



THE CENTRE CALL

GERMANTOWN JEWISH CENTRE

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Finding Inspiration

by Rabbi Adam Zeff

A Hasidic story: There was once a man who had never had the opportunity to get much of an education. He could neither read nor write, he knew no prayers, and he could make neither heads nor tails of even the simplest passage from the Torah, let alone brave the thickets of rabbinic argument

contained in the Talmud. His family's poverty had forced him to go to work at an early age, so in his brief time in the classroom, all he had managed to learn was the names of the Hebrew letters. The man was ashamed of his lack of learning, so he usually avoided going to the synagogue at all. But one Shabbat day, as he was sitting by the side of a stream under the shade of a tree, the man was overwhelmed with gratitude for the beauty of the world that God had created, and he was seized by the irresistible urge to express his feelings to God. In a frenzy, he sought out the nearest synagogue and quickly went inside.

Once in the door, he immediately felt his old timidity and shyness return. He saw the people around him rapidly reading complex prayers under their breath, and he heard from the *bimah* the gorgeous voice of the cantor, singing beautiful words of praise to the Holy One—or so he assumed, for he couldn't understand a word. How could he, such an ignorant, unlearned fellow, dare to open his mouth in this learned assembly? Look at all these people! He craned his neck and caught a glimpse of the rabbi, a tallit covering his head, lost, or so he guessed, in a world of prayer that the man couldn't even imagine. It was hopeless, thought the man. He should never have come.

The rabbi was lost, but not in prayer. Instead, he was struggling mightily on that Shabbat morning to find inspiration that would move his heart and his tongue to pray. He knew all of the words and all of the prayers; he even knew the more esoteric interpretations hidden in sacred texts that only a few could decipher. But on this day, none of the rabbi's knowledge could give him the inspiration he needed. He was struck dumb. He looked around him, ashamed. How could he dare to open his mouth in the midst of all of these good-hearted people,

standing together in prayer? It was hopeless, thought the rabbi. Better he should not have come to the synagogue at all.

Standing in the crowd, the man suddenly had a thought. He raised his eyes to the Holy Ark at the front of the synagogue and imagined himself standing before the very throne of God, even amidst the throng of people. Inspired, he opened his mouth and said, "O Holy One of Blessing! I long to praise you, but I don't know how. I don't know the right prayers, and I don't know the right words. But I do know the letters, the holy letters in which all of the prayers and the whole Torah is written. So these letters I offer to you. Please, put these letters in the right order to spell out all of the praise of you that I feel in my heart," and he began reciting, "*Alef, bet, gimmel...*"

At that moment, the rabbi, looking around the room from the *bimah*, saw the man standing in the *kahal*, a look of uttermost rapture on his face as he recited his prayer. Watching his mouth, the rabbi quickly realized that the man was simply reciting the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. But what *kavanah* he had! What beautiful intent he brought to the recitation of each letter! The rabbi was immediately filled with inspiration. He turned back to the ark and raised his voice, praying as he never had before, and by the merit of the prayer of the unlearned man, the rabbi's prayer rose to the Holy One of Blessing, and both of their prayers were heard on high.

The vicissitudes of our lives, as well as the troubles of the world in which we live, can make it hard for us to find the strength to go on. How can we continue to learn, to pray, to act when it sometimes seems our well of inspiration has run dry? One way, as the rabbi learns in the story, is to look around us. See our fellow travelers in this world, like us, lacking much, feeling hopeless, but nonetheless, at least on occasion, striving mightily with whatever resources they have at their disposal to go on hoping, to go on singing, to go on working for change in themselves and change in our world. We can find inspiration not necessarily in the successes, but in the strivings of those around us, and they can, in turn, find their inspiration when they see us striving too. May we continue to inspire and be inspired by each other as we find our way, letter by letter, toward a more holy world.

SHABBAT & HOLIDAYS

Please join us at 9:30 AM every Shabbat morning
in January and February for Beit Midrash.

January 4 & 5

- Shabbat Together
- Kol D'mamah with Leah Weisman

January 11 & 12

- Shabbat Warmup StoryTime @ Big Blue Marble
- Kabbalat Shabbat
- Charry Service: Mazal Tov to Evan Kean, son of Kirby Kean & Susan Grivaldi, on becoming Bar Mitzvah
- Shabbat Sha'baby
- Parashat ha-Shavua B'lvrit

January 18 & 19: Ralph Granger Memorial Shabbat

- Shabbat in the Neighborhood
- Charry Service: Ralph Granger Memorial Shabbat Service
- Musical Marching Minyan
- Ralph Granger Memorial Shabbat Kiddush & Program

January 25 & 26

- Kol Zimrah
- Minyan Masorti Anniversary Shabbat
- Charry Service: Mazal Tov to Maria Pulzetti on becoming Bat Mitzvah

February 1 & 2

- Speed Shabbat
- Havdallah Family JAM
- Charry Service: 2nd grade Siddur Ceremony

February 8 & 9

- Shabbat Together
- Charry Service: JDAIM Shabbat
- Shabbat Sha'baby
- Parashat ha-Shavua B'lvrit

February 15 & 16

- Shabbat Warmup StoryTime @ Big Blue Marble
- Kabbalat Shabbat
- Minyan Masorti & Charry Service (9:30 AM): Mazal Tov to Henry Charap, son of Lawrence & Ellyn Charap on becoming Bar Mitzvah
- Musical Marching Minyan

February 22 & 23

- Kol Zimrah
- Charry Service: 3rd grade Tanakh Ceremony

Friday Night Service & Kol Zimrah - Fridays, 6 PM

Shabbat Morning Services - 10 AM unless otherwise stated

Shabbat Morning Kids Space: Kids are welcome
to play Shabbat-friendly games in
Room 305 – BYOG and some provided.



MAZAL TOV! IN CELEBRATION OF...

Sol Elsila, son of Mikael Elsila and Dina Pinsky, on becoming Bar Mitzvah

Levi Rudick, son of Paul Rudick and Denise Wolf, on becoming Bar Mitzvah

IN MEMORIAM

David Shreiner, brother-in-law of Nathan Martin, and uncle of Hadassah and Yehuda

Irene Feldman, long-time member of Germantown Jewish Centre

Doris Sacks, mother of Alan Sacks, and grandmother of Ben and Rachel

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Judith Camins

Dannetta Purnell

Samira Mehta

Shelly Yanoff and Gerald Kaufman

ISRAELI DANCING

Sundays at 10 AM

January 6, 20, 27 • February 3, 10, 17, 24

Taught by our wonderful instructor Grant Shulman, GJC's Israeli dance group welcomes dancers of all ages and levels. We begin each session with 45 minutes of beginner dances, followed by instruction, review, open dancing and requests with increasing levels of difficulty. GJC's dance group is proud to be friendly and inclusive.

**For more information,
please contact Tamar Magdovitz at
tamarmagdovitz@gmail.com**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Denise Wolf, GJC President



At the synagogue's Annual Meeting last June, I told a joke about synagogue life: A cruise ship came upon a very dangerous storm. Waves wildly thrashed the deck and the entire ship swayed. The passengers were panicking. The captain asked if there were any clergy aboard . . . he shouted for a priest, a minister, a rabbi, an imam. No one responded. Desperately wanting to calm the passengers, he asked if there was *anyone* with any kind of religious

affiliation who could lead a prayer. An older gentleman tentatively rose his hand, and announced, "I am president of Beth Shalom synagogue in New Jersey." The captain begged him to do something – anything – religious. So, the president stood on a soapbox, looked at all the passengers, and loudly announced, "I will appoint a committee and take up a collection."

Yes, we can chuckle. But the reality is that committee work is vital to the character and vigor of our synagogue. Here, at GJC, dozens of dedicated congregants serve on all kinds of committees from religious observance, to social justice, to education, Israel, and building projects. The work is, at times, demanding, yet provides an invaluable service to our community. Through committee work, members have an opportunity to pursue areas of interest and contribute their specific skills. Most of all, it is an excellent way to meet fellow congregants and become further integrated into our community of communities.

Years ago, I was asked to serve on an Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee for the Religious School, chaired by Stefanie Seldin. Initially, I hesitated to get involved. How much time would this take? Would I be able to commit adequately? Could I add value? I'm not an educator, so what expertise could I offer? Eventually, I dove in. It was a lot of work, but equally satisfying. It enabled me to connect with other Religious School parents, as well as with Rabbi Adam, and influence the direction of our kids' Jewish education. For me, an amateur davenner who never knew which minyan to attend, serving on a committee enabled me to build personal relationships and engage more with my community. It was well worth it!

At GJC, there are four categories of committees: (1) Standing Committees, (2) Liaison Committees, (3) Activity Committees, and (3) Ad Hoc Committees. The Standing Committees assist in the performance of essential corporate functions. The Liaison Committees provide advice and support to the rabbis and professional staff. The Activity Committees develop and implement their own agendas and activities. Finally, the Ad Hoc committees are created by the President to perform specific tasks.

Standing Committees include the House & Design Committee, Finance, Development, and Membership. The Leadership and Nominating Committee is essential to ensuring stability and continuity in the synagogue's leadership; no one sits on the Board of Directors or the Executive Committee without this committee's endorsement. Chaired by our former president Christine "Chris" Levin, the committee hopes to promote a culture of service by focusing on a more long-range approach to cultivating potential congregational leaders. Our Sub-Committee on Building Preservation, led by Steve Levin, which, with Sherman Aronson's expertise, gives us comfort that our needy building is in capable hands.

Next up are the **Activities Committees**, such as the Chesed Committee, the Tikkun Olam Coordinating Team, and the Israel Program Group. Chesed is responsible for supporting members of the congregation who are ill or have special needs. Many of us have received a delicious meal or challah while in the hospital or convalescing at home from the Chesed Committee. The Tikkun Olam Coordinating Team fosters the social conscience of the congregation and supports the translation of social concerns into action. In recent moments, this Committee has focused on refugee justice. The Israel Program Committee, generously funded by Joan N. Stern, encourages engagement with Israel through guest speakers, films, music, and food.

Our Liaison Committees include the Early Childhood Program Committee, the Religious School Committee, and the Religious Committee. The Religious Committee, for example, discusses and gives feedback to Rabbi Zeff to help him formulate rules for religious services and ritual policies consistent with *halachah* (Jewish law).

The Ad Hoc Committees are also busy at work. I have the honor of describing four of them:

The Search Committee for a Director of Education, chaired by Alex Molot, will begin interviewing applicants in the early part of 2019. Its youngest member, a teacher assistant and recent graduate of Religious School, Alexandra "Alex" Shapiro, is an enthusiastic contributor to the discussions.

The members of the newly appointed **Security Committee**, chaired by Will Shapiro, are wrestling with the complex issues surrounding the long-term security needs of our community: Do we want a police presence? Will a single entrance complicate the openness and flow of our building on Shabbat? Do we have the budget for this? There are no easy answers here and we are extremely grateful for the Security Committee's efforts.

Many of you have heard about the **Values Committee**, chaired by David Mosenkis, the purpose of which is to provide a framework and shared language to express the core

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (continued)

commitments of our community and help guide our decision making. Perhaps you provided some feedback at one of the numerous communal parlor meetings held in recent months.

Finally, the **Ad Hoc Committee on Public Stances** is tasked with determining whether the synagogue should endorse events and make statements on matters of public concern. The committee recognizes the sensitivity of this topic and the panoply of views held by our congregants. They reviewed results

from a synagogue-wide survey on the topic and are drafting a policy. Dan Livney, who chairs the Committee, regularly informs the synagogue leadership regarding their progress.

As you can see, committees are abuzz! We are a diverse congregation in terms of age, politics, religious observance, backgrounds and sexual orientation, and we strive for our committees to reflect this diversity. **So, please get involved and make a difference!**

ROSH PINAH

"The humblest of stones has become the chief cornerstone." [Rosh Pinah] (Psalm 118:22)

GJC expresses its deep gratitude for the generous support of its congregants who have chosen the Rosh Pinah (Cornerstone) level of membership. Their contributions provide crucial support, enabling us to serve the entire GJC community. We cannot adequately thank the following members for their commitment to Germantown Jewish Centre:

Marta & Chip Becker

Michael Beer

Helen & Michael Feinberg

Dayle Friedman & David Ferleger

Sarah Braun & Shai Gluskin

Myra & Gert Jacobsohn

Barbara Jaffe & Howard Langer

Evelyn Eskin & David Major

Rachel Falkove & Michael Masch

Cyrilla Rosen

Jessica & Mathieu Shapiro

Beth Stearman

THE LITTLE SHOP IS HERE TO MEET ALL YOUR GIFT NEEDS!



We are your one-stop shop for beautiful hostess gifts, Judaica, jewelry, books, toys, candles, wine and *so much more*.

Stop by and check out our new inventory, including fair trade and other items at all price points. Remember our free giftwrapping!



JANUARY SPECIALS

20% discount on all items (usual exclusions apply*) and Early Bird Special discounts of 10% when you shop weekdays 12:00 - 3:00 PM.

These two specials can be combined for a 30% reduction!

Also, 10% off on Barkan Pinot Noir.



MIMOSA SUNDAYS • JANUARY 13 & FEBRUARY 10

PERFORM A MITZVAH AND SHOP AT THE LITTLE SHOP!

All profits from your purchases at The Little Shop support GJC programs.

WINTER LITTLE SHOP HOURS

Wednesday 12:00 - 7:30 PM • Thursday 12:00 - 5:00 PM • Friday 12:00 - 4:00 PM • Sunday 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM

*Usual exclusions from discounts include books, wine, mezuzah scrolls and tefillin.

FEBRUARY SPECIALS

Jewelry and Ahava Products and 20% off all items on Sunday (usual exclusions apply*)



Todah Rabbah!

Todah rabbah to everyone who generously gave to the High Holiday Appeal! Below is a list of gift dedications, representing the many ways each of us connects to Judaism and to this beautiful community. If you have not yet, but would like to contribute, please contact the office. We will list your name and dedication in the next issue of the Centre Call.

Chip & Marta Becker, in honor of Rabbi Zeff

Michael Beer, in honor of Rabbi Sklover

Rick Berkman & Toni Seidl

Josh Bolton & Natalie Lyalin, in honor of the friendships made and the life-long bonds forged at ECP and GJC

Helene Broitman

Eric Brunner & Leah Weisman, in honor of Leah's grandparents, Yaakov & Eva Esther Rovin Weisman

Bonnie Buyum

Milt Cohen & Elise Bromberg

Avi Decter, in memory of Naomi Decter

Nancy Epstein, in honor of her parents

Michael & Helen Feinberg, in honor of the engagement of Ari Feinberg and Kate Sheridan

Maurice & Maxine Feldman, in appreciation and gratitude

John & Elaine Frank, in honor and warm appreciation of Rabbi Adam, Rabbi Alanna, and Rebekah Robinson for their support of their grandson Asher in preparation for his Bar Mitzvah

Richard Gold & Cheryl Kritz

Allen Gottlieb & Ellen Fleishman, to support their shul community

Julie Greenberg, in honor of Rabbi Zeff

Allan & Jane Greenspan, with thanks to Rabbi Zeff

Rod Griffith & Moira Rosenberger

Juha & Elana Hollo, in memory of Elana's uncle, Paul Hyman

Andrea Jacobs, in honor of the GJC Pride Shabbat planning crew

Bill Kavesh, in honor of Adina Newberg, Albert Berdugo, Howard Langer, and Allen Gottlieb

Neil Kitrosser & Diane Aji, in memory of their parents, Adele & Sam Aji and Bea & Ben Kitrosser

Bernie & Ellen Kolodner, in memory of their parents, Anita and Oscar Lichtenstein and Helen and Morris Kolodner

Howard Langer & Barbara Jaffe

Pesha Leichter, in honor of the wonderful staff at GJC

Herb Levine & Ellen Frankel

Judd Livingston & Hillary Kruger, with gratitude to the GJC community

Mark Lipshutz & Nan Myers

Sam & Tamar Magdovitz, with thanks to the Eagles for a transformational Super Bowl win

David Major & Evelyn Eskin, in celebration of GJC's commitment to being a welcoming and inclusive community with wonderful music

Richard & Alice Mandel, in memory of Lee Dushoff

Alan Mendelsohn & Mindy Shapiro, in memory of their loved ones who have passed

Marty & Linda Millison

Jeffrey & Linda Needleman, in honor of their grandchildren

Steven Peitzman, in honor of Ken and Susan Weiss

Dan Hoffman & Abby Pozefsky, in memory of their beloved Karen Pozefsky

Yoni & Aviva Reinfeld, in honor of their children turning 1 year old and on the birth of their niece, Meital Reinfeld-Burgos

Hershel & Betsy Richman

Jack & Susan Rome, in memory of Susan's father, Lloyd Schachtner

Norman & Leah Schwartz

Howard Bilofsky & Margaret Shapiro, in memory of Margaret's parents, Arnold and Ruth Segel

Brian & Elana Shaw, in honor of the GJC community they continue to cherish from afar

Joan Silver, to her very dear GJC friends who have been so supportive during these past six months

Gary Stein & Ellen Reese

David Stern & Kathryn Hellerstein, in memory of their parents, Kurt & Florence S. Stern and Herman K. & Mary F. Hellerstein

Joel Sweet, in honor of the democratic transition of power from Chip Becker to Denise Wolf

Donna Tartasky, in memory of her father, Meyer Tatarsky

David & Brigitte Thalheimer, in honor of Berel Sternthal and the Morning Minyan

Howard & Ronit Treatman

Lou Walinsky & Nina Gordon, in celebration of Israel's 70th birthday - Am Yisrael Chai

Joey Weisenberg & Molly Weingrod, in honor of all that GJC gives to them

Chava Weissler & Nancy Fredland, in memory of their parents, Alfred & Pearl Weissler and Samuel Fredland & Beth Wiener

Thank you also to our donors who wish to remain anonymous.

TIKKUN OLAM

by Margaret Shapiro

New GJC Initiative on Refugee Justice

Refugee Shabbat took place on October 20, and was jointly sponsored by Tikkun Olam Coordinating Team (TOCT), Men's Club, Women of GJC, HAZAK, Minyan Masorti, and Dorshei Derekh. Cathryn Miller Wilson, the CEO of HIAS PA, and Peter Gonzales, CEO of The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, spoke about their respective roles and organizations. The Marcus Auditorium was packed as the speakers discussed the present state of refugees and how both organizations work to make the lives of newcomers easier, safer and more productive. HIAS PA has recently expanded their mission, as the flow of refugees has slowed and the need for resettlement of new families is less. They hope to work with more immigrants who have not arrived so recently, but still need help with legal matters, medical and social services, finding better jobs, better housing and learning English.

Peter Gonzales discussed his work at The Welcoming Center helping immigrants find employment that considers their interests and experience more than their initial jobs. The organization's mission includes Workforce Development, Encouraging Entrepreneurship, and Promoting Civic Engagement to prepare them to participate in their communities. He told an endearing story about a Syrian client who started a pickle business at Reading Terminal after being on the maintenance

crew for a year and a half, mainly cleaning toilets. In Syria she had been in business, and in Turkey she was a supervisor in a factory. She also cares for her four children and hopes they will have an easier life.

As a result of this presentation and interest on the part of the congregation, TOCT has recently approved a new ongoing initiative at GJC led by Joyce Lieberman and Seth Lieberman that will coordinate and bring together volunteers in different areas connected with immigration. They plan to organize three different components consisting of **1) Advocacy with Government Officials, 2) Protest 3) Facilitating Direct Support with Refugees and Immigrants**. Previously, many congregants have been active in these areas as individuals. This initiative will build on the ongoing support that GJC teams have been providing to two local refugee families, and provide a structure for members to organize together in advocacy and action on behalf of justice for refugees and immigrants. Hopefully, more people will find a way to help immigrants feel welcome and to demonstrate that America is indeed a kinder, safer place.

Please contact Joyce Lieberman at rejoice34@gmail.com if you would like to learn more about this exciting plan.

Shabbat Shalom Project



Community and a sense of belonging are foundations of Germantown Jewish Centre. The Women of GJC are introducing the **Shabbat Shalom Project** in an effort to strengthen our outreach efforts and support of community. There are GJC members, both women and men, for whom we would like

to enhance their connection to GJC. *Out of sight does not mean out of our hearts and minds.*

Susan Weiss and Peninah Berdugo, along with the GJC administrative staff, have provided a list of GJC member names who would appreciate a Shabbat Shalom telephone call at a minimum of twice per month. Susan and Peninah will match volunteers and recipients. The volunteers will agree to call that

person twice a month, at a minimum. A simple Shabbat Shalom greeting and maybe a short chat is all that is required. We will provide some basic guidelines for volunteers. We are not asking volunteers to provide any service beyond reaching out to further connect our community. This is a great opportunity for those members who have teenagers in their home, to model for them how a synagogue creates and sustains a sense of community and connectivity. It is also a way for members to participate in a Women of GJC activity from their own homes.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact: Susan Weiss 610-909-8127 or email her at slw6809@comcast.net or Peninah Berdugo 215-917-5840 or email her at peninahberdugo@gmail.com

If you know of someone who would like to be a recipient of a Shabbat Shalom phone call, please contact either Susan or Peninah. We would be happy to add them to this new program.

TIKKUN OLAM (continued)

Racism, Anti-Semitism and Refugee Justice

In October, Tikkun Olam@GJC hosted a two-part workshop called **Reexamining Racism and Anti-Semitism**. The presenters were Dr. Howard Stevenson, the Constance Clayton Professor of Urban Education at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, and Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, the Director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at Reconstructing Judaism. Thirty people attended each session. Last year's Granger program featured the same two powerful presenters and many congregants asked that they return to discuss this topic in more depth with a smaller audience.

The first session focused on the difficulty of talking about both Racism and Anti-Semitism, and how they were both based on fear. Both speakers spoke about internalized oppression, i.e., how both Blacks and Jews internalize the stereotypes that characterize their group. They become fearful that they will act in a way that will connect them to the dominant stereotype and act to convince others that they are 'not that way'. Both Blacks and Jews feel fear, but demonstrate the fear in different ways. "Anger and bravado" or "circling the wagons and feeling persecuted" are two ways this fear might play out.

The second session took place three days after the attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, so the speakers revised their original plans and focused on facing fear, anger, and helplessness in the current frightening environment. Rabbi Liebling talked about Eric Ward's recent research on white nationalism: Ward maintains that anti-Semitism is at the core of white nationalism in that they claim that Jews are the cause of their problems and fears.

(<https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29>)

Though they look different, in that racism is constant and anti-Semitism is cyclical, both serve to keep the economic system in place. Anti-Semitism positions Jews as the scapegoat, blaming them for whatever goes wrong economically. George Soros is in the news frequently as the Jew who currently gets blamed for the financial woes of white nationalists.

The most important point of the evening was how crucial it is today for Jews, Blacks, Muslims, LGBTQ people, and Christians to stand together. We must ally with others outside our own circle to combat the xenophobia, bigotry, hate, and white nationalism that is a threat to our American ideals. As participant Richard Stern wrote following the program:

"We have to find a way to **hold both truths** -- intensifying racism and antisemitism -- precisely to remind us how inextricable they are. We raise both truths not as a comparison, but as a fundamentally intertwined reality. Our persecution, the attacks on women, and the African American, Muslim, Gay, and Immigrant communities are inherently intertwined..."

At the close of the second session we were left with more hope and less fear, as well as the challenge of strengthening our ties with the larger community. The extraordinary Shabbat at GJC on November 2, when hundreds of Jews and non-Jewish allies packed the Charry Sanctuary, was a great example of standing together.



Participants at the first Racism/Anti-Semitism Workshop

THANK YOU

Germantown Jewish Centre
would like to extend thanks and
gratitude to the
Wolfe Family Foundation
for generously supporting and making
our programming possible.

SAVE THE DATE!

Torah Fund Brunch

May 5

Join us in honoring

Yona Dansky

Proceeds benefit the Jewish Theological Seminary

Speaker: Elaine Culbertson
Chair of the Pennsylvania Holocaust Education Council

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Akhila and Will Shapiro

by Linda Kriger



Bela, Will, Rashi & Akhila Shapiro

Akhila and Will Shapiro and their two young children, Rashi, 3, and Bela, 1, are among a number of young dynamic families who promise a bright future for GJC.

Akhila, 33, was born in Philadelphia and grew up in Cherry Hill. An only child, she moved with her parents to India at the end of sixth grade and lived in Bangalore for two years to be close to her grandparents. "My parents felt that this was the best way for me to understand my family, their language, and culture, rather than visit for a couple of months every few years," she explained. "It's hard when you live so far away to build meaningful relationships with family members. I am glad I had the opportunity to connect with my grandparents during those years."

Akhila attended a rigorous international school that required her to catch up in math and science. "I did very well and enjoyed it," she said. "It was challenging at first, but being in middle school is socially challenging wherever you are."

She returned to the United States to attend Cherry Hill East High School and Columbia College in New York City, where she studied anthropology and pre-med. Before attending Temple's medical school, Akhila returned to Bangalore for a year, where she lived in a rural village working with a group of doctors who ran two large hospitals and a school that served a tribal community.

When she returned to Philadelphia, she saw on line that Will had posted that he was looking for a vegetarian roommate and I posted back that "I lived in Old City and we could be roommates." He replied, "That's nice, but I want to stay in West Philadelphia. I need more trees." The two attended a lot of the same classes. "He stood out," she said, smiling at her 6 foot 2 inch

husband. "We ended up studying in groups together, became good friends, and started dating towards the end of the first year." At the end of their internship, (Will at Temple Hospital and Akhila at Jefferson and Nemours (DuPont) Children's Hospital), they married.

They moved to Mt. Airy when Akhila was pregnant with Rashi, and the next year Akhila became chief resident and Will started a fellowship in pulmonary and critical care medicine. "When we lived in the city, we used to come out to the Wissahickon any weekend we were free, which wasn't often," she said. "We're happy here."

For the past three years, Akhila has specialized in caring for hospitalized patients as a pediatric hospitalist. She takes care of children with a variety of ailments. She works about 60% of a full time equivalent to try to maintain a balance between being a mom and a physician.

Will, 38, lived in Media until he was four, and then moved to Bala Cynwyd. For elementary school, Will walked to Solomon Schechter Jewish Day School, and the walking "made a big impact on me," he said. "Later, when I had the opportunity to work at Chestnut Hill Hospital, I jumped on it because I didn't want to drive to work. I also think I learned more at Schechter than in any other schooling. It was a great school for me."

He remembers working with his father, uncle, and grandfather who worked in the family business founded by his great-grandfather, at 2nd and Arch Streets. The business went through several iterations, but ultimately sold pottery and baskets to garden centers. Will has two younger siblings, Annah and Mirra, who live in Oregon and Kentucky. His mother practiced psychotherapy in Narberth. Will's parents divorced when he was in third grade.

After his parents' divorce, "I had two of everything: two Thanksgivings, two Jewish holidays. I had two bar mitzvahs. Jake Kriger (now a GJC member) taught me Mishpatim and the other Torah portion I learned was Beshallah. I guess it helped me become resilient."

Will attended Bala Cynwyd Middle School and Lower Merion High School, where he grew six inches in ninth grade. "I really got into volleyball," he said, noting that he was on a team that finished second in the state. He went to Vassar, majoring in psychology, with a minor in Jewish studies. He worked on the school newspaper and played a lot of volleyball at the school. He also played on the American team in the international Maccabiah games in Israel.

Between college and medical school, Will spent five years figuring out what to do, traveling, and then studying and working in

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT (continued)

preparation for medical school. Initially, Will had no idea what to do, so he indulged in wanderlust, changing venues every few months.

After a trip to Chile and Argentina, he interpreted Spanish in a medical office for 4-5 months and then moved to Camp Towanga, a Jewish summer camp outside Yosemite in the Sierra Nevada in California. "I was 23 and trying to decide what to do with the rest of my life. I was afraid of taking biology and chemistry. I didn't think I was smart enough. My mother convinced me I was and I'm very grateful to her for that and many other things." He went to the Pre-Med/Post Baccalaureate program at the University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 2004.

While taking classes, Will continued as a medical interpreter and found a job in "an amazing laboratory that studied how neurons migrate in a developing brain." The month before medical school,

he and his siblings took a 200-mile hike on the John Muir trail from Mount Whitney to Yosemite. "Two days later I started medical school," he recalled.

Now, Will and Akhila are homebodies. After a residency in Internal Medicine, Will completed a three-year fellowship at Temple in pulmonary and critical care. He now works for the Temple Lung Center at Chestnut Hill Hospital and cares for critically ill patients in the intensive care unit, as well as seeing patients with pulmonary problems in the office and in the hospital. You may see Will on his bike in the mornings and evenings, riding to and from work. "We moved to Mt. Airy to live near the shul, the woods and the co-op," Will said. "Shabbat is important to us and we try to bring Rashi and Bela to GJC each week and to share our interest in prayer and study with them. We feel blessed to live in the warm, diverse community that we call home."

NEDIV LEV

Within the GJC community, we are fortunate to have a growing number of members who give above and beyond, year after year. Nediv Lev (our pillar members) provide a backbone to the GJC community, and their commitment enables the shul to provide for the needs of all our members. We especially thank the following members for helping our shul continue to offer the highest possible level of education, religious, and social programming:

Marcy & Dan Bacine

Jane & Richard Baron

Peninah & Albert Berdugo

Harold Berger

Dveera Segal & Brad Bridge

Linda & Jake Kriger

Barbara & Dick Menin

Chuck & Martha Schleifer

Allyson & David Schwartz

Denise Scott Brown

Patty & Steve Segal

Stefanie & Alex Seldin

Joan N. Stern

GJC's 13th Annual Women's Clothing Exchange

will be held on

Sunday, January 27, 2019, from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM



This community and charitable event serves many functions; some participants have said that it is a win-win-win!

Every year women in the community are asked to donate any clothing and accessories in good condition that they no longer use. These donations are collected at GJC during the week before the event. (This year, that will be Monday, January 21 – Friday, January 25.)

The event is set up like a giant bazaar. It is a festive atmosphere—with music, friends, and a private place for trying on clothes. Women from all over the city come and pay \$20 to "shop" for shoes, sweaters, coats, jeans, dresses, skirts, blouses, jewelry, accessories, pajamas, lingerie, bathing suits, exercise gear, vests, shorts, and other miscellaneous women's clothing.

This year, the proceeds will be used by GJC to support its work with POWER, an interfaith organization committed to implementing systemic change for the betterment of PA communities (powerinterfaith.org). When the Clothing Exchange is over, all the leftover items are donated to Whosoever Gospel Mission in Germantown. This organization supports people who have been homeless and have struggled with addiction to get the help they need to get clean, sober and vocationally trained. It is indeed a win! win! win!

For more information,
contact Genie Ravital: geniebud@gmail.com

WOMEN OF GJC

by Sandy Meyer & Vilma Lieberman, Co-Presidents

In October, Klezmer and trumpet music made for a very enjoyable program at our **Welcome Back Event**. Nearly 90 members of Men's Club and Women of GJC listened to and sang along with Susan Watts and her trio (including GJC's Justin Fink and Elliot Seif) for a lively morning of old and new tunes.



In November, we had an interesting program, **Update on Gerrymandering**, by Fair Districts PA, a non-partisan organization. Even though the PA Supreme court ruled on redistricting prior to the 2018 midterm elections (which made the

districts more equitable), there is more work to be done. Fair Districts is continuing to pursue a change in the law that would ensure that the redistricting remains in place for future elections. If this doesn't take happen, then gerrymandering may continue after the 2020 census. In addition, districts for PA State House and Senate seats have also been gerrymandered, and the courts have yet to address inequities in those maps. For more information go to: <https://www.fairdistrictspa.com/solution>.

Also in November, several of us attended **Mid-Atlantic Women's League Founder's Day** at Temple Sinai. We accepted an award for surpassing our fundraising goal for Torah Fund 2017.



Vilma Lieberman, Maxine Feldman, Sandy Meyer, Rhonda Mandel & Connie Katz at Founder's Day

Building Beautiful project of enhanced lighting in the Magil Chapel is moving along with your generous support.

Our Women of GJC **Fall Membership Drive** did very well year. We thank so many of you for joining and helping to support our programs and events. Please remember that everyone (whether a member of Women of GJC or not) is welcome to attend all programs and events. Looking forward to seeing you all at our many wonderful events!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Sunday, January 27, 2019, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM • 13th Annual Women's Annual Clothing Take Away. All proceeds from this popular annual event support GJC's work with POWER. Contribute as many new or gently-worn clothes as you like and take home as many as you can use. Admission \$20. (See article elsewhere in this issue) **For more information, contact Genie Ravital at geniebud@gmail.com.**

Saturday, March 9, 2019 • Purim Bash: "Strike Up the Band"

See details article elsewhere in this issue and on the GJC website and for more information on our biggest fundraiser of the year!

GJC's EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM (ECP)

by Michelle Bernstein

We have been super busy here in the ECP! Not only are the children playing and smiling and laughing all day long, but we have many big projects in the works!

The ECP is EXPANDING! On January 2, we opened a new classroom for toddlers! The new classroom (on the second floor) will be filled by the Kofim (monkeys)! One of the local schools is closing its doors, and we took this opportunity to welcome some new friends to our program. Dubonim are also moving upstairs in January, allowing for these two classes to be together and to collaborate. Our art room is moving downstairs into the current Dubonim classroom.

We have LAWN SIGNS that you are welcome to put on your lawn to help us promote the ECP. Since 2019 fall registration opened in December, we want to help get the word out. You can pick up a sign in the office!

We are also excited to start some renovations on our playground! We will be removing two trees and resurfacing part of the space to improve the safety for our children.

But let's take a look at what our small friends are doing! Here are some photos of the children in action!

DID YOU KNOW?

ECP is a special place for young children from 6 months of age through 5 years of age and for their families. Through the lens of Jewish culture and tradition, our children learn about themselves and the world around them in a program which emphasizes learning through doing. The Early Childhood Program nurtures and respects individuality, while encouraging the children to develop a sense of community and friendship. The preschool follows the yearly cycle of the Jewish holidays. Jewish culture, traditions, and values are woven into our curriculum. Through Mitzvot (commandments), Tzedakah (charity), and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), the children learn to respect themselves, others and the world they live in. We are committed to teaching and promoting respect and understanding of all persons. GJC's Early Childhood Program is open to all!



Please Join Us For the 35th Annual Granger Memorial Shabbat

What Does It Mean To Live In The Poorest Big City In America?

How financial well-being affects everything

From health & housing to education & employment

Saturday, January 19, 2019

Lunch • 12:30 PM

Program • 1:15 PM

Marcus Auditorium



PINAT HA-HINUCH ~ EDUCATION CORNER

We are People of the Book: L'dor va Dor

by Rabbi Alanna Sklover, Director of Lifelong Learning

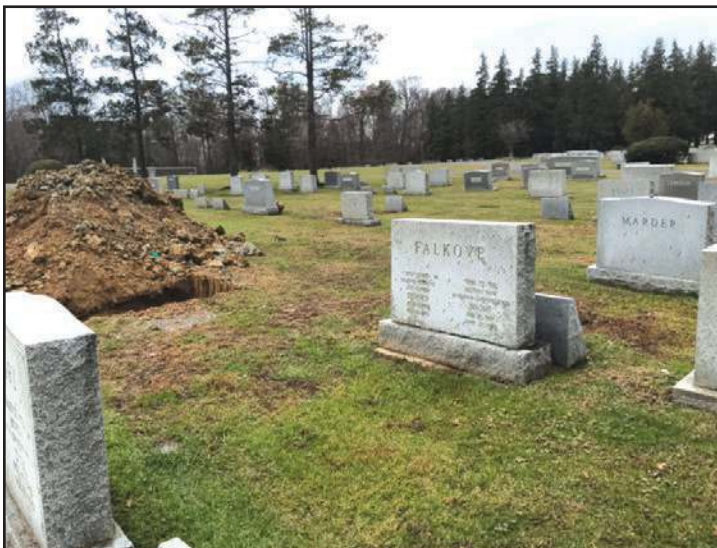
Jewish tradition teaches us to honor those who have passed on with gentle accompaniment – from the very moment from when their soul departs to the point at which their body returns to the earth. We treat our sacred objects, such as prayer books, *tzitzit* (*tallit* fringes), sacred texts containing God's name, *sifrei Torah* (scrolls) and *mezzuzah* parchments with a similar respect at the end of their life, accompanying them in their final moments, and gently burying them in a cemetery. Every few years, our staff goes to the King David Cemetery to pay our respects, accompanying them to their final resting place and lowering them into the ground. On a rainy and cool morning in December, Eric Word and I had the honor of doing just this.

Like many synagogues, Germantown Jewish Centre stores our well-worn *siddurim* and damaged texts in a space in our building called a *genizah*, so that they can eventually be buried in a cemetery. Jewish tradition teaches that all items that contain an element of *kedushah* (holiness), particularly those in which God's name is written, must be buried, rather than discarded, when no longer usable. As a child, I was intrigued by this Jewish tradition, envisioning lavish funerals for beloved books and fish-platter laden *shivas* for *Torah* scrolls. Though I learned eventually that there were no such gatherings, I am no less moved by the notion of showing *kavod* (honor and respect) in this way to our sacred items.

In our tradition, it is considered a great honor to be buried near the sacred texts of our tradition and the beloved ritual objects of our community. Because of this, some people even indicate in their end of life wishes that their grave be used as a *genizah*. As Eric and I approached the grave which had been opened to receive our *genizah* materials, we were greeted by familiar names of longtime and much honored members of the community: Falkove, Marcus, Darmstadter, Shapiro, Lemisch, Weiss, Charney, Gafni. It was as if these names, and the individuals laid to rest in

the earth beneath, were gathered for exactly the occasion that I had seen in my mind's eye as a child. Here for the funeral of our books were the very people who had held them in their hands year after year, and whose family members the words in them had accompanied during the eleven months of mourning.

As Jewish people, we are often referred to as "People of the Book." It is through our texts and the traditions which develop in the discourse on their pages that we find and retain our identity. Through rituals around *sifrei Torah* (*B'nei Mitzvah* ceremonies, marking milestones, pre-wedding *aufrefts*) we mark our most joyful communal moments. These items, passed through generations, outliving us all, tell the story of our ever-evolving communities. They not only contain divine *kedushah*, but also *kedushah* with which we infuse them. Perhaps, this is why we return them to the earth, a place that human and divine hands intertwine as we partner in the act of "tilling and tending" (Genesis 2:15) our fragile and precious planet. In the funeral liturgy we read that "we are but dust" (Psalm 103). May we all, as we hear this line, now also read in a deeper meaning of a sacred dust, infused with our sacred texts, stories, traditions and memories, that connects all of our generations – living and dead – *l'dor va dor*.





Germantown Jewish Centre

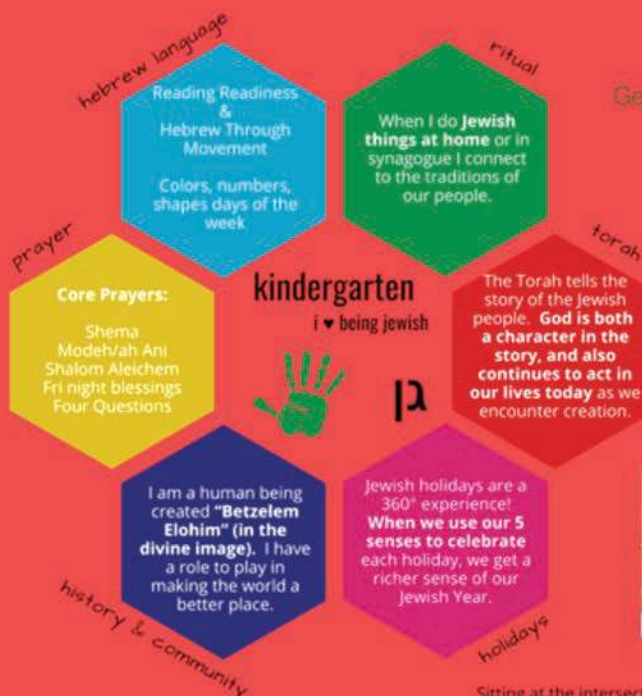


Sitting at the intersection of **tradition, innovation, and community**, the Religious School at GJC is committed to educating a new generation of kids for our evolving Jewish world. Our program urges students to **get curious about their Judaism** and integrates cutting edge teaching methods like Hebrew Through Movement. As they learn and explore, students build **confidence** in their knowledge and connection to our tradition, **competency** in prayer and ritual skills, and a strong sense of **Jewish identity** and connection.

GJC Religious School

get curious!

215-844-1507 x24 • www.germantownjewishcentre.org



Germantown Jewish Centre



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PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

**Tuesdays at 7:15 PM
in the Quitman Library**

People of the Book reads fiction and nonfiction books of Jewish interest mostly written by Jewish writers and chosen by the group. Volunteers lead the monthly discussion. Join in!

**For more info, contact Nan Myers
at nanbmyers2@gmail.com.**

January 8
Away
by Amy Bloom

February 12
*In the Land of
Invisible Women*
by Qanta Ahmed

March 12
The Frozen Rabbi
by Steve Stern

April 9
Miss Burma
by Charlene Craig



People of the Book by Vilma Lieberman

On October 10th, GJC's People of the Book group met to discuss *One Hundred Suggestions for Seekers & Spiritual Activists* with the author, our own Rabbi Josh Bolton. It was a wonderful evening and a great dialogue with Josh, discussing his book, his work at Penn Hillel, and his journey as a young Jew juggling faith, family, and work in the 21st century. We were glad he was able to join us and that we had an opportunity to get to know this dedicated young man.

Josh posted the following comment and picture on Facebook: "The women of this book club at the Germantown Jewish Centre clearly had read my book with greater thoughtfulness and interest than most of my friends. If there are any women's clubs or congregation sisterhoods from Boston to Richmond that would like to make an evening out of *One Hundred Suggestions*, it would honestly be my pleasure."

If you would like to join People of the Book, please reach out to Vilma Lieberman at vilmablue@yahoo.com.



Participants at the People of the Book, with Rabbi Josh Bolton

Bottom row, from left: Luci Stroman, Vilma Lieberman, Josh Bolton, Jill Nissen, Nan Myers

Top row, from left: Nina Gordon, Dena Lake, Marsha Hyman, Judy Miller, Rhonda Mandel, Debby Stern, Judy Schwartz



נר תמיד

PLANNED GIVING & NER TAMID

Remembering Germantown Jewish Centre in your will, a trust, or retirement asset is a meaningful way to ensure that your commitment to our community continues to help our synagogue thrive for generations to come. For more information on how you can include GJC in your estate plans, please contact Nina Peskin at 215-844-1507 x12.

NEWS FROM HAZAK (55+ programming)

by Coleman Poses & Helen Feinberg

...And Josh separated the waters that were above the ferment from the waters that were below the ferment, and he, and the entirety of his minions, saw that it was good.

That's pretty much how HAZAK and the Men's Club kept the party going between Hanukkah and New Year's at the home of Chris and Steve Levin last month, as Josh Peskin shepherded us through the beer-making process in his program: *Jews and Brews*. Many of us remember Josh as a master coffee roaster from a HAZAK-sponsored program two years ago, but those skills belie his talent as a brew-master as well. Josh introduced us to the intricacies of the beer-making process while instructing us on the history and culture of Jews and brews.

Since the last HAZAK installment in the Centre Call, we have celebrated HAZAK Shabbat, where Tamar Jacobson discussed how the principles from her book, *Everyone Needs Attention: Helping Young Children Thrive*, could be applied to every stage of the life cycle. Although her expertise is in early childhood, her remarks resonated deeply with the entire congregation. The service celebrated the contributions of our members and marked a number of important birthdays and anniversaries.

Future HAZAK events include a number of films that will be announced in future Centre Calls, a program on "Sex and

Consent," co-sponsored with Women of GJC in March, and a tour of Old City historical sites led by GJC's Elise Bromberg.

Our November and December readings for the HAZAK book group were *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History*, by Steven J. Zipperstein, and *Button Man*, by Andrew Gross. The selection for January 9, 2019, is *Famous Father Girl: A Memoir of Growing Up Bernstein*, Jamie Bernstein's account of life with her father, Leonard Bernstein. Hope you can join us for some of these events.

DID YOU KNOW?

HAZAK programs are planned for those age 55+, and are geared to reflect both common interests and get us to "stretch" to try new activities as well. Our well-attended book group meets monthly all year long. HAZAK also sponsors book talks by local authors, as well as speakers on topics of particular importance to our interests. We host Sam Feinberg each August to discuss opera, and we show great films! We also take day trips to cultural and natural sites in the area, often to places members have never been. HAZAK is for all of us to stay connected to GJC and to each other: to venture out and experience parts of our city we haven't seen before, to read, learn and talk together, to keep us strong. We hope you will join us. Membership is \$10/year.

Chesed Cooking

by Peninah Berdugo

On October 21, 2018, seventeen volunteers from a variety of communities within GJC came together to make soup, challot, and kugel under the auspices of the Chesed Committee. Kathy Amrom, the outgoing chair of the committee, came down from the Hudson Valley to train the new co-chairs, Gena Epstein and Peninah Berdugo, and to enjoy cooking with new and longtime volunteers. Not only was the freezer fully stocked by the end of the session, but the bakers, cooks, slicers, and dicers all seemed to enjoy themselves thoroughly.

The food prepared by the Chesed Committee volunteers is used to create simple food packages for GJC congregants who are welcoming a new baby, experiencing an illness, or mourning the loss of a loved one.

Volunteers of all ages are invited to participate in this mitzvah in whatever way they are able: cooking the food, delivering the packages, creating handmade cards, or donating funds. If you are interested in becoming involved with our Chesed Committee, please contact Peninah Berdugo at peninahberdugo@gmail.com.

Geena Epstein prepping veggies at Chesed Cooking





2019 GJC Purim Bash

STRIKE UP THE BAND

Saturday, March 9, 7:30 to 10:30pm

You are invited to GJC's 2019 Purim Bash,
sponsored by the Women of Germantown Jewish Centre.
Whether you're a virtuoso or a new member of the band, we guarantee you'll have a great time!

Greet friends in the **Band Room** (Silver Kiddush Lounge) for hors d'oeuvres and a light bar with wine, beer, and soda before heading upstairs for the main event. Or go directly to **The Rehearsal Hall** (Marcus Auditorium) for the main event starting with hors d'oeuvres and an **open bar** with wine, beer, whiskey and mixers. Throughout the night in The Hall, we'll serve a **delicious buffet** of the best medley of hot and cold items you and your band mates can imagine, along with a sumptuous dessert buffet from the start. The night also includes:

- The best-ever band tunes for dancing the night away, provided by our **Band Leader DJ Michael Lazar**
- A lighthearted **musical performance (Purim Spiel)** by our most talented band members: **Rabbi Zeff** and the **GJC Choir**
- **A Silent Auction** – with dozens of area restaurants and services represented
- An exciting **5-Star Live Auction** offering amazing experiences and trips across the globe, including
 - Super Bowl and other sports venue tickets
 - Trips to Africa and Italy and other amazing destinations
 - Cultural experiences (theater, orchestra, etc.)

Free Children's Programs

While we're upstairs partying, our children will be enjoying themselves at the **free** events for children of Bash participants. (RSVP early, as spots are limited.)

- **For 6-month to 6-year-old Virtuosos:** Care in GJC's Early Childhood Program (ECP) space run by ECP staff. Note: Five- and six-year-olds will have an age-appropriate movie in a space away from the littlest guests and the be tucked in for sleep until you pick them up
- **For 7- to 11- year old Band Leaders in Training:** In the Temin Canteen Room with movies, popcorn, treats and fun with friends for a memorable night. (Purim Costumes Optional)
- **For Teen Assistant Band Masters:** Provides volunteer opportunities to help make this event a great success for GJC.

Tickets

- * \$200/Patron (with one non-member guest ticket)
- * \$150/Sponsor
- * \$50/Individual
- * \$45/Person for a 10-person table
- * \$36/Individual age 36 and under



QUESTIONS about the Purim Bash?
Contact Marilyn Kraut at 215-498-0213 or mkkraut1@gmail.com.

RSVP by February 9th to Nan Daniels at nhd3505@gmail.com or by downloading the form found at <http://germantownjewishcentre.org/2019-purim-bash/>

*** Your support for the Purim Bash, the Little Shop, and other Women of GJC fundraisers is very important for GJC! Our congregation's continued generous contributions make it possible for WGJC to provide \$25,000 annually in support of GJC's operating budget, \$18,000 annually to the Religious School, Shabbat and High Holiday child care, and continued Building Beautiful activities for updating and maintaining our spaces and resources. Recent examples include new Torah covers and lighting our Ten Commandments on Lincoln Drive. This support also enables us to host Women's Shabbat and Scholar-in-Residence Weekend and provide timely and enriching programs and fun activities for all GJC members.**

Thank you for your contributions and support. We look forward to seeing you at the Purim Bash!

MEMBER MEMORIES

by Mindelle Goldstein

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Germantown Jewish Centre welcomed a refugee from Germany. Sigmund Lachman was new to America, barely years away from time spent in Dachau. The Centre had hired him to daven Shacharit and to read Torah and Haftarah. The congregants were so moved by Sig's melodious chanting and by his history that they soon regarded him as our unofficial cantor.

Each week, following services and shared "Good Shabbos" greetings, Sig, my parents, and I walked to our home on Glen Echo Road, where we enjoyed Shabbat lunch together. At two o'clock, my father tuned the radio to the broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera. He and Sig sat in the living room facing each other and began to talk softly. It was then that my protective mother whisked me away.

When we returned in the late afternoon, I would see Sig and my Dad still seated opposite each other, in the now darkened room. Tears were running down my father's cheeks as Sig described the horrors etched in his memory.

Upon spying us, my father would immediately turn up the volume of the radio. He would begin to sing along with the opera, waving his arms in the air as though conducting the orchestra. Sig would then pull me onto his lap, rock me to the powerful music and hug me with all his might.

A Member Memory Follow-up:

A member read Norman Newberg's September Member Memory and sent this follow-up:

I loved reading Norman's remembrance. I was in the Charry when the power went out. Rabbi Gordon suggested we all put our arms around each other and encouraged us to sing as we rocked side to side. Finally someone took out a key chain that had a tiny flashlight and gave it to Rabbi. A few others approached the Bimah, with a similar light, and the service went on. Obviously this was before we all had cell phones!

NEWS FROM THE MEN'S CLUB

by Dick Menin, President

On behalf of the GJC Men's Club I'd like to thank all of you who supported – both financially as well as spiritually – the GJC Hanukiyah. This has been one of our signature projects since 2000 and it continues to be enjoyed by the shul membership as well as the neighbors. There was one year early on when it wasn't put up and there was quite an expression of disappointment from residents of Ellet Street that the "children" were not lighting up their neighborhood. If you haven't had an opportunity in the past to honor or memorialize a loved one through the Hanukiyah, please consider it next year.

Our "Scotch in the Sukkah" this year had more than 40 attendees. It seems that moving it from a weekday evening to Sunday afternoon made it more accessible and this change will continue.

In December we again hosted Dr. Andrew Newberg talking about Jewish spirituality.

In the near future we will be having several film presentations. *There are Jews There* looks at Jewish life in many areas, foreign and domestic, where a Jewish presence seems surprising. *Rock in the Red Zone* is a story about Jewish and Palestinian adolescents in Israel, dealing with the stresses of growing up in an area that can be turbulent. This will be presented in conjunction with our GJC teen group. Look to email and the Shabbat bulletin for specifics as the time comes closer.

We are still working monthly with the Jewish Relief Agency to pack and distribute food to those in need. For more information, speak directly with Jim Meyer (276-462-4989) or myself (215-947-3382).

Again, our primary goal is to enhance fellowship and develop friendships within our GJC community. ALL are welcome to join.



Jim Meyer talking about Scotch in the Sukkah

A Trip to Poland

by Ellen Lederman & Nina Gordon

Last spring, Nina Gordon, a current GJC member, and Ellen Lederman, a former member, traveled together to the Baltic States and Poland on a trip of a lifetime.

Ellen was a member of GJC for 22 years, and has been living in Silver Spring, Maryland since 2006. Prior to that, she and her family lived in Cleveland for six years after leaving Philadelphia. Nina and her family live in Mt. Airy, and they have been members of GJC for 32 years.

The two women met while Nina lived in Germantown and Ellen lived in East Mt. Airy. When Nina moved to Mt. Airy, the two lived in walking distance of each other, and Ellen's children studied pottery with Nina. The women participated together in the Israeli Day parade each year. They dreamed of traveling together, and this trip was a fulfillment of that dream.

We hope you enjoy their stories.



Ellen Lederman

Ellen: As a small child, I would ask my maternal grandmother where she was from in Europe, and her answer was always, "the Russian-Polish border." As the result of a recent trip to Poland and the Baltics in April and May, I have come to understand the complexity of her response. For centuries, Poland's borders (east, west, and south) were subjected to more powerful countries (Russia, Germany, and the Austrian-Hungarian empire) where there were ethnic groups (Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Germans) that these powers elected to "protect" by occupying these areas that were traditionally in Poland. There were three million Jews all over Poland, including the border areas, prior to WWII. Nationality vs. citizenship made the situation very complex. After WWII, there were "exchanges of ethnic populations" on Poland's borders. This background brings me to the current situation for Jews in Poland.

Try to imagine a modern building with lots of windows and a JCC logo in the historic Jewish neighborhood of Krakow, Poland. Nina Gordon and I had the unique opportunity to spend 90 minutes with the deputy director of the JCC. (The director was in the US, attending a conference.) We learned that the JCC programming includes an early childhood center, a Sunday school, a Hillel "Gimel Student Club," Hebrew classes, and a senior club that includes attendees who are childhood Holocaust survivors. Many non-Jewish volunteers help with a variety of tasks related to celebrating Jewish holidays, activities, and Shabbat dinners.

In Warsaw, we visited the recently opened and highly-acclaimed Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Needless to say, the five hours we spent there were not nearly enough to digest this long and often tragic history. But clearly, Poland today recognizes the historical contributions that the Jewish community made over many hundreds of years.

Our trip also included a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps. Standing in front of the infamous *Arbeit*

Macht Frei sign lets you know in a bone-chilling way that history leaves its mark for the world to see evil up front.

In addition to Poland, our tour took us to the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Those Jewish communities today are small; very few synagogues survived the war. These countries have a long and tortured history with Russia and even today there are tensions between the local population and the small Russian minorities who have often lived there for two to three generations.

Vilna, the capital of Lithuania, has some beautiful architecture from several centuries, representing different periods of history. It has an old Jewish neighborhood in need of repair, where we saw only one functioning synagogue, built in 1903. There is a Tolerance Museum that covers hundreds of years of Jewish history.

Poland and the Baltic countries have a long and complicated history with the Jewish communities in their midst. After World War II and the communist takeover of Eastern Europe (including these three countries), there was rampant anti-Semitism, especially in Poland after the Six Day War in 1967. Poland encouraged Jews to leave with a one-way ticket to Israel.

The current political situation in Poland today causes us to pause with concern: the irony of the rewriting of the issue of "Polish concentration camps" runs parallel to the reality of young people finding out they had Jewish grandparents and now wanting to reclaim and explore that family history and their own identities.

In conclusion, this trip provided an opportunity to see and experience the complexity and multi-layered history of Jews in a part of Europe from which many of us have had family members who emigrate a century ago. More than ever, I am eternally grateful they made that journey when they did.

* * * * *

A Trip to Poland (continued)



Nina Gordon

Nina: My friend Ellen Lederman and I decided to travel to the Baltic countries. I especially wanted to go to Poland, the birthplace my maternal grandmother, Pearl Kahn née Keller, and to bear witness at Auschwitz.

Our plane landed in Frankfurt, where we were to transfer to our flight to Tallinn, Estonia. It was my first time stepping foot on German soil and I was profoundly aware of this.

I remember as a child all the prohibitions concerning buying products (and especially cars) made in Germany. I was very impressed with the airport, especially its size and the quality of the food at the concessions.

Tallinn had a synagogue, but I didn't have a compelling desire to visit it, especially since it was out of the way and we had such a short amount of time to visit this northern Baltic city.

Riga was the second city we visited on our tour and it was easier to find the footprint of Jews here. I liked Riga, especially the beautiful view from high atop our hotel. I loved walking through the Art Nouveau section and learning about the Jews who had lived in and designed some of these magnificent buildings. In addition, the criticisms heaped on this section of Riga by the Soviets, who later set up their embassy or consulate in one of those buildings, added to understanding the continued bitterness felt by the people of the Baltics and Poland against the Russians.

Vilnius captured me on a more *haimisha* (warm, personal) level. I had some photocopied pages from a guidebook to help introduce us to Jewish Vilnius. As we were wandering through narrow streets, trying to find our way to the synagogue, we came upon a street, purely by chance, that had been photographed for the guidebook. I took photos of the faded Hebrew letters atop a doorway which turned out to be Yiddish. Unfortunately, I read neither language, but that didn't matter. I was deeply moved to see this physical remnant of the Jewish life that existed in this historic city. Further up the street, posted on a building, were photographs of people taken away by the Nazis.

At the end of the block we found the synagogue. The exterior looked fresh and newly painted and there were a number of masons working on one section of the exterior. The sanctuary looked rather shabby, but in a recent photo of Netanyahu visiting the sanctuary it sparkled and gleamed. I was pleased that there were funds to maintain the Choral Synagogue, especially since it is a functioning shul and I believe the only synagogue in Vilnius that survived WWII.

Our tour then took us through Poland. It was green and lush and the woods were dense. I couldn't stop thinking of all the people, Jews and non-Jews, who hid in these forests during the war, and about the Jewish partisans who hid women, children, the elderly, and the sick deep in these woods as they sought food and munitions and steered clear of the anti-Semitic Polish partisans. *Fighting Back* was a fascinating book written by the Jewish Polish partisan, Harold Werner (he finished his book on his death bed), whose writing created vivid pictures in my mind that were brought forth as the bus moved towards Warsaw. I loved seeing the sign BIALYSTOCK as the bus kept moving through the countryside.

Warsaw was a bustling, sophisticated city with a huge amount of construction. We had arrived in the afternoon on a Friday and there was a synagogue just a few blocks from our hotel. We were able to visit, just before sundown, and walked around the building; we spoke to one of its members, but couldn't gain entry because the building was locked.

We went to the newly constructed Museum of the History of the Polish Jews when we had free time. I think we were told that it was voted the best museum in Europe in 2016. It was so compelling that we spent five hours there, and left as they were about to close. It felt like the first time my husband and I visited the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. We were told that it would take about two hours, but we spent almost the entire day...and still felt there was more we wanted to see. The Polish museum had been built where the Warsaw Ghetto had stood and I felt a profound loss that nothing of this infamous Ghetto remained. I wanted some remnant of it as a way to bear witness.

On the way to Krakow, we visited Auschwitz. The most powerful things about visiting this death camp were the young Israeli visitors, wrapped in the Israeli flag singing as they walked. Then we saw and heard a thousand Russian Jewish young adults walking along the camps railroad tracks singing *Am Yisrael Chai* (The People of Israel Live).

In Krakow, we found the ten-year-old Jewish Community Center with its 700 members and multitudes of programs for people of all ages. It was a wonderful place to visit and learn about the resurgence of Jewish life and culture in Poland. To see this beautiful, newly built structure in the Jewish quarter, surrounded by a number of old synagogues was uplifting. All of my maternal grandmother's family got out of Poland at the turn of the last century. I don't know if she lived in Krakow or in a nearby village, but I was so pleased to visit the country of her birth and even more pleased that my great-grandfather, Selig Keller, brought his family to America. Lastly, I asked someone at the JCC where I could get some *babka* (sweet yeast cake). He told me that in Poland, *babka* is only eaten around Easter. Don't they know what they are missing?

TODAH RABBAH!

CONTRIBUTIONS from OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2018

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If you are interested in writing for The Centre Call, we would love to hear your ideas! Please contact Kate Lawn at program@germantownjewishcentre.org. The deadline for every issue is the 1st of the previous month.



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