City of New York, and he fiercely defended its people. Above all, he loved his country, the United States of America, in whose armed forces he served in World War II.” In conclusion, it echoes the final words of murdered American journalist Daniel Pearl: “My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish.”

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